

Placemaking -the importance of kinship for migrants' habitus and territorial integration

Üzeyir Tireli¹ and Jens Christian Jacobsen²

Abstract

This article delves into the evolving significance of kinship among non-Western migrants residing in Western Europe. In the migrants' countries of origin, kinship generally encompasses a rule-based and normative way of life, hinging on each individual member's adherence to kinship values. In contrast, life in their new Western host countries is expected to revolve around the individual's personal engagement in education, employment, and healthcare within the context of the nuclear family. This shift is often framed in integration policies and practical social work as a transition from viewing migrants as passive recipients of their homeland traditions to recognizing them as active agents responsible for shaping their own lives. However, this transformation raises the question of whether kinship diminishes in significance in these new surroundings or if it can assume a new role as a foundation for complex individual lives. In this context, active participation (and integration) would be built upon a secure base strengthened by kinship.

Our analysis focuses on how migrants grapple with two equally crucial systems: the kinship of their home country and the nuclear family structure of the host country. Upon their arrival in the host country, migrants confront a weighty choice: Should they relinquish their kinship relationships because they seemingly serve no purpose in the host country? And must the migrant assimilate into a nuclear family structure where welfare is guaranteed by the welfare state, but where each individual citizen is expected to contribute to community-building and a sense of belonging? These questions should be considered by both migrants themselves and within the domain of social work.

This analysis revolves around a single concept central to migrants, namely kinship, and how it evolves through their experiences in the host country. Migrant relations encompass group dynamics and cultural values not always comprehensible to most people in the host country. However, following migrants' experiences, kinship emerges as a crucial bridge to integration within a Western welfare state. In our analysis, we primarily draw upon Pierre Bourdieu's distinction between official and practical kinship. We perceive kinship as a tool of power for managing social and

¹ Üzeyir Tireli, PhD, Associate Professor, University College Copenhagen, Denmark. E-mail: Ut@kp.dk

² Jens Christian Jacobsen, independent scholar, Copenhagen, Denmark. E-mail: [jcyj2049@gmail.com](mailto:jcj2049@gmail.com)

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cultural conflicts (Bourdieu 1979, Brighenti 2010) due to kinships serving as bastions of emotional and value cohesion among their members. Nevertheless, kinship can also serve as a secure foundation for migrants in novel surroundings, characterized by foreign demands and expectations (Carsten 2020).

The article concludes by briefly outlining how educational practitioners can monitor migrant families' perceptions of and attachment to their new locale.

Keywords: Kinship; migration; family; transformation; minorities; place; territories; urbanization; integration

Introduction

This article aims to explore an often-overlooked aspect of the resilience of non-Western migrant families: kinship. We seek to elucidate why kinship holds significant importance in community-building and how nurturing kinship relationships can enhance and fortify the integration of migrant families into society.

The terms “Western” and “non-Western” are political constructs originating primarily within the “West” itself. They serve as political inventions employed to categorize and differentiate population groups, often leading to exclusion and alienation. These terms are frequently utilized to foster the perception that certain groups are fundamentally “opposed” or even pose a potential “threat” to what is deemed “Western” culture, values, or societal structures. In this article, we employ the term “non-Western” as a practical reference to a specific cohort of migrants, specifically those hailing from regions like the Middle East and Africa. They face various challenges, including economic, political, social, or environmental factors. However, we do so with a consciousness that these categories do not inherently capture the intricacies and diversities found within these groups.

In their home countries, kinship embodies a rule- and norm-based way of life, predicated on individual adherence to family or clan values. In their new host countries, life evolves over time based on individual engagement in education, employment, and healthcare (Fliche 2006). This transition does not signify a diminished importance of kinship in the new surroundings. Instead, it signifies that the family assumes a new significance as an interpretive framework or a realm for multifaceted daily life. In this context, active participation (and integration) is contingent not solely upon the family's endorsement but also on the individual's ability to successfully integrate into the labor market, private life, and the host country's values. It hinges on the mutual agreement between the family and the individual regarding what is truthful and appropriate, without conflicting with the new way of life in the host country (Fliche 2006). When migrants can navigate this terrain successfully, it paves the way for the development of their habitus, encompassing the totality of experiences accrued throughout life. These experiences serve as the foundation upon which individuals act and make new life choices.



