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Introduction: rising powers and the future of global governance

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ABSTRACT There has been much debate over the extent to which the rising powers of the global South are challenging contemporary global political and economic governance. While some observers see an emancipatory potential in the redistribution of power among states, others see the rising powers as firmly located within the Western-centred neoliberal world order. This collection of papers seeks to go beyond the state-centrism of existing approaches by examining how challenges to global governance by rising powers are rooted in specific state–society configurations. Through studies of Brazil, India, China and other important developing countries within their respective regions, such as Turkey and South Africa, the papers examine the way domestic structures, arrangements, actors and dynamics influence the nature of the international interventions and behaviour of rising powers. They ask how their increased political and economic enmeshment in the international system impacts upon their own internal societal cohesion and development. By examining these issues, the papers raise the question of whether the challenge posed by the rising powers to global governance is likely to lead to an increase in democracy and social justice for the majority of the world’s peoples.

Summary of the papers

Little more than a decade ago the economic and financial crisis that swept across the non-Western world (the so-called ‘Asian financial crisis’ of 1997–98) was ostensibly a harbinger of the ‘end of late development’ and a reassertion of the West’s political and economic dominance over the global South. The current global financial crisis, however, having originated in the West itself, has arguably turned that narrative on its head. In sharp contrast to the triumphalism exhibited on the part of the West towards the alleged ‘crony capitalism’ of the East and its tendency to spread contagion, it is the West whose lax financial...
regulation has allowed contagion to spread from the centres of global finance in the West towards the global South. The fact that this time the South has in relative terms experienced a ‘good crisis’ has meant that the West has lost the moral authority to lecture the non-Western countries on the ‘proper’ way to organise and regulate their economies.

As a result, the crisis has now opened up space for rising powers of the global South to play an increasingly active role in the reform of global economic and political governance, to the extent that a ‘regime change’ in global governance is now at least a distinct possibility. Crisis management has not only involved a reliance on the financial reserves of the rising powers, but has also conferred a participatory role for rising power governments themselves through the forum of the G20. Even before the crisis countries such as India and Brazil had become increasingly vocal in the Doha Round in promoting a rising powers position on the reform of the rules of global trade. And, perhaps most importantly, in 2009 the ‘BRIC’ acronym ceased to be simply a convenient category indicating countries with the greatest investment potential, and became a political reality as Brazil, Russia, India and China (and from 2010 South Africa) sought to forge close political ties through annual meetings of rising power leaders. High on the agenda of this grouping has been the desire to move away from the dollar as the world’s foremost reserve currency, thus offering the potential to bring about an end to the ‘exorbitant privilege’ of the USA and the situation in which the surplus countries of the global South repress consumption in order to subsidise consumption in the West. Further proposals include establishment of a BRICS development bank that, if realised, could potentially pose a significant challenge to the World Bank.

Yet the rhetoric of ‘South–South cooperation’ mobilised by groupings such as the BRICS notwithstanding, it is quite clear that the challenge that the rising powers pose to global governance is of a qualitatively different nature to that of previous Third World political movements, such as the Non-aligned Movement, the G-77, and their efforts in the 1970s to set an agenda for a ‘New International Economic Order’. Although substantive differences within BRICS, for example, have led some to doubt whether it constitutes a useful analytical category at all, the countries it comprises share in common the fact that their recent growth owes much to their extensive and increasing international engagement, rather than to any partial withdrawal or ‘de-linkage’ from the global economy. At the same time, however, as the reform agendas noted above suggest, they are nonetheless openly critical of the perceived bias towards the global North in the institutions of global economic and political governance structures and seek to alter the global status quo and enhance the influence of the global South.

It is not surprising therefore that opinion as to the longer-term implications of the rising powers is divided. It may now be that the global South is emerging to form a real economic and political force that may move beyond dependence on the West to form a new centre of power in the global political economy. In this view the global financial crisis can be seen as having accelerated trends of a significant challenge to the geopolitical and geo-economic predominance of the West and to the global hegemony of the Anglo-Saxon model of capitalism.
This has been characterised as a transition from a unipolar US hegemony to one of ‘emancipatory multipolarity’, in which the countries that represent the majority of the world’s peoples now have a position at the head table, or even as a broader underlying ‘global centre shift’ or ‘hegemonic transition’.

