



Towards a Just and Egalitarian Africa: Eradicating Injustices and Inequalities

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Abstract. Africa is a continent of paradoxes. The continent is richly blessed with abundant natural resources such as gold, diamond, oil, gas, bauxite, arable land, forests, wildlife, water, platinum, chromium, cobalt, etc. The continent also has abundant human potential and resources. Despite all these, the resources are poorly managed and this is one of the reasons why there is a high rate of *japa* (migration) out of the continent. Africa is massively underdeveloped. Despite political independence from the colonialists many decades ago, the land of Africa is inundated with injustices and inequalities. Through critical hermeneutics and analytic methods, this paper argues that there is a need to eradicate injustices and inequalities in Africa. The paper finds out that many factors are responsible for inequalities and injustices in the continent, such as bad and inept political leadership, corruption, colonialism, neo-colonial influences, ethnicism, poor administration of criminal justice, etc. The paper concludes that if Africans mitigate injustices and inequalities, they will create a more just and egalitarian society.

Keywords: Africa, egalitarian, justice, inequalities, injustice, leadership, politics, society.

1. Introduction

The African society and continent remain a troubled one and politically unstable. There is hardly any part of the continent you travel to that is free from injustices and inequalities. Africa is a continent of paradoxes. Africa is a land, unfortunately, that is inundated with violent conflicts and wars. Most of these violent conflicts and wars arise from situations of injustice, ethnic marginalization, denial of minority rights, cronyism, and inept and bad leadership. Take Nigeria, for instance, there have been so many ethnic agitations and cries over marginalization by ethnic-based groups such as the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), the Urhobo Progress Union, the

Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB), Ijaw Youth Congress, etc.

It amounts to injustice when people come to power or political leadership positions and become dictators/sit-tight rulers. They believe it is their birthright to rule their countries until their deaths. The continent has witnessed people like Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire, Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, Hussene Habre of Chad, Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, and Omar al-Bashir of Sudan who came to power and remained in power until they died or were butted out. In places like Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, etc, there are ongoing wars and violence either over resources or cries of marginalization from certain parts of the countries. Thousands of African youths are illegally trekking through the Sahara Desert and crossing the Mediterranean Sea. Thousands have died in the sea. Many of the countries they are struggling to leave have been impoverished by corrupt and bad leaders who care nothing for the good of the people. Thousands of Africans were killed in the Rwanda genocide. The atrocities that took place there were committed by fellow Africans. Among us not too long ago, Idi Amin of Uganda terrorized foreigners and his native people. Africa has not succeeded in effectively managing its enormous natural resources. Wherever there are natural resources in Africa, there is always war and violence, either in the past or in the present. Democratic Republic of Congo is embroiled in wars over natural resources. There is continuous tensions in the Niger Delta of Nigeria over natural resources and environmental degradation.

What is currently happening in many African countries is not what people expected in the wake of independence from colonialism. At the dawn of independence in African countries, there were high hopes that the continent would develop and advance rapidly in all areas, such as science, technology, culture, etc. In many African countries, these dreams

have been shattered. For what you now have are looted national treasuries, massive youth unemployment, xenophobic attacks against foreigners, ethnic tensions, waning of authentic African values as a result of globalization and westernization, high rate of “Japa” (migration out of the continent), etc. Many of these issues border on social injustices and deprivation of egalitarian ethos. When there is egalitarianism and justice, there is bound to be a more peaceful order and a society in which people’s welfare and well-being are catered for at all levels.

Given the above, this paper, through critical hermeneutics and analytic methods, probes into the lack of total justice and egalitarianism in the African continent. It argues that it is not yet *Uhuru* (freedom) in Africa. The continent is still oppressed by both internal and external unjust forces. The paper shows that the continent is still filled with so many inequalities, such as gender inequalities, social inequalities, political marginalization, religious discrimination, etc. In pursuing the goal of the paper, the following procedure is adopted: an examination of the basic concepts, followed by a look at the situation of inequalities and injustices in the continent. After that has been done, some way forward is proposed.