Theoretical starting point

In his seminal work, “Outline of a Theory of Practice” (1977), Pierre Bourdieu underscores the profound role of an individual’s social origin and class in shaping their decisions, deliberations, and choices. He introduces the concept of ‘habitus,’ which refers to a system of enduring and transferable dispositions that define an individual’s capacity for social positioning. As individuals integrate their family and class experiences into their daily lives, these dispositions serve as “a matrix of perceptions, values, and actions that make it possible to solve an infinite number of tasks” (Ibid. 82-83).

Bourdieu’s exploration of ‘parenté pratique’ (1979: 273), or practical kinship, initially received limited attention in European anthropology. More recent research has delved into kinship concerning marriages and alliances within families (Collard 2000, Schweitzer 2000). However, it has been challenging to find research that explores how kinship can function outside of the family context (Fliche 2006). As we revisit Bourdieu’s work four decades after the publication of “Le Sens Pratique,” we must pose the following question: Can non-Western migrants maintain their tradition-based kinship values in Western societies like Denmark, where a public system provides welfare and where individuals are expected to assume greater personal responsibility for their well-being?

While the participation of families in the economic systems of their home countries implied shared financial and social responsibilities among relatives (White 2000), the income of individual migrant workers in the host country has gradually narrowed the scope of those covered by these financial obligations. Presently, obligations and responsibilities predominantly fall upon members of the host country’s so-called nuclear family who earn income: parents to children, spouses to each other, and, over time, the financial contributions of children to the parental generation. The concept of ‘welfare’ has evolved primarily around the individual, with the Western notion of the family designating specific breadwinning roles for individuals (Kjaerulff et al. 2015).

According to Bourdieu (1979) and Hareven (2015), kinship is an arrangement that binds individuals through shared perceptions of biological, legal, and value-related matters. This ultimately manifests through the reproductive organizational form of kinship: the family. Both families and kinship serve to organize support, socialization, and, to some extent, the social placement of individuals (Furstenberg et al. 2020).

Beyond obligations for financial support, individual migrants do not hold paramount importance for the welfare of the family. Nevertheless, the family histories of migrants, often spanning several generations and constituting living knowledge for all family members, dictate that the individual migrant always carries a symbolic debt to their family. Symbolic debts must always be repaid, particularly in the context of marriages, as emphasized by Bourdieu. To comprehend how individuals navigate intricate kinship relationships—whom they interact with, how, and when—one must examine how kinship as an institution resolved such ‘payments’ in the past, often spanning generations. In practice, forms of payment imply a complex genealogy of tactics, confrontations, and alliances. Consequently, everyone ‘inherits’ a set of practices that they must grapple with. The individual is perpetually indebted to the family, either through personal debt or as a ‘payer’ of debts that those closest to the family cannot repay, ultimately placing the responsibility on the individual who should repay the debt (Bourdieu 1979).

Upon encountering their new host country, migrants thus become acutely aware of the coexistence of two parallel welfare systems: the kinship system of their home country and the nuclear family structure of the host country. Upon arrival, migrant workers are confronted with a choice, albeit one that is radicalized by being no choice at all: Should the migrant forsake kinship because it serves no welfare function in the host country? Must the migrant assimilate into a nuclear family structure where welfare is predominantly provided by the welfare state? We conceptualize the welfare state in line with the sociologist Gøsta Esping-Andersen's comprehensive definition: 'The activities of the state are intertwined with the market and the family as the individual's provider' (Esping-Andersen, 1990: 21).

This choice implies that migrants must reconcile with the notion that the nuclear family is believed to fulfill a fundamental emotional need for personal togetherness through spouses and children. Moreover, perceptions related to upbringing, behavior, values, and attitudes are largely entrusted to public institutions. Here, migrants lack experience from their home country that could make this functional division in the host country comprehensible.

However, from the migrant's perspective, public and state power often symbolize control and punishment, which they strive to avoid as much as possible. Consequently, it is not surprising that migrants opt to adhere to established kinship patterns rather than embrace a reshaped practical kinship structure in the host country, which migration has rendered inevitable. This choice is neither straightforward nor exclusively advantageous for migrants, as we elucidate in the following.