However, there is much ground for a more ‘pessimistic’ view that that the rise of these new powers has been overstated or that their rise is firmly located within the Western global hegemony. Indeed, when we examine the participation of the rising powers in the G20, there is evidence to suggest that this has much to do with crisis management through shifting the burden on to the rising powers themselves, a form of rebalancing of the sort pursued during the 1985 Plaza Accord that eventually led to the economic decline of Japan. Questions of representation surrounding the G20 remain, and this is even more the case with BRICS. Despite the latter’s proposal of a development bank as an alternative to the World Bank, the BRICS initiative can be viewed more as a case of seeking a place at the table of global neoliberal economic governance. As Bond argues in this issue, like Berlin in 1884–85, the BRICS summit scheduled to take place in March 2013 in Durban, South Africa looks set to carve up Africa, unburdened by ‘Western’ concerns about democracy and human rights.

With these questions in mind, the aim of this collection of papers is to contribute to this debate on the impact of the rising powers on global governance. Through studies of Brazil, India, China and other important developing countries within their respective regions, such as Turkey and South Africa, we raise the question of the extent to which the challenge posed by the rising powers to the contemporary system of global governance is likely to lead to an increase in democracy and social justice for the majority of the world’s peoples. This approach is based on the recognition that, within the mainstream literature on the rising powers, there has been something of an unacknowledged transition from the globalisation debate of the 1990s, in which transnational economic processes were alleged to have made the state a less relevant actor, to a more state-centric framework in which the rising powers and the West are locked in a zero-sum struggle for influence over global governance institutions. A corollary of this approach has been that, within the mainstream discourse on rising powers, there has been an assumption that an increased voice at the global level necessarily translates into greater social justice for domestic societies within the rising powers themselves and in the global South more broadly.

Thus, the papers seek to go beyond mainstream state-centric analyses of rising powers to consider how the potential challenge these countries pose to the politico-economic predominance of the West are rooted in specific state–society configurations. It seeks to critically interrogate such approaches by exploring how domestic structures, arrangements, actors and dynamics are influencing the nature of the international interventions and behaviour of rising powers. What are the main constituencies and interest groups, such as domestic or foreign capital, domestic lobbies and civil society organisations, which most significantly influence the interventions of the rising powers in the reform of global governance? What material and political interests do these interventions represent? Also, to what extent is increased political and economic enmeshment in the international system by the rising powers having an impact on their own inter-
nal societal cohesion and development? Moreover, how are these interventions at the global level located within, and instigated and/or constrained by, the increasingly transnationalised neoliberal nature of global political economy? One of the key developments since the Third Worldism of the 1960 and 1970s has been the relative pluralisation of domestic societies. While the rising powers clearly differ in terms of their degree of institutionalisation of formal democracy, even authoritarian states, such as China, are becoming more open to forms of influence from domestic constituencies. The special issue thus seeks to examine the extent to which greater pluralism at the domestic level influences the position that rising powers adopt on the international stage, and the degree to which nongovernmental and governmental realms interact in terms of policy formation.

By addressing such questions, it is possible to raise the broader normative question of the implications of this emergent redistribution of economic and political power for the sustainability and legitimacy of the emerging 21st century system of global political and economic governance. To what extent is the integration of these rising powers into contemporary global governance creating new and serious domestic and international tensions and vulnerabilities that may also undermine or challenge future global economic stability and prosperity? This special issue examines how the domestic legitimacy of the international positions adopted by emerging power has an impact on the negotiated new global order itself. Questions of democracy, legitimacy and social justice are largely ignored or under-emphasised in many existing studies, and the aim of this collection of papers is to show that serious consideration of such questions provides important insights into the sustainability of the emerging global political economy and new forms of global governance.

