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Forms and Functions of Traditional Dress

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Abstract

Nigeria is endowed with abundant human, natural and material resources, which could be used in different vocational practices. Most practitioners of art have consistently laid emphasis on uniqueness, high quality forms, style and content. Methods of production have revealed the high level of creativity such as in raw materials; blend with the synthetic and natural yarns which often result into uniqueness, high quality forms, styles and content they are recognised. Each of these various people has dress forms by which those of the children are different from the adult and dress forms of adult's males are also different from their adult females. These dresses are used during occasions. Although there are differences in the dress forms obvious similarities are notice in them.

Clothes speak louder than words. One of the distinctive features of human clothing is that a group of people share particular pattern of dress and the development of these complex and varied cultural patterns characterize human society .Clothing could be referred to as non – verbal communication, but yet it communicates.

Clothing carries messages and conveys vital information about people; when you meet an individual or group of people for the first time, you can easily form an impression of that person from the information convey to you by his/her appearance (cloth). That is; the social background, the kind of job they do, and even what kind of person they are.

Elizabeth (1989) notes that clothing provides roles and status of individual within a society and within the social groups, individuals occupy a certain status, position or rank and play certain roles; some of these roles may be brief and are played

for few hours such role include wedding ceremony while others can be permanent such as our sexual roles.

Clothing corrects the postural fault and enhances beauty, gaits, and excesses personality in any form. It is also a way of analogous to language and that one can talk about the rules which govern the wearing of clothes in the same way that one can speak of grammatical rules that govern speech

Functions of Clothing

Since prehistoric times, people in almost all societies have worn some kind of clothing or the other many theories have been advanced as to why humans began to wear clothing. One of the earliest hypothesis is the so-called modesty/shame theory, also known as the fig leaf theory. This theory is based on the biblical story of creation. In the book of Genesis, Adam and Eve, the first human beings, realize they are naked after they ate an apple from the tree of knowledge. Ashamed of their nakedness, they make clothing for themselves out of fig leaves. As late as the 19th century, most Europeans and Americans believed that people wore clothing primarily for reasons of modesty. With the rise of a nonreligious