Official and practical kinship

Bourdieu distinguishes between official and practical kinship. Official kinship refers to the formal representations that individuals, such as migrants, provide of their family relationships. Formally, kinship is relatively well-defined, shaped by rules, cultural norms, and handed-down traditions. It is primarily expressed in formal situations, often when dealing with authorities, where the migrant must explain the significance of kinship and its origins (Bourdieu 2007, 86f; 256f).

In contrast, we have practical or everyday kinship. This concept encompasses the intricate web of lived family ties, referred to as 'parenté pratique.' It consists of relationships and connections that are actively mobilized by specific members for particular purposes and as long as they prove useful. Practical kinship is inherently strategic and is often combined with other non-family ties, such as friendships, neighborhood relationships, and collegial bonds (Bourdieu 1979).

Official kinship can be likened to practical (or everyday life) kinship "in the same way that the geometric space of a map, understood as an imaginary representation of all roads and theoretically possible routes, relates to the network of roads that are actually used, traveled, maintained, and thus readily accessible" (Bourdieu 2007, 98). Bourdieu views kinship as an anthropological and ethnographic means of organizing daily life in the place where, by tradition, people collectively experience their historical belonging.



We will maintain the differentiation between official and practical kinship to comprehend how migrants uphold kinship in a new environment. Similar to Bourdieu's structural distinction between these two forms of kinship, there is an 'external' official version that can elucidate the migrant's sense of belonging over time, and a practical version that can be observed. In the practical version, kinship encompasses not only biological relations but also includes individuals who share the migrant's values in everyday life, where, as in Bourdieu's analogy of the road map, they all "go to the same place." However, for the migrant, the myriad relationships, not only with the home country but also among migrants in the host country, imply that their everyday life is shaped and reshaped within far more intricate relationships and conditions than can be observed solely through the lens of, for example, migrant workers.

Research on migrant families and forms of kinships

In the interdisciplinary field of migration studies, kinship has long been a prominent area of research. Existing studies have delved into the role of kinship networks, which facilitate migration and establish connections among migrants in various locations (Andrikopoulos and Duyvendak 2020). Moreover, research has highlighted the adaptability of kinship constructs due to migrants' experiences and their assimilation into different cultures (Foner 1997). This exploration has also underscored how specific social constructs of kinship become ingrained within cultures characterized by mobility. Notably, in their influential work on kinship within the context of migration, Bryceson (2019) demonstrated that the practices, composition, and structure of transnational families often deviate from the definitions of a 'legitimate family' established by nation-states, which are targeted by social policies and family reunification regulations. It is crucial to acknowledge that family units play a fundamental role in state control, and in migration scenarios, individuals are often compelled to conform to the Western model of the family unit (Hvidtfeldt et al., 2022).

Since the 1980s, anthropologists have widely agreed that in many cultural contexts, 'kin' are not predetermined by birth but are instead socially constructed through ongoing relational actions and practices (Carsten 2020). The dynamic, creative, and adaptable attributes of kinship make it a valuable resource, particularly when individuals are on the move. Carsten posits that both 'kinship as being' and 'kinship as doing' are intrinsic to migration processes. 'Kinship as being' primarily involves the analysis of kin relations based on birth, descent, and ascribed status, while 'kinship as doing' emphasizes the importance of ongoing and performative processes that lead to the formation of kinship bonds (Carsten 2020). He suggests that 'kinship as doing' underscores the significance of the present and future, as it explores kinship through the active practices of becoming.

Research in and about immigrant families has mainly focused on issues of migrant workers' integration (or marginalization) in receiving countries (Barbara 1993). The

literature often mentions two factors that shape migrants' lives. On the one hand, there are individual preferences and wishes, and on the other hand, the opportunities provided by the social context (Kamijn 1998). Migrants may have a strong desire to integrate, but a lack of opportunities may lead to marginalization instead of integration. Other factors play a role, such as belonging to other groups of migrants, the family, and in the local area. It is belonging that can both integrate and segregate the migrant.

Integration can therefore be seen as part of a wider discussion about 'agent versus structure' as a background for understanding individual actions and the social consequences of these actions (Bourdieu 1977). While cultural preferences can shape the migrant's behavior, the migrant is not always free to choose them. Preferences can be shaped by both the majority and minority culture, and the dominant normative local environment, e.g., the family, can discourage or encourage the achievement of specific cultural preferences. The literature unsurprisingly shows that overall, it is an interaction between agent and structure (Alenius 2015).