Achin Vanaik, in his contribution to the issue, poses the question of how to conceptualise the emerging constellation of rising Southern powers and to what extent this constellation may be displacing the USA as the world’s pre-eminent hegemon. He begins by engaging with ongoing debates surrounding the relationship between the state and global capitalism, arguing that the fact of competition among individual capitals contributes to competition between states, in turn constituting a world order consisting of both geopolitical and geo-economic dynamics. The question thus becomes one of examining whether any of the rising powers has the potential to displace the USA as a global hegemonic power. The most obvious candidate, China, is in fact beset by profound problems associated with its rapid late industrialisation: structural imbalances, financial instability, deep social inequalities and endemic unrest. The fact that these problems are not easily resolvable raises a question mark over China’s ability to exercise global hegemony. Despite the recent rapid growth of a service industry and the emergence of a sizable middle class, India’s rapid economic growth occurs in a context of endemic poverty. In terms of foreign policy the country has since the end of the Cold War been fully incorporated into the broader geopolitical aims of the USA. In fact, neither China nor India shows any inclination to overtly challenge the global position of the USA. The strong discourse of ‘South–South cooperation’ deployed by many of the rising powers might more accurately be seen as rhetoric with which to negotiate a stronger bargaining position within
the US-centred world order. Similarly, the BRICS initiative can be seen in much the same light. Indeed, the real vulnerabilities to US hegemony exist not within the rising powers but in the Middle Eastern, North African and Central Asian regions. As an alternative, therefore, Vanaik proposes a ‘quintet’ of the USA and rising powers as the most apt conceptualisation of the emerging and existent dominant powers: a hub and spokes arrangement that includes the rising powers but relies on the indispensable role of the USA and its military power and capacity as lender of last resort. Such a geopolitical configuration is not invulnerable, however, and remains subject to the kind of people power that has been seen in the recent Arab Spring. Indeed, Vanaik concludes by considering the possibility of surpassing the current geopolitical conjuncture—a possibility predicated on the decline of US power but which will, given the lack of social prerequisites, not involve a return to global Keynesianism but rather will necessitate a genuinely anti-capitalist alternative.

In his contribution Andreas Antoniades examines the new global debt relations following the recent global financial crisis. Specifically he raises the question of whether the crisis and the fact that rising powers are the primary holders of US debt confer a degree of structural power on the rising powers. More broadly, how does debt operate as an instrument of power in the context of hegemonic rivalry between the established West and the rising powers? Central here is the issue of global imbalances. To some extent it is correct to say that the Western economies are faced with heightened levels of public and private debt that extend down to the level of individuals and households, and that governments have little room for policy manoeuvre; thus the process of deleveraging is likely to be a long drawn out one. The position of the USA as debtor and the rising economies as creditors has thus been maintained and deepened. This does not mean that a shift of hegemony to the rising powers has taken place, however, since the USA continues to enjoy considerable structural power. The ‘exorbitant privilege’ that the USA enjoys as a result of the international use of the dollar has even been strengthened as a result of the crisis. The USA has been able to devalue away a significant portion of its debt. This has occurred through exchange rate valuation, in which a depreciation of the dollar has served to increase the value of foreign assets belonging to the USA while not being affected by US liabilities. The USA has been able to control this process through domestic monetary policy. The role of the stock market also functions in a way that benefits the particular composition of US investments.

Following this overview of the global structure, the next four papers consist of country case studies of rising powers, their potential, and/or their policies. Beeson raises the question of the extent to which China may be able to translate its growing material preponderance into regional and global leadership. He argues that, despite a strong potential for increased Chinese leadership, constraints that are both specific to China and related to the broader geopolitical conjuncture serve to place stringent limitations on China’s ability to exercise the kind of leadership deployed by past hegemons. The analysis thus casts doubt on the question of whether there can be such a thing as ‘hegemony with Chinese characteristics’. While China exercised a form of hegemony in Sino-centric East Asia before the 19th century clash with the Western powers, there are formida-
ble barriers to regaining such a position in the 21st century. Recent events, such as China’s entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) suggests that, rather than proposing an alternative to the US-centred Washington Consensus, China may conversely be in the process of internalising the rules of the West.

