

Theoretical analysis of peace journalism and reporting during electioneering period in Kenya

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Cite this article in APA

Otieno, M, O. & Ndonge, M. M. (2022). Theoretical analysis of peace journalism and reporting during electioneering period in Kenya. *Journal of media and communication* 4(1), 221-229.

<https://doi.org/10.51317/ecjmcs.v4i1.39>



A publication of Editon
Consortium Publishing (online)

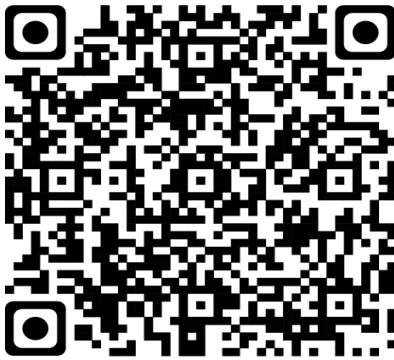
Article history

Received: 10.05.2022

Accepted: 12.05.2022

Published: 30.06.2022

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Abstract

This research article aims to analyse peace journalism and reporting in Kenya during the electioneering period. This research article employed a qualitative research method and a descriptive research design. This design will help understand peace reporting and its role during electioneering. The research analysed data thematically. The researcher first organized data by doing a preliminary read-through, coding, and then developing themes. The data was then represented, and then the interpretation of themes followed. This research article employed a qualitative research method and a descriptive research design. This design will help understand peace reporting and its role during electioneering. The research analyzed data thematically. The researcher first organized data by doing a preliminary read-through, coding, and then developing themes. The data was represented, and then the interpretation of themes followed. Analysis from this study demonstrates that Kenyan mass media often take sides, affecting quality coverage, thereby failing to live to the standards of neutrality in reporting. Secondly, the study revealed that many Kenyan journalists do not properly follow the war and conflict-related stories they cover. The study also established that Kenyan media seldom report on the possible solutions to conflict and the aftermath of war. The findings also revealed that Kenyan media had not sufficiently incorporated some peace journalism and reporting elements. As a result, they are capable of fueling violence through their reporting. The study recommends that further studies need to be done to analyse the implication of mainstream media and its impact on news coverage and reporting in Kenya.

Key terms: peace journalism, peace reporting, electioneering period.

INTRODUCTION

The mass media is an influential instrument used in disseminating information on peace, politics, environment, business, and sports, among other things, to the public. A platform that, if well utilized, the public can be kept informed on matters affecting them and what goes on around them daily. During an electioneering period, peace reporting becomes very substantial, and the media should pay acute attention to what kind of stories they disseminate to the public. However, any synopsis of peace journalism should primarily commence with a speedy analysis of the perception of peace. The term peace has been defined pedestrianly as the nonexistence of all forms of violence and conflict (Keeble et al., 2010). However, Dr Galtung Johan, a Norwegian academician acknowledged as the father of peace journalism, has written and published comprehensively on negative and positive peace. According to him, positive peace exists when harmony, justice, and equity exist.

On the contrary, negative peace is loosely seen as the nonexistence of any form of conflict (Galtung, 1969). The notion of Galtung on positive peace is predominantly relevant since peace journalism attempt to highlight initiatives that pursue harmonious coexistence at the same time. It encourages productive dialogue among conflicting parties on issues of equity and justice. Thus, peace journalism tends to give a voice to all parties involved in the conflict but, at the same time, tends to focus on the invisible effects of conflicts, such as damage to social structures and trauma (Courtney & Heather, 2013). The main aim of peace journalism is to expose untruths from both sides of the conflicting parties, give voice to the voiceless, do a people-centred report, and, most importantly, be solution-oriented (Keeble et al., 2010).