Only in recent years has research into family and kinship dynamics among migrants begun to emerge: Several studies of whether work and family life thrive in migrant families in Europe show that first-generation families lack relevant information about, for example, childcare facilities and lack knowledge about relatives' networks to support them with childcare, leisure opportunities, etc. Research into culture and religion and attitudes towards family and gender roles often portrays difficulties in marriage in migrant families, especially in families where the husband and wife come from different parts of the home country (an overview in Barbara 1993). But with increased globalization, it appears that knowledge about the social structures of the host countries is gained in the home countries, regardless of where these are located (ILO 2021).

When research focuses specifically on the family as a sociological unit, migrant families have been loosely defined as families that have one or more members who are immigrants from another country (Baldassar et al 2013). A variant of this definition is to define the migrant family as a family that migrates in different ways between countries: some leave, others stay in the home country, some come and go, others (children and grandparents) return to the home country. The multilocal and multinational migrant family has become more frequent in research in a world of transnational mobility and communication.

The migrant family as a transnational entity

Transnational mobility, often referred to as migration, has been predominantly characterized by individuals and families relocating to other countries or regions in pursuit of employment and sustenance for several decades. Labor migration is driven by policies that frequently impose restrictions on family reunification and residence permits. Consequently, family members may either join the migrant in the host



country or remain in their country of origin, resulting in family relationships spanning two different parts of the world, typically a wealthier region and a less affluent one. As a result, migration has historically been associated with two main patterns: joint family migration or the arrival of a male migrant followed by the family.

In cases of the latter pattern, family migration can take various routes. If the male worker, whether married or single, arrives first, he seeks employment and accommodation, and if married, his wife may follow later, either with or without their children. In the case of single male migrants, they may choose to marry within the recipient country or return to their home country to find a spouse.

The impact of the migration of working men on migrant families can be quite diverse. Coping with marital separation can be highly stressful, and forced separation from young children can lead to tension between parents and children. Additionally, male workers may form new families in the host country while attempting to maintain ties with their families in the home country. However, rarely is attention directed towards whether the 'Western' family institution is suitable as an integration tool. The family is often viewed as a defined framework for raising children and providing adults with a support system after a long day's work, but its suitability for the socialization of migrants is seldom explored.

Single women and mothers also migrate independently. In impoverished countries, unskilled single and divorced mothers are often among the first to migrate, frequently illegally, to work as domestic or unskilled health workers. While this may improve the living conditions of their children, who may be left with relatives such as grandparents, these single mothers often face precarious employment, inadequate housing, and challenging living conditions. This situation is often associated with significant psychological stress and can lead to severe poverty and the fragmentation of transnational families.

Overall, there is a substantial gap in knowledge concerning migrant families within research on transnational migration (Baldassar et al. 2013). Although migration flows involve intricate relationships among various actors, including individuals, families, social networks, markets, and states, other topics have taken precedence in social science research. Issues such as political and economic disparities between home and host countries, migrant numbers, and their societal consequences, such as identity, recognition, or delegitimization of ethnicity, have been and continue to be prominent areas of focus in classical migration research.

As evident from this concise overview of research on families and migration, the field is expansive. We have chosen to concentrate on a single "plural construction" among migrants, namely kinship. This decision is partly due to kinship's centrality in socio-economic explanations for the ease or difficulty of integration in the receiving country. Additionally, kinship, as an extended family concept, encompasses various "foreign"

group dynamics and values often encountered by individuals in the host country without full comprehension.

All kinship structures are rooted in biology through birth and origin, but in practice, kinship forms always represent a hybrid combination of biological and social relations. The concept of relatedness is central in anthropological research on kinship, attributed to the English anthropologist Janet Carsten (2000). She views relationships and mutual obligations as the foundation of contemporary practical kinship. Previous research's preoccupation with lineage and family has given way to an emphasis on reciprocity, highlighting present-day relationships between individuals. This broadens the definition of kinship from a diachronic national reliance on descent to a synchronic, transnational, and observant depiction of kinship in action.

The marker of current and essential connectedness plays a vital role in social integration within kinships because these bonds are not upheld by individual characteristics but rather by interdependent networks of relationships among individuals who often occupy disparate positions within the social structure of their environment.

A transnational kinship?