2. Clarification and Analyses of Concepts

The basic concepts necessary to be clarified in this paper are justice and egalitarianism. The word “just” is an adjective of justice. The word just is generally understood as what is correct. A thing is just when it corresponds to order or what has been laid down. Justice is the administration of what is considered just. Just and justice are two words that are intertwined, for just is simply an adjective of justice. Justice can be defined as an “attribute of political systems, relations between individuals, actions, and we also say of persons that they are just” (Mautner, 2005). In the history of Western Philosophy, there have been varied discourses on what justice is. In *Plato’s Republic*, justice consists of the three parts of the soul (rational, spiritual, and appetitive) performing their proper functions (in the political society, it is three parts -the guardians, the auxiliaries, and the artisans- performing their duties); in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, justice in the general sense means habits and dispositions of a good citizen such as courage, loyalty, honesty, sobriety, etc (Mautner, 2005). In another sense, justice is one of the virtues (Mautner, 2005). It is distributive justice, which allocates benefits and burdens in a society in a fair manner, and also rectificatory or commutative or corrective justice, which restores the balance between two individuals (Mautner, 2005). In Stoicism and the systems that follow it, justice is the disposition of being a good

human being living as a citizen of the world and not just the city-state (Mautner, 2005). Justice is what conforms with the law, respect for people’s rights, and giving each person their dues (Ekabo, 2016).

From the perspective of the organization of society, justice is often called social justice, and it refers to: ...economic welfare of social groups. As such, it demands a proportionate share for the social partners in the fruits of their economic cooperation.... Social justice further demands a proportionate and equitable distribution of the wealth of a nation among the different groups and regions of a society. Hence the concentration of a nation’s wealth and land-ownership in the hands of a few extremely rich families while the majority of citizens live in poverty, offends against justice. Social justice likewise demands a balancing of wealth between stronger and weaker sectors of a society, such as often the well-to-do industrial and less favoured agricultural sector, or between developed and less developed regions in a nation (Peschke, 1992, pp.234-235).

It is important to distinguish justice from other concepts. Justice is not mercy, love, kindness, compassion, etc. Indeed, justice is not the only virtue needed in society. For instance, a welfare state may provide social security for all the unemployed, but that may not be entirely just. The redistribution of wealth must follow just principles, if not, other forms of injustice are created, for there are some of the unemployed who are lazy and refuse to work. The just thing to do will be to deprive them of social security. Because of the adverse effect of denying lazy people who are unemployed social benefits, the government may decide to adopt principles that help all, no matter the situation. This is why society, at times must move beyond legalistic forms of justice.

Because justice is so important, let more be said about it. Justice can also be seen as legal justice, social justice, distributive justice, commutative justice, and vindicative justice. These are explained as follows: legal justice deals with individual citizens' relationship with the state requiring observance of laws; distributive justice deals with fairness of distributions of goods and duties in the state; commutative justice requires fairness in transactions among individuals in the state; vindicative deals with punishment being appropriately apportioned to offenders (Omoregbe, 2007). All types of justice are needed in society to various degrees. If society were to be free of elements of vindicative justice, society may likely be filled with criminals. Vindicative justice can deter people from committing crimes. Social justice that is attentive to the needs of the poor and vulnerable and enables individuals to obtain their dues is also needed (Royal, 1997). In Christian ethics, especially

from the biblical prophetic perspective, justice concerns right relationships among people, concern for the politically oppressed, exploited, and marginalized, and calls for addressing concrete human needs to eradicate inequalities and transform structures that oppress human beings, other earth creatures and the planet itself (Hobgood, 2007). Note that: “Social justice is placing the rights of all people at the heart of economic, social and environmental policies. It means tackling issues such as poverty, exclusion, inequality, unemployment, and lack of social protection, all of which are challenges in Africa” (International Labour Organization, 2024, para 3).

The term egalitarianism refers to “an outlook that opposes privileges and favours equality between individuals. The equality is always in some respect which is specified explicitly or understood from the context” (Mautner, 2005, p. 179). There are different shades of egalitarianism (while radical egalitarians oppose rewards based on skill or luck, favouring equal reward for everyone; others are tolerant of rewards based on skill or luck, etc.) (Mautner, 2005). The term egalitarianism can also be seen as: ...a philosophical perspective that emphasizes equality and equal treatment across gender, religion, economic status, and political beliefs. Egalitarianism may focus on income inequality and distribution, which are themes that have influenced the development of various economic and political theories. Egalitarianism may also look at how individuals are treated under the law (Kenton, 2024, para 1).