While China’s distinctive model of ‘state capitalism’ ostensibly provides an alternative model for other developing countries, debates surrounding the Beijing Consensus notwithstanding, what appears to be lacking is any attempt by China to formulate its own model as a set of universal principles. China’s grand strategy, as expressed in the notion of ‘comprehensive security’, suggests an emerging regional leadership role, and indeed there is evidence to suggest that China has launched a charm offensive to bolster its soft power in the region. Yet here countervailing forces exist too in the form of the Obama administration, which has sought to reverse the relative neglect of East Asia under George W Bush. While China’s participation in various regional multilateral institutions again suggests a willingness to play by the rules of cooperation, regionalism itself is a contested project. The reluctance to see the kind of potential Chinese dominance exercised through groupings such as ASEAN+3 has led to a range of alternative institutions favoured by the other countries in East Asia. Increased maritime disputes in recent years also threaten to undermine any goodwill that China may have earned previously. In conclusion, Beeson argues that, rather than seeing the emergence of China’s leadership role, we may perhaps be entering into a situation in which global leadership is carried out by a wider group of powers, including a post-hegemonic USA. While this has parallels to Vanaik’s quintet, Beeson sees this arrangement in a more favourable light.

Bond’s contribution argues that South Africa’s regional and global rise, despite the rhetoric, should be described as a case of ‘sub-imperialism’ rather than ‘anti-imperialism’. Sub-imperialism, according to Bond, involves the promotion of neoliberal Washington Consensus policies domestically and a combination of a faux critique of the North/West while at the same time serving as a regional platform for accumulation drawn from hinterland neighbours, and playing the role of ‘deputy sheriff’ for the region within a broader US-centred global order. Domestically South Africa has indeed undergone a process of sustained neoliberal restructuring since the mid-1990s. While a notable development in the South African political economy was that of the transition from apartheid to democracy, Bond argues that the context of neoliberal restructuring meant that this was largely a replacement of racial exploitation with class exploitation. Indeed, South Africa now has the dubious distinction of having among the world’s highest Gini rankings. In terms of the country’s relationship with the wider continent, South Africa has performed a ‘gateway function’, with Johannesburg as a regional branch-plant base for a variety of multinational corporations. Pretoria has been one of the key supporters of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), an economic development programme which repeats the disastrous structural policies of the 1980s and 1990s with little reflection on their harmful social effects. Furthermore, Pretoria’s explicit strategies for global engagement, including joining the BRIC alliance in early 2012, have not proven effective in reforming world power relations. Thus, as Bond argues, the degree to which BRICS has recently accommodated imperialism—
especially in matters related to economic and ecological crises—suggests that critics should more forcefully confront the general problem of the sub-imperial re-legitimation of neoliberalism and reinforcing of North American power.

Christensen examines the transformation of Brazilian foreign policy under the Workers’ Party (PT) government (2003–present). He argues that since the PT came to power Brazil has been actively involved in diffusing its power globally and in gaining more influence in the realm of global economic and security governance. In doing so, Brazil has sought to defend its own autonomy, strengthen its economy, gain more influence in the global political arena and develop South–South cooperation in order to further these aims. In the South American region the Brazilian government has pursued a geopolitical strategy of creating a Brazilian sphere of interest in the region, as well as establishing a platform for Brazil’s competitive insertion in the global economy. This has involved the formation of the South American Defense Council, and the forging of significant economic trade and investment links, as well as infrastructural developments improving access to Brazilian export markets in Asia and in South America. Beyond the region Brazil has also sought cooperation within the rising BRICS group to establish a common programme for the reform of the global economic and political order. The latter is an agenda which has met considerable success, although key issues such as the reform of the WTO have seen slower progress and divisions remain within BRICS over the reform of the UN Security Council. The global security order has also continued to be dominated by the USA and the West more widely. Nonetheless, Brazil’s initiatives have also achieved several successes, such as the establishment of a Common Defense Council within Unasul, making South America a security region. Through the Common Defense Council Brazil has thus to some extent achieved its aim of turning South America into its own sphere of influence, although significant differences remain between its constituent members, and the Council remains an intergovernmental institution based on the respect of national sovereignty and autonomous policy making. Nevertheless, the region functions well from the perspective of Brazilian development and global power projection. Arguably Brazil’s main priority has moved from South American cooperation to its cooperation with the other BRICS countries. The BRICS coalition has become increasingly influential within key multilateral institutions and has made it increasingly necessary for traditional Western powers to negotiate matters of security and economic governance with rising powers.