Transnational kinship is a complex and flexible social construct, rather than a precisely defined concept. It represents a dynamic, socially constructed domain rooted in people's cross-border kinship connections and practices (Alenius 2015). Functionally, this domain can be categorized into three primary components: macrospace, mesospace, and microspace. Macrospace encompasses factors such as transnational policies, socio-cultural and economic developments within societies, and various forms of social practices in this transnational context. Mesospace consists of families, transnational kinship networks, relationships, and transactions. Microspace delves into individuals' informal behaviors and practices for informal education within the transnational environment. Within the mesospace, families can create informal learning environments characterized by "fusion values," which can benefit both the family in the host country and the individual migrant, as well as the family in the home country.

The integration of migrants into nation-states or host countries and the maintenance of transnational connections need not be contradictory social processes. In fact, the simultaneity of these processes, integrating daily activities, routines, and institutions within a shared transnational perspective, is a possibility that warrants exploration. In practice, this means that integration in a new country and connections to a home country, dispersed networks of family, compatriots, or individuals who share a religious or ethnic identity, can coexist and mutually reinforce each other. To make this simultaneity visible, it is crucial to distinguish between the existence of transnational social networks and individuals' awareness of their participation in these networks.



A distinction must be made between being in a socially defined space and the ways one belongs to that space (Bourdieu 1996):

Being in space: This pertains to actual social relations and practices in which individuals engage, without necessarily aligning with the identities associated with those actions. Individuals may perform certain roles or tasks without fully identifying with the specific local identities or cultures linked to those roles. Social spaces inherently contain institutions, organizations, and experiences at various levels, generating identity categories that individuals or groups may adopt or select.

To belong to: In contrast, this involves practices or actions of belonging that visibly demonstrate an identity linked to a specific group. These actions are not merely symbolic but concrete, tangible behaviors that signify a sense of belonging. Examples include wearing religious symbols, displaying flags, or making specific dietary choices. Ways of belonging combine action and awareness of the identity conveyed by those actions.

Investigating synchronicity, such as simultaneity within a space that combines being and belonging awareness, necessitates more than questionnaires or interviews with migrants (Alanen 2011). Social spaces exhibit both synchronic (structural) and diachronic (dynamic) features, and a comprehensive understanding of how these spaces evolve requires attention to both aspects. Analyzing migrants' positions in a social space requires data on social relations and ideals practiced in various contexts. Informants should discuss themselves and others in relation to values and practices across different situations, considering concrete circumstances. It is vital to listen to the sometimes divergent, sometimes convergent narratives and opinions concerning life in the host country, developments in the home country, transnational engagements, gender dynamics, politics, and specific events. Migrants often navigate simultaneous contexts, and their positioning must be observed from multiple vantage points. This approach can provide insight into the "simultaneity of spatial scales" (Massey 1994, 264). It involves recognizing how struggles for recognition and positioning relate to multiple simultaneous contexts and distinguishing whether, and to what extent, the migrant's life exhibits transnational dimensions versus a predominant focus on life in the host country.

Migrants often find themselves largely responsible for their integration upon arriving in Western countries, with minimal assistance beyond basic orientation programs provided by the host country. How can kinship, which encompasses the social, cultural, and emotional dimensions of migrants' lives, facilitate this integration process?

For Bourdieu, the migrant's habitus is shaped by dispositions formed through their experiences in a specific place and their sense of belonging to that place. This positioning encompasses both formal and practical aspects. Over time, migrants often develop an understanding of how to formally occupy specific roles and positions in

the host country. However, the more intricate question pertains to whether the migrant genuinely belongs to that place. Investigating this aspect is a complex endeavor (Lingat & Toland 2020). We will briefly outline how to approach this investigation.

A research framework

According to Hagerty et al. (1992), a sense of belonging emerges when individuals perceive themselves as an integral part of a system or environment. Hagerty et al. outline two defining characteristics that contribute to a sense of belonging:

Valued involvement: This reflects an individual's perception that they are not only valued but also an essential and meaningful component of relationships with others, groups, objects, organizations, environments, or spiritual dimensions.

'Fitting in': This aspect encompasses an individual's feeling of alignment or agreement with others, whether in groups, organizations, or religious associations.