The media has a leeway to report on a wide range of issues of public interest. However, it is necessary to focus on peace reporting during any electioneering period. Therefore, media gatekeepers and senior media editors must prioritize the need for peace reporting to mitigate any form of violence. Generally, an electioneering period has been the trickiest time in most countries. Many countries around the globe often experience some kind of violence or serious disagreements before, during, or shortly after

presidential or parliamentary elections. Therefore, peace reporting is vital during an election period. Courtney and Heather (2013) define journalism as the act and process of producing and distributing reports on events. The activity encompasses assembly, evaluating, producing, and presenting imperative news stories and information relevant to their audience. Different types of journalism exist peace journalism, war journalism, environmental journalism, citizen journalism, investigative journalism, watchdog journalism, online journalism, broadcast journalism, opinion journalism, sports journalism, trade journalism, entertainment journalism, and political journalism. The common denominator that cuts across these different forms of journalism is that there is the aspect of gathering information and disseminating it to the public. The type of information may differ depending on the form of journalism, and the platform where this information is shared may differ. Professional journalists attached to a media organization may share the information via print media, electronic media (Television and radio), or social media. In contrast, citizen journalists may be limited on the platform to disseminate information.

Courtney and Heather (2013) postulate that peace reporters must pay attention to reporting non-violent initiatives at the grassroots level and the various news beats and following the resolution, reconstruction, and reconciliation phases. In addition, they must also adhere to some essential news values that all journalists, irrespective of their specialities, consider. They include timely, prominence, proximity, impact, violence or conflict, oddity or bizarre, human interest, and currency. At the same time, they must possess qualities of good journalistic reporting that include the aspect of balance reporting by giving two sides of the conflicting parties and practising sensitivity in reporting at all times (Neumann & Fahmy, 2016). Therefore, this article will seek to examine peace journalism and reporting during an election period in Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Peace reporting is a fundamental element in the media before, during, and after elections. The political temperatures are often high during the period of elections in any given country. Therefore, electronic, print and social media should all be geared towards

peace reporting, which involves fair and objective reporting. A comparative analysis study on the mass media coverage of Taliban clashes in the Pak-Afghan by Hussain and Sirai (2018) found that the war framing dominated the vernacular and the English media in both countries. Concerning reporting strategies, the study found tangible differences in both nations regarding frames used in war journalism, while both countries employed comparable thematic approaches to peace journalism. A different comparative analysis study done in Kenya by Arregui et al. (2020) employed content analysis and in-depth interviews using a sample size of 257 articles drawn from Kenya, South Africa, the United States, and the United Kingdom with 14 semi-structured interviews with both foreign and local reporters respectively. The study found that war journalism was the dominant frame used while there was no substantial alteration in the usage of peace journalism.

On the other hand, interviews revealed inadequate understanding of peace journalism by most foreign correspondents while in the situation of reporters in Kenya; the interviews revealed that their understanding of peace journalism was utterly different from their overseas equivalents. In rejoinder, a study led by Lee et al. (2006) on Asian conflict and the war in Iraq utilizing content analysis with a sample size of 1558 stories found that newspapers in Asia used peace journalism frames in covering the war in Iraq while war journalism frames were dominated in the coverage of the local conflict. The study further found that hard news employed war journalism frames while opinions and feature stories used more peace journalism frames. In addition, foreign-sourced news stories used more war journalism frames, while local content in the newspaper written by local correspondents used more peace journalism frames. Similarly, a mix-method study by Hussain (2019), using content analysis and focus group discussion on peace journalism and conflict reporting in Pakistan, found that de-escalatory coverage is inversely proportional to the intensity of a conflict in terms of its perceived threats to national security. Secondly, the study also demonstrated that the media coverage was spread across a range of thematic frames, although particular perspectives became more prominent.

A study by Ciftcioglu and Shaw (2020) on peace journalism during war risks using a content analysis of Turkish and Greek newspapers with a sample size of six newspapers found that the headline pages of the newspapers had a strong inclination toward war in comparison to peace journalism. Further, the study found no discussion on the genesis of conflict and the peaceful resolution to the conflict in the newspapers. Shinar (2009) employed a similar methodology on media reporting of the 2006 Lebanon war by newspapers in Toronto, and Israeli newspapers using a content analysis found a high tendency by the two newspapers toward war journalism frames. However, a comparative study demonstrated that the two newspapers did not entirely disregard the peace journalism under study. They used both war and peace frames in their publications. The study also found both resilience and salience of war journalism in both newspapers. Conforming with Shinar's (2009) earlier findings in Toronto and Israeli newspapers, a comparative analysis study by Lee (2010) used content analysis on news coverage of three Asian conflicts with a sample size of 1 973-news stories from 16 vernacular and English newspapers found that the length and intensity of conflict shape the peace and war journalism frames. The media decides on the frame to use depending on the length and duration of the conflict. The frames employed by a given newspaper are also dictated by the Media policies and the editorials of that particular media outlet. The findings recommend structural adjustments for peace journalism to develop into a sustainable, mainstream conflict news coverage.