Bank’s and Karadag’s contribution explores Turkey’s growing regional power in the Middle East. This ‘Ankara Moment’, the authors argue, has emerged as a result of the domestic rise of the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi—AKP) and its distinctive mix of Muslim values and liberalism. The rise of the AKP occurred as a result of the disembedding of the market from the military Kemalist regime following the IMF-led restructuring of the early 1990s and the further discrediting of existing elites as a result of the financial crises of 1994 and 2000. The consolidation of the AKP’s power against the traditional Kemalist establishment has demonstrated that Muslim values can coexist with economic and political liberalisation. The rise of the AKP has also led to gradual shifts in Turkey’s foreign policy and increased activism in the Middle
East that runs counter to the country’s traditional relations with the region throughout the post-Ottoman era. This new-found regional role has taken the form not only of the rise of the AKP domestically but also of Turkey’s heightened economic engagement in the Middle East and the country’s ability to offer an alternative political model of Islam and democracy, and its increased soft power based on its combination of Islamic values, a successful economy, political pluralism and an independent foreign policy. The opening for Turkey’s regional power has also been enabled by significant geopolitical dynamics in the 2000s, including the wars in Iraq, Lebanon and Gaza, which have enabled Turkey to position itself between the pro- and anti-Western camps in the Middle East. This is a regional role that both made the Turkish model capable of emulation but also in turn served as a tool for domestic legitimation. To what extent this regional role can continue in the context of the aftermath of the Arab Spring is questionable, however, as Turkey’s economic interests still require a degree of engagement with authoritarian regimes in the region.

The final questions examine in turn thematic issues of global justice, development aid and democracy promotion. In her paper Chandhoke examines the rising powers in terms of the extent to which they are capable of achieving justice for the majority of their inhabitants. She begins by noting the fact that those rising powers that have been most vocal about inequality in terms of their representation at the level of global governance also have the most unequal domestic societies. While she recognises that it is the international institutions which are in many ways responsible for increased poverty within rising power states, she is sceptical of the assertion that the reform of global governance to accommodate the interests and demands of the rising powers alone will significantly act to assuage that inequality. Thus, if growing activism in the governments of the rising powers is not in itself likely to tackle injustice domestically, Chandhoke argues that civil society activism is essential to bring social injustice and inequality to the top of the agenda. Through a case study of Women in Informal Employment (WIEGO), an Indian initiative to establish a transnational union of home-based workers, it can be seen that across the world people can be bound together in a number of ways, generating solidarity among different kinds of people who live and work in different situations, in different countries, and grafting social policy onto political agendas. Thus, the activism of rising power states at the level of global governance and the activism of civil society in seeking to help the poor need not be mutually exclusive. But, as Chandhoke goes on to argue, even if global coalitions of the poor make an impact upon policy, ultimately it is only the national state itself that can help realise these demands, thus making the national state a key target of reform in the realisation of justice.

Quadir raises the question of whether the rising powers are likely to establish a new global aid architecture. As numerous observers have noted, the rising powers such as China, India, Brazil and South Africa have in recent years become increasingly active donors. This aid is frequently not labelled ‘aid’ as such, since that establishes problematic associations with the relations of domination between the North and the South. Rather the aid is referred to as a form of South–South cooperation, which differs from Western aid because of its lack
of conditionality and its ‘untied’ nature. While this suggests a form of aid that is a significant departure from the Western norms and potentially more conducive to development in the global South, Quadir argues that the prospects for Southern aid to pose a significant challenge to the global aid architecture are not bright. Emerging donors tend to rely on ad hoc measures for distributing aid and their efforts are characterised by a lack of coordination between government departments thanks to bureaucratic struggles over spheres of interest, lack of clear and transparent reporting and monitoring and a lack of the sharing of experiences between the rising powers themselves. Despite the rhetoric of untied aid, aid does nevertheless serve to provide economic opportunities for the countries involved and serves foreign policy goals such as garnering support for a permanent UN Security Council seat (India), recognition of China over Taiwan, etc. Thus its serves the ‘national interest’. Finally, though difficult to calculate with any precision, the volumes of aid appear to be simply too small.