Both characteristics emphasize the subjectivity and uniqueness of the sense of belonging, which varies depending on the individual and the specific context. While a sense of belonging is a subjective and transient experience, it is typically linked with social belonging and thus exhibits a negative correlation with feelings of ostracism, loneliness, and social isolation. However, it's important to note that a sense of belonging can exist even without the presence of others. For instance, individuals may feel a sense of belonging to a place even in the absence of people. This quality of being an integral part of a system distinguishes belonging from other forms of belonging that revolve around active social relationships (Hagerty et al. 1992).

Despite the widespread acknowledgment of the importance of feeling at home, there are limited formalized approaches to assess this sentiment. One common method involves psychometric scaling, although many of the results are based on scales developed for a specific study. Additionally, many scales are tailored to specific demographic or cultural groups within a particular country (Chow 2007).

Psychometrics encompass the measurement and assessment of psychological traits or characteristics. This typically involves posing a series of questions to individuals about a particular topic, such as belonging. The responses are then condensed and organized into methodologically justified categories, known as clusters. These questions may be supplemented with observations, and the results can be represented graphically to illustrate the extent and interconnectedness of an individual's relationships with others. Sample questions might inquire about an individual's experiences regarding: a. Feeling supported b. Being interested in others c. Active engagement d. Shared experiences e. Feeling valued f. Working toward collective goals.

These questions are asked within a specific context, or they can be generalized to suit different inquiries. For instance, various avenues of inquiry could include:



- •What does belonging mean to you based on your experiences?
- •How do you perceive your sense of belonging in your current role as a student, a newcomer in the workforce, a homemaker, etc.?
- •Can you describe the feeling of belonging in this context?
- •What factors contributed to your sense of belonging while you were a student, a newcomer in the workforce, a homemaker, or unemployed?
- After processing the responses, some answers can be explored in greater detail through focus groups or by seeking input from selected individuals.

Summary and conclusion

In conclusion, our examination of kinship as both a biological and sociological construct has revealed its potential as a powerful tool for facilitating social integration within welfare states. Unlike many integration mechanisms that rely on individual characteristics, kinship thrives on the robust networks of relations between groups, offering a stable social structure both in migrants' home countries and as a potential secure base in their host countries (Carsten 2020).

Within the context of Europe kinship faces a multifaceted challenge. On one hand, it must recognize individuals as autonomous and self-determining subjects. Simultaneously, it must continue to serve as the guardian of tradition, protecting its members from the influences of cosmopolitan anonymity and the overwhelming forces of modernity. This dual role creates a dynamic tension, transforming the social space into an unpredictable interplay between distance and proximity, local rootedness, and widespread mobility.

In light of these challenges, there arises a necessity for contemporary “free individuals” to renegotiate the rules of kinship, particularly within the realm of education. Education is a constantly evolving phenomenon, posing challenges to tradition-bound networks like kinships. The conditions of life in welfare states, with their extensive transportation networks, digital media, and diverse cultural norms, foster fluid living conditions that allow individuals to simultaneously be “close” and “far” from their relatives. Kinship, rather than being marginalized, must continuously adapt and reinvent itself as a foundation for the individual.

While family traditions and ancestral values persist, new forms of solidarity are emerging to accommodate and support innovative models of entrepreneurship, education, cultural policies, and reproduction. The concept of placemaking, as envisioned by Bourdieu's practical kinship, becomes a crucial focal point. Placemaking strengthens the bonds between individuals and the spaces they inhabit and share. It involves a collaborative process through which individuals can shape an environment, such as an educational institution, that serves as a framework for maximizing shared values.

This evolving landscape leads to the formation of new coalitions in relation to the market and the state, inspiring migrants to reimagine both private and public spaces as central sanctuaries within their new communities. However, in the absence of integrative infrastructures and social support, private forms of solidarity can become more prominent, with kinship playing an increasingly significant role in compensating for these deficiencies (Humphrey 1998).

Our article makes a valuable contribution to the current body of research by introducing the concept of “transnational kinship” as a powerful analytical tool for understanding the dynamics of kinship within migratory contexts. This novel concept allows us to explore and comprehend the multifaceted role of kinship in the lives of migrants and their families as they navigate the complexities of transnational mobility. By employing transnational kinship as a conceptual framework, our research sheds light on how these extended kinship network’s function, adapt, and evolve in response to migration.

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