Another way is to state that: “Egalitarian is the belief in the equality of all persons and the conferment of all equal rights to all persons. Cambridge Dictionary sees egalitarian as the belief that all people are equally important and should have the same rights and opportunities in life. Collins Dictionary states that egalitarian means supporting or following the idea that all people are equal and should have the same rights and opportunities” (Okeke, 2023, para 1). Egalitarianism does not mean identical treatment for every human person. Equal treatment does not mean identical treatment, if not since the sick and healthy, young and old, should not be treated in the same way, for they have particular needs that need to be attended to. (Adekunle and Yunisa, 2012). Equal treatment means no discrimination. Both justice and egalitarianism go together and are intertwined.

A society is unjust if it fails to promote principles of egalitarianism. It should also be recognized that the opposite of justice is injustice, while the opposite of egalitarianism is inequalities. To work for justice is to work to eradicate injustices that exist in society. And to promote egalitarianism is to work to end

inequalities in society. It is in this light that the situation of injustices and inequalities in society are examined. As this is done, a deeper understanding of what are injustices and inequalities will manifest.

3. The Situation of Injustices and Inequalities in Africa

There is a call for a just and egalitarian society in Africa because, in much of the continent, the land is still inundated with injustices (opposites of justice) and inequalities (opposite of egalitarianism). If justice and egalitarianism can prevail, it will be the end of injustice and inequality. This is what the paper implies, as it examines injustices and inequalities in this section. When they are mitigated, then a just and egalitarian order will prevail. Africa is still grossly underdeveloped. Inequalities are a global challenge, especially in Africa, as a result of poor development, educational disparities, poor healthcare systems, insecurities, and migration (Saoudi and Louis-Sarbib, 2023). On wealth inequality, it is regrettable to note the following:

Income inequalities in Africa are high. In 2021, according to the World Inequality Database, the share of the top 10% cluster on the African continent accounted, on average, for approximately 54% of the total national income, which is more than six times the share held by the bottom 50%. Wealth inequalities are even more pronounced, with the 10% richest Africans concentrating nearly 71% of total wealth, more than double the wealth held by the bottom 90%. Strikingly, the bottom half of the population possesses a meager fraction of the total wealth, amounting to nearly 1%. These findings underscore the pressing need to fully document the dimensions of inequality and to work towards a more equitable distribution of the fruits of development across African societies (Saoudi and Louis-Sarbib, 2023).

The African continent is the second largest in the world in terms of size, filled with abundant natural resources and human potential. However, due to poor leadership, it is massively underdeveloped. It is in a situation of injustice. Africans do not deserve what they are experiencing now that is meted out to them by corrupt and inept leaders. The enormous financial wealth of the continent that should be used in the development of social infrastructures like roads, railways, airports, seaports, electricity, education, etc, is looted away by kleptocrats. Africa is a land in which “there is poverty everywhere. Infrastructures breakdown, compounded with wars, insurgencies, increased number of refugees, hunger, sufferings, deaths, etc.” (Ogundowole, 2006). The immediate previous statement was written about 20 years ago. You would have thought that the situation had changed. The change that Africa has

experienced in those 20 years is very little. Indices in Africa show a deteriorating situation with low incomes, poor health facilities, inflation and unemployment on the rise, breakdown of social infrastructures, and many persons living on less than \$1.90 per day (Nnadozi, 2019). All these amount to unjust situations, for even though Africa can feed its citizens yet, many go hungry daily.

Corruption is one of Africa's greatest problems. Corruption includes things like stealing, inflation of contracts, bribery, embezzlement, kickbacks, etc (Bolokor, 2013). Despite many laws and agencies established in various African countries, corruption continues to be on the rise. There are many anti-corruption agencies in different African states, and the African Union has an anti-corruption board. Corruption impoverishes the land, breaks the economy, makes life miserable, and deprives people of the dividends and benefits that the government should provide for the people. It contributes to injustices and inequalities in the land. The few rich, especially those in power, get richer at the expense of the generality of the people. Society cannot be just as far as corruption exists. For services that the government should provide, corrupt government officials and employees continue to demand extra and illegal money from the people before providing the services.