Finally, Stuenkel raises the question of the implications that the rising powers have for democracy promotion. While democracy promotion has most commonly been associated with the Western-centred liberal order, instances of support for democracy promotion in neighbouring countries can be seen in India and particularly in Brazil. As Stuenkel argues, democracy promotion has in recent years become a key part of Brazil’s strategy of exercising regional leadership and stability, although this has occurred more often in cases of full blown constitutional crises rather than in cases of irregularities in electoral procedures. Despite India’s long-established democracy and the support for democracy that it has voiced in international fora along with the claim that it is not an exclusively Western notion, actual cases of the promotion of democracy have been few and far between, a prominent example being that of the Maldives. India has in reality been reluctant to promote democracy in its immediate neighbourhood. These differences between Brazil and India with regard to democracy promotion can be explained with reference to their divergent geopolitical contexts.

As with Brazil itself, Latin America was part of a broader third wave of democracy in which democracy for the most part became the norm in the region. The fact that India is largely surrounded by autocratic neighbours leaves less scope for intervention in a manner which maintains regional stability. The task of merely keeping one’s neighbours from sliding back to autocracy is easier and safer than India’s challenge to help its neighbours democratise.

Despite their disagreement in emphasis, the nine articles could be read as supporting a unified argument about the current shifts in global power and the resulting prospects for global governance and a transformed international order. The argument begins with Vanaik’s conclusion that we are entering an era of a new pentarchy, a world still of rival capitalisms, but one dominated by the USA, China, the EU, India and Russia, with a few other major powers of lesser influence. Yet this world remains one in which the USA is more than a first among equals, but less than a global hegemon. Vanaik’s view of the essential economic structure of the emergent world, and of the structure of global power, is reinforced by Antoniades’ analysis of the structure of financial power revealed by the recent global financial crisis and by Beeson’s analysis of the
impediments to development of Chinese hegemony even within East Asia, let alone globally. Bond, Christensen, and Bank and Karadag describe similar trajectories of three of the somewhat lesser powers outside the new pentarchy. Bond sees South Africa as a sub-imperialist buttress of the USA and neoliberal economics within sub-Saharan Africa. Christensen describes a Brazil that has developed a greater critical distance between its policies and those of the USA and Bank and Karadag describe the basis upon which Turkey is developing a similarly separate policy agenda, but the focus of both powers remains on their regions and neither can be expected to challenge US power, or the economic system it supports, at a global level. Chandhoke, Quadir and Stuenkel ask questions about this emergent order from the point of view of those with no access to wealth, and with little political voice. Chandhoke argues that in the kind of world in which we live—and in the world that Vanaik anticipates—most of the least advantaged will gain little from the collective action of the new Southern powers that are in or near the pentarchy. The poor will have to look for other means to transform an increasingly global capitalism—as indeed they already have begun to do. Quadir and Stuenkel suggest that there will even be few changes in the international reformist institutions that address the economically marginalised and the voiceless. The overall global aid system is unlikely to be fundamentally transformed by the rise of a few new donors. Democracy promotion by rising democratic powers—especially Brazil and India, but the argument might also apply to Turkey and South Africa—may at least broaden the understanding of democracy that guides the promotion activities of global international agencies, as well as that of the USA and its northern partners.

This is a sobering assessment, sobering enough that it is important to consider what the authors of these chapters may have left out. Certainly, as Chandhoke might note, they have presented a largely state-centric view of the problem (albeit one that takes into account state–society relations), a view that downplays the politics of transnational solidarity and the political power of the forces that manifest it. Equally the papers reflect what may be an unduly strong scepticism about the degree to which economic globalisation may have transformed the basic structure of the global political economy. Not surprisingly, from the point of view of scholars who concentrate on the largest and most powerful of the world’s rising economies, capitalist economies still look fundamentally separate. There is no ‘transnational capitalist class’ or ‘global 1%’ to be found in these pages, just as there is relatively infrequent mention of the transnational aspects of social movements that are discussed in terms of their significant impact in South Africa, Turkey, India, Brazil and elsewhere. Debating those issues may well be a topic for another volume.

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Notes

5 LE Armijo, ‘The BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) as analytical category: mirage or insight?’, Asian Perspective, 31, 2007, pp 7–42.
9 A Payne, ‘How many Gs are there in “global governance” after the crisis? The perspectives of the “marginal majority” of the world’s states’, International Affairs, 86, 2010, pp 729–740.
10 Armijo, ‘The BRICS countries as analytical category’, pp 7–42.

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