Similarly, a cross-national analysis study by Cozma and Kozman (2017) on the Syrian crisis in U.S. and Lebanese newspapers using a comparative content analysis found that newspapers in Lebanon devoted four times more stories to the predicament than their U.S. counterparts. While on the aspect of coverage, newspapers in both countries heavily rely on officials, conflict, and war journalism frames. The study also found Lebanese newspapers to be more associated with the partisan proprietorship of the news channels; however, their coverage was more thematic than U.S. reporting (Cozma & Kozman, 2017).

On a global scale, Høigilt and Selvik (2020), investigating the role of journalists in a political

transition, did a study in Tunisia. The author demonstrated that the most influential and powerful Tunisian journalists were very reluctant in their role as arbitrators in public debates despite many of them enjoying the freedom of speech. The author further posits that due to the failure of the media and journalists to perform their role and set peace as an agenda, the authoritarian government went on with their activity unchecked by the fourth estate. Unlike Høigilt and Selvik's (2020) earlier findings, Hussain and Ahmad (2021), using a comparative analysis study on the perception of journalists in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan towards war and peace journalism using a sample of 317 journalists, found that many journalists often participate in broader practices that foresee the connection of peace and war journalism approaches. However, the study also demonstrated that journalists in the three countries preferred vigorous war journalism approaches and flaccid peace journalism strategies. Primarily, they were geared toward using the war journalism frame in their courage and reporting new stories.

Nonetheless, a study by Hanitzsch (2010) on journalists as peacekeeping forces shows that reporters are not responsible for peacekeeping, nor are they responsible for the peaceful resolution of conflicts in society. However, journalists and reporters can contribute actively to the diplomatic settlement of the conflict, but their influence is limited. The author states that maintaining peace and order is the police and the military's duty and that, journalists should not be forced to engage in activities out of their jurisdiction. However, in Nigeria, a study done by Akinro (2019) on Boko Haram crisis coverage by Nigerian and American newspapers using framing analysis found that the newspapers under study shifted frames on how they covered the crisis. Initially, the frame focused more on the individual, then later on society, and finally internationally.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Principles and Major Guidelines for Peace Journalism during Electioneering Period

Galtung and Lynch (2010) established guidelines for peace reporting. Keeble et al. (2010) define reporting as giving a spoken or written account of something one has observed, heard, done, or investigated. These guidelines dictate that peace journalists need to

discover the genesis of skirmishes, find out those involved in the conflict and their goals, the cultural and social-political context of conflict, and finally, the invisible and visible conflict indicators. Galtung and Lynch further remark that peace journalists must avoid the de-humanization of the parties involved in the conflict and expose their interests; instead, peace journalists should focus on offering non-violent responses to conflict and alternatives to militarized or violent solutions (2010). It is particularly crucial for gathering and reporting on election matters.

Aspects in Peace Journalism and Reporting

There are aspects of peace journalism and reporting that every journalist and reporter needs to practice. The accuracy, balance, and fairness in reporting are the most significant aspects incorporated in political and election reporting. These aspects provide a vibrant roadmap to understanding the relationship between journalists and their story sources, the kind of news stories they cover, and the consequences of their journalistic practices. Moreover, it assists journalists in being sensitive and mindful of non-violent tactics of political reporting. Creativity is equally vital in the daily journalistic duties of gathering, editing, and reporting news stories.”(Seaga et al., (eds.) 2011). The centre for global peace journalism at the University of Park developed some significant aspects that they believe editors, journalists, and reporters need to incorporate into their daily engagements, particularly when it comes to peace journalism and reporting. These aspects include framing news stories, choosing words to use in the stories, reporting geared towards peace, and calling for peace initiatives. These aspects, however, should not compromise the rudimentary doctrines of good journalism and reporting. These aspects are valid for political reporting, particularly before, during, and after elections. Peace Journalism offers peace arbitrators a voice while making peace initiatives and non-violent results more viable and visible (Keeble et al., 2010).