The continent is still inundated with wars as a result of either struggle over mineral resources, cries over ethnic marginalization, or injustices. In the face of injustice, some persons turn to the barrel of the gun, and before you realize it, there is the emergence of another militant group. The cry over ethnic marginalization is a common one in Africa. In Ethiopia, many ethnic minorities are crying marginalization (Freeman, 2003). In Nigeria, almost all regions in the nation are crying marginalization. In 2020/2011, there was the Arab Spring that broke out in North Africa. It came essentially as a cry against dictatorial governments and the economic hardships that had been experienced by the people. The people were suffering from many injustices. There were protests in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and some other countries in the Middle East. These protests were attributable to the misrule of entrenched dictators in these countries, economic inequality, lack of full political rights, and governmental corruption, and it is important to note that the governments in Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt were brought down as a result of these protests (Null, 2021). In much of North Africa, where these protests took place, people are still groaning in poverty, economic hardships, and under bad governance. Despite years of political independence from Apartheid rule, there are still many in South Africa who are yet to enjoy full and real political freedom (Hamilton, 2017). South Africa has

experienced many protests as people agitate for economic freedoms, and because of the failures of the government to fully provide economic dividends, some turned to xenophobic attacks as they blamed foreigners. There is no doubt that conflicts and crises affect the realization of social justice (Bonny, 2022). The fact is that as conflicts, especially violent ones, take place people are displaced, dislocated, lose their habitation, have their properties destroyed, and are deprived of basic social amenities. Violent conflicts precipitate inequalities.

Another area where there are so many inequalities and injustices is the whole issue of gender. There is so much gender disparity and discrimination in the African continent. Much of Africa, if not all, is a patriarchal society where the male personalities dominate and subjugate. Women are denied many rights. Childless women are battered and insulted. The girl-child does not have equal access to education. In Sub-Saharan Africa, only 29% of income from labour goes to women as a result of only 46% of women participating in the labour force (Saoudi and Louis-Sarbib, 2023). Male dominance in Africa has led to gender inequality as women are made to play second fiddle, and women who are unable to bear male children or are childless are discriminated against (Anumudu and Boakye (2021). Female genital mutilation is still common, and some claim it is part of the culture that should remain. There are still barbaric widowhood practices that take place, and women are denied many other basic rights. The marriage institutions in many African countries inherently as constituted allow for a lot of discrimination that women suffer. In the Democratic Republic of Congo: "The husband is the head of the household. He owes protection to his wife; his wife owes obedience to her husband" (Democratic Republic of Congo, art 444). While there may be nothing wrong with the husband being the head, the challenge often is that headship that should be used for service and caring for family needs is used for domination and denial of the rights of women (Ikeke, 2024). The majority of child marriages in the world take place in West Africa according to available statistics (Jousse, 2021). In politics in many African countries, political positions are occupied by men.

Many factors account for inequalities and injustices in Africa. As always, it is difficult to excoriate colonialism from these factors. Indeed, colonialism is long gone. But in much of Africa, what many African countries got is paper independence, lacking deep-rooted political and economic independence. Africa is still troubled by neo-colonial forces. Inequalities and disparities arise from historic colonial legacies such as land distribution policies in some regions, especially in Southern Africa (South

Africa, Zimbabwe, etc), where these historic policies have contributed to racial discrimination (Saoudi and Louis-Sarbib, 2023). The colonialists, without caring for cultural and linguistic affinity, brought people of different affinities into balkanized so-called nations. And so there continue to be agitations for self-determination on the part of these ethnic nations. African politics is often riddled with ethnic sentiments, and people often vote on ethnic lines. Africa is a land in which, nationally a corrupt leader is condemned but when he comes to his locality, he is celebrated as a hero. Neo-colonial forces continue to impede Africa's development and quest for a just society. Through aid and multinational corporations, former colonial powers continue to influence African nations for their interests (Chinonye, 2007). As a popular adage says: "the payer of the piper dictates the tone." Over-reliance on foreign powers and bodies such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and World Trade Organization are factors that contribute to eroding African economic independence, and it is these powers that dictate policies for Africa (Nnadozie, 2019).

When there is injustice and inequality in society, it is attended with many consequences. They slow down economic growth, hinder social cohesion, erode the confidence of the people, especially the middle class, limit the use of human capital and lack of opportunities, and cause a state of hopelessness that causes people to illegally immigrate and even resort to internal strife (Saoudi and Louis-Sarbib, 2023). There is hardly any region of Africa that is free from civil unrest. As disparate and nationalities groups fight over power and management of the state apparatus, the attention to development projects is weakened (Nnadozie, 2019). While in a short paper like this, it is not possible to enumerate and explain all the issues regarding injustices and inequalities, they must be dealt with to foster the African people's dream.

4. Way Forward in Building a Just and Egalitarian African Society

There are many ways to promote or foster a just and egalitarian society. Many factors can promote justice and mitigate inequalities in African societies. What the 1999 Nigerian constitution states is not different from what should be attainable in every African country. Citizens should be treated with equal rights and opportunities, the sanctity of human life should be respected, the government should be humane, natural resources should be exploited for the common good, and there should be impartial administration of justice and criminal law (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2011).

One of the ways is through a social education that is liberatory and fosters values of equality. Education should be accessible to all, no matter their gender, creed, religion, or political affiliation. No one should be discriminated against when it comes to education. It should be an education that frees and empowers people. It should be an education that liberates the human mind. In his legendary song, one of African Diasporan's greatest sons, Bob Marley, cried "emancipate yourself from mental slavery." Education can break shackles. The kind of education that Africans need is not indoctrination or dogmatism but a Freirean type of education, an education that rejects a banking concept of education but rather encourages critical consciousness and struggles for freedom from all forms of oppression (Freire, 2010). As previously noted, a society that denies some persons, especially females' education is unjust. The consciousness that should be educated for and promoted in African societies should be that of theistic humanism that attends to the welfare and well-being of the people (Dukor, 2021).

Social and public policy is also very crucial in fostering an egalitarian and just society. It is through social and public policy that the government carries out its wishes and desires. Public policies should not end at the level of policy. Policy should be pragmatically implemented. An area where there should be policy to tackle injustices is land. Colonial policies deprived many Black Africans of their land. "Reforms of property rights and access to land are therefore necessary, and the proper articulation of these two policies remains a central issue" (Saoudi and Louis-Sarbib, 2023, p. 11). It is the government that makes public policies and enacts laws to govern the land.

Poor leadership, as previously noted, is one of the banes of African problems. Africans need good leaders who will foster equal development in all regions of their nation. Not leaders who are ethnic warlords/bigots who develop their areas of origin to the neglect of other regions in their nations. If Africa can get the political leadership question right, many other things like social justice, egalitarianism, social welfare, effective environmental governance, etc, will be in place. All across the continent, there is a political leadership problem, and this has caused a socioeconomic crisis, a syndrome of failed states, and mindless exploitation of the people and the natural wealth of the continent by corrupt politicians (Nwozor, 2014). It is painful to state that: "The reign of greed, dictatorship, and oppressive government, exercised through coercive fist by some African leaders, has made the political climate unfriendly for the realization of the dreams and aspirations of the common man" in Africa (Arinze, 2014). Many African leaders have billions of dollars stashed in Western banks; one wonders where all the money

came from. Many feel entitled and loot their national treasuries damning the consequences.

There is also corporate regional leadership. Outside the African Union, Africa has many regional organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Southern African Development Community, etc. These organizations have a role to play in fostering a just and egalitarian Africa. The leaders of the African Union and the regional bodies should exercise vibrant corporate leadership to see that the objectives of the African Union and the regional bodies are fully implemented. Africa will be truly great and just if the African Union can achieve its aim of existence. It is the role of political leadership in different countries to determine the exact policies to be implemented to achieve a just and egalitarian society. All policies and laws that foster discrimination and promote injustices and inequalities should be abolished. African leaders have a grave role to play to ensure that wars and violent conflicts are curbed. Africa is bedevilled by a lot of wars that have caused displacement and dislocation of people, precipitating more inequalities. It is of African leaders, both as individuals and at the corporate levels, to ensure Africa is ridden of the plague of violent conflicts and wars. If wars can end in Africa, there is hope of building a better and more just society.