Four items from Lynch and McGoldrick's seventeen plan points in peace reporting. The fundamental one is language and word choice. Firstly, journalists must avoid words meant to victimize people, such as defenceless, destitute, or devastated. Secondly, they should avoid emotive and imprecise words such as

massacre, tragedy, and systematic. Thirdly, words that demonize people such as cruel, vicious, and barbaric. Lastly, they should avoid words meant to label people such as extremists, fundamentalists, terrorists, and fanatics (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005). Avoiding these kinds of language in electioneering reporting can go a long way in enhancing political stability. Other aspects that journalists and reporters need to be mindful of include; reporting about political parties' common ground, avoiding loser, winner reporting, minimizing horror and violence reporting, and most vitally, being factual in reporting. Reporting rumours and unverified facts are extremely dangerous in journalism, most fundamentally when handling electioneering reporting (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005). The key intention of peace journalism principles and aspects is to update and develop strategies and tactics necessary in crime, terrorism, human right, political, and electioneering reporting. These strategies and tactics of peace reporting and journalism can offer guidance in reporting a wide range of conflicts such as ethnic differences, civil unrest, political misunderstandings, religious conflicts, and resource dispute (Shinar & Kempf, (eds.) 2007).

Media Neutrality during Electioneering Period

Electioneering refers to all actions and happenings that political parties, politicians, and their supporters use to influence and convince the electorates to vote for their political outfits in an election (Beerbohm, 2015). Before, during, and after an election period are critical times when media need to demonstrate a high level of sensitivity in reporting and neutrality regarding newsgathering, packaging, and reporting. The media must stand out and evade presenting itself as partisan. Every media's responsibility to the outlet is to elude this temptation during and after an election. In Kenya, electioneering periods are sensitive, and any little thing can plunge the country into violence and political skirmishes. In the 2007 general election, some media houses were accused of siding with political outfits and openly supporting certain political players. This tendency significantly interfered with their journalistic principles of neutrality and objectivity in reporting. Some schools of thought believe that media, to some extent, contributed to the post-election violence that rocked Kenya shortly after the 2007 general election. Kenyans witnessed the same kind of biased reporting in Kenya's 2013 and 2017 general elections. The media

must maintain neutrality to avoid taking sides in the political divide. However, this has not been the case. Moving toward the 2022 general election, some media owners have publicly declared their support for particular political parties and their candidate in the coming 2022 general election. This kind of trend, to some extent, paints a picture to the public that the media, in this case, ceases to be independent and instead geared toward supporting a political outfit and its ideologies. Mr S. K. Macharia, the owner of the Royal Media Services (RMS), one of the largest media conglomerates in Kenya that owns several television stations with the most significant number of F.M. radio stations in Kenya, has for years been known to be an avid supporter of the longest-serving opposition leader in Kenya, Mr Raila Odingo. Therefore, the assumption is that the RMS supports the candidature of Mr Odingo in the upcoming 2022 general election.

On the other hand, the Standard Media Group, which the Moi family owns, has taken a stand on whom they intend to support in the upcoming 2022 general election. A study finding by Otieno and Ndonge (2020) indicated that political players in Kenya tend to own news media outlets to use them to propel their political ideologies and agenda. This trend becomes very rapid during an electioneering period. Political media ownership has occasioned a lack of neutrality and balanced reporting in Kenya (Otieno & Ndonge, 2020). This tendency, in turn, interferes with journalistic objectivity in news reporting. It is a dangerous trend considering that Kenya is moving towards an election that many anticipate will be contested. Media neutrality is critical, but most importantly, before, during, and after elections. It is an aspect that is crucial in peace journalism and one that all media outlets in Kenya should embrace moving forward. Over the years, the mass media have failed to demonstrate to the public that they are genuinely independent and respect the principles guiding reporting. Evidently, the analysis above shows that the media often take sides, thereby failing to live up to neutrality standards in reporting. This reporting trend is dangerous in an electioneering period.

Practical Tips in Peace Journalism and Reporting during the Electioneering Period

Peace journalism is a practice of journalism devoted to sightseeing the genesis of the conflict with the intent to develop and encourage communities and societies to value and consider non-violent reactions to war (Gumede, 2016). They further postulate that editors and reporters must choose what and how to report it to create opportunities for peace. For peace is envisioned as an end, and nonviolence proposed as a means is considered both the establishing ideologies of news making and the essential good to civilizations globally. It has been why peace journalism is seen as a profession that keeps evolving and an analytical prototype for research of social media representation. On the other hand, conflict is viewed as a battle of conflicting interests between parties that often surpass to reach an amicable solution (Galtung, 1969). One key component in the practice of peace reporting is the ability to uncover the power relation and its interplay in conflicting situations at different levels in society. These societal power levels could include interpersonal, structural, cultural, and global. Therefore, a journalist or media reporter who understands the interplay of power is well placed in the practice of peace reporting during electioneering periods.

Galtung (1969) believes that members of the editorial team share a wide range of experiences in covering different forms of conflict for different types of media organizations and this collection of quick tips draws directly on their experience. Many of these ideas speak to each other, and there are strong links between the different ideas. Likely, you may already be doing many of these things in your reporting, but if not, they are all worth considering. Galtung posited that the editorial team agreed that journalists should not sit back and wait for conflicts to erupt. Instead, they should be monitoring the communities they work in and looking out for the signs of emerging conflict. As soon as journalists observe the signs that a conflict may be moving from a latent to an emerging state, they need to start speaking to people on the ground to get as many viewpoints as possible about what is happening (Galtung, 1969).

That will ensure that they are well informed when approaching the main stakeholders in the conflict. Peace journalists must spurn being reactive. If they wait for spin-doctors to come to them, they will be

limited by their planned agenda. However, if they approach them proactively with carefully crafted questions, they can adequately understand what is happening. However, peace journalists can only be proactive if they have their ears on the ground and contact people who understand what is happening (Galtung, 1969). These can be achieved if journalists get out of the newsroom and spend time in communities meeting people and making contact with various organizations, which is critical before and after an election. Additionally, peace journalists need to find out about the local Non-Governmental Organizations and Church-Based Organizations working in the area, spend time talking to small business owners, and contact the local churches, mosques, temples, and civil society organizations, social activists, and unionists.

Lynch and McGoldrick (2005) suggested that peace journalists should also consider contacting individuals who are spokespersons in the police and different departments of local councils and get their contact details. They should then regularly check in with these people, which can prove very useful during an electioneering period. A weekly or fortnightly phone call costs little but keeping in touch with a wide range of familiar sources often results in fantastic stories. Often these people will be able to alert a journalist of any rise of tensions and possible conflicts in communities, sometimes well before they break out and at a point where your stories can contribute to preventing conflict before it erupts in a charged political environment. Contacting a wide variety of individuals can also be critical during an electioneering period, a time of highly escalated conflict when certain parts of a community become no-go areas or when a journalist does not have the time and capacity to visit many different parts of a community. These contacts can give you tip-offs about what is happening, describe what they are experiencing and help you verify claims made by the parties involved, the authorities, and other stakeholders (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005).

Radio stations covering violent political outbreaks can also help keep audiences updated about where violence is taking place and which areas they should avoid. Galtung (1969) recommends that journalists develop a database that contains all of the vital information they are likely to need when reporting on

the conflict. The database could include historical information about previous conflicts, dates, and the names and positions of the different stakeholders. It can also include information about crucial commitments different political leaders have made about the conflict (Galtung, 1969). From the analysis, several Kenyan journalists have rich contacts going by the rich story content they cover and disseminate to the public. However, there seem to be a failure by most of them to do a proper follow-up of these conflict-related stories. Peace journalism dictates that journalists and reporters must first highlight the genesis of war and conflict, report it so that it does not escalate nor trigger violence, and most profoundly, report on the possible solutions and the aftermath of war and conflict. Then and only then would peace reporters be considered to have done justice to the war-related story.

Significant Elements of Peace Journalism and Reporting during Electioneering Period.

Generally, ordinary citizens may view peace journalism as advocacy geared towards creating societal peace and peaceful coexistence among conflicting parties. On the other hand, several peace journalism scholars also postulate that nonaggressive initiatives can be recounted to foster diplomatic solutions to war and violence and to de-saturate collective fantasy from the unrelenting confidence that war and violence are the only sustainable responses to it (Lynch & Galtung, 2010). They further posit that there are visionary individuals who are lovers of peace, and this emerges primarily from their personal experience of conflict, which is seldom heard, and this is because they do not embody an official societal power or because they are written off as biased (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005). As Keeble et al. (2010) articulated, peace journalism shows backgrounds and contexts of conflicts; hears from both sides; explores hidden agendas; and highlights peace ideas and initiatives anywhere.

Lynch and McGoldrick (2005) suggested that the ten peace journalism elements were in rejoinder to the irresponsible and sensational reporting adopted by several journalists and reporters. Reporting that ignores non-violent responses and instead aggravates a heated and already tense situation. This kind of reporting goes against journalistic principles and elements, especially in an electioneering period. This

reckless reporting is beneath peace journalism and reporting. The elements that should guide journalistic peace reporters include; the need to examine and re-examine the genesis of conflicts, being at the forefront in discussing solutions, becoming proactive during the entire process of war and conflict resolutions, and focusing on uniting conflicting parties instead of causing more division through unprofessional reporting. Lastly, journalists must avoid "us versus them" evil people versus good people kind of reporting at all times. A successful electioneering reporter adheres to the elements above and ensures that they stand on the side of peace and peaceful coexistence among people. A good journalist who aspires to cover elections should be ready to shun political propaganda and instead focus on pursuing facts from all existing sources. Peace Journalist is further mandated to offer balanced coverage of issues affecting people from conflicting parties. In addition, he or she must strive to eschew sensational and superficial reporting and instead focus on in-depth coverage by highlighting accounts of war and conflict that affect society. On the other hand, the media must equally grant voice to the proletariats instead of only covering the bourgeoisie and their interest.

When it comes to peaceful coexistence in a state like Kenya, which is governed by the rule of law, peace reporters must consider the consequences of their coverage. The need to carefully pick words and phrases is fundamental in journalism. The poor choice of words can intensify conflicts and violence in a steamy electioneering period, such as Kenya often experiences. The same should be applied to images and photos used in journalistic reports and coverage. Peace reporters must select images thoughtfully before using them. Photos and images can distort occurrences, worsening an already dire situation and re-victimizing the people who got hurt. Peace is and will always be an essential aspect of human coexistence and for any development to be achieved. Many countries around the globe are at war, and as a result, no significant developmental progress can be achieved in such a state. War is often accompanied by loss of lives and destruction of properties. Therefore, if something is to be promoted will be peace, and the best platform that could perfectly carry out this responsibility is the media. The media, therefore, has the duty of promoting peace through peace journalism

and reporting. However, Kenyan media have not sufficiently incorporated some of this peace journalism and reporting elements. After the post-election violence of 2007/2008, a Kenyan journalist was accused of using his radio platform to fuel hate speech and later was among the six Kenyans charged by the International criminal court in Hague, Netherlands, for having played a critical role in the violence that rocked Kenya following the heated general election of 2007. It is, therefore, safe to conclude that if Kenyan journalists were to live to the standards and incorporate these elements of peace journalism, then Kenya would have no experience post-election violence or reduce the intensity of the violence that Kenyans witnessed following the conclusion of the 2007 general election.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion: Peace journalism is an exciting tool for exploring the relationship between communication, media corporations, and war. The study established that the mass media have over the years failed to demonstrate to the public that they are truly independent and that they respect the principles

guiding peace reporting during an election. It also found out that the Kenyan media often take sides, which affects quality reporting, thereby failing to live to the standards of neutrality in reporting. However, there seems to be a failure by journalists in Kenya to do a proper follow-up of these conflict-related stories. The study further found out that many peace journalists in Kenya often fail to highlight the genesis of war and conflict and report stories to not escalate or trigger violence. The study also established that Kenyan media often do not report on the possible solutions and the aftermath of war and conflict.

Recommendation: The study recommends that further studies be done to analyse the implication of mainstream media and its impact on the news coverage and reporting in Kenya. Secondly, the study also recommends that research be conducted to establish the role of media in the political and electioneering coverage in Kenya. Lastly, the study recommends conducting more research to analyse the relationship between societal conflict and journalistic coverage and reporting.

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