Related to policy and leadership are laws. The instrument of the law should be used to adjudicate for egalitarian values. There should be strong laws that are enforceable to curb social discrimination, deprivation of human rights, and other social ills. A society in which law is weak is bound to be an unjust society. Might become right, and there will be lawlessness. A lawless society cannot be just. It is leaders who have to ensure that the laws made for the good of the nation are enforced and implemented. In some African countries, there are still many child marriages in which children are allowed to get married to adult men. There is a need for laws that prohibit child marriages (United Nations, 1979).

A strong civil society is also important in the different countries to promote a just and egalitarian society. Where civil society is weak, it gives room for governmental impunity. A strong civil society should be critical of the government and question those in power. There is no generally accepted definition of civil society. According to K. Ranchod, it can include groups such as consumer organizations, trade unions, social movements, religious organizations engaged in corporate social responsibility and welfare services; and for M.J. Mafunisa, it includes religious groups, labour unions, cultural and educational organizations,

student groups, sports groups, ethnic groups and political parties (Mkhize, 2017). Civil societies have a role to play in helping to transform society and promote good governance (Mkhize, 2017). Religious bodies, whether Christian, Muslim, African Traditional Religion, etc, have a great to play. They should, in their worship and homilies, speak about the values of justice and egalitarianism. Religions need to speak to themselves also about the values of egalitarianism, for often there are many inequalities in religious bodies, especially discrimination against women and people of other religions. The values of authentic prophetic justice and human rights should be the frequent messages that should come from the religions. In Catholic Dioceses throughout Africa, there are justice, peace, and development departments or commissions. Some other Christian or religious organizations may have similar organs. These bodies should not relent in their struggle for justice and peace in the African continent. Religious leaders must stay bold and vigilant in campaigning for human promotion and justice in Africa. In Africa, you have the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), All African Conference of Churches, etc.

A strong media is necessary to promote a just and egalitarian society. A strong and vibrant media should hold the government accountable and set an agenda for government. The media is often called the fourth estate of society. It should serve the cause of justice and egalitarianism. The social and mass media should devote more programmes to campaign for good governance, good leadership, free and fair elections, respect for human rights, etc, in the various countries in Africa.

5. Conclusion

The question of creating a just and egalitarian society is an important one. No society can obtain the optimal good life without just and egalitarianism. It is crucial to end inequalities and injustices to enable justice and egalitarian values to prevail. The paper deals with these issues just mentioned by examining the situation of injustices and inequalities in Africa. It was shown that many injustices and inequalities exist in Africa in different ways, such as gender discrimination, political discrimination; corrupt and inept leadership that causes suffering and pain, and oppresses the people; income and wealth inequalities, wars and violent conflicts, ethnicism, etc. Without curbing and eradicating, all these injustices and inequalities will continue in the land. Towards eradicating all these social ills and problems, the paper proposes critical education in consciousness that struggles against discrimination and oppression, enactment and implementation of good and healthy social and public policies, good national leadership, and corporate leaders from the

African Union and other regional bodies, a strong and vibrant civil society, a critical media, good laws, end to corruption and so forth. There needs to be in Africa a society that treats all people equally (not identically) without discrimination, offers people their due, and is concerned about the plights of the poor, vulnerable, marginalized, etc.

Finally, the pursuit of a just and egalitarian society in Africa is an urgent and crucial endeavour, demanding the elimination of entrenched injustices and inequalities that have stifled the continent's progress for far too long. Despite Africa's vast wealth in natural and human resources, the prevalence of poor governance, corruption, and external exploitation has perpetuated cycles of poverty, conflict, and marginalisation. To realise the continent's full potential, there must be a concerted effort to address these underlying issues, promote transparent and accountable leadership, and ensure inclusive development that benefits all. Africa's future rests on its ability to build societies founded on fairness, justice, and equal opportunities for every citizen. Achieving this vision will require the commitment of African governments, civil society, and the global community to dismantle systems of oppression and foster a spirit of unity and social justice. A truly just and egalitarian Africa is not only a possibility but a necessity for the continent's sustainable development and the upliftment of its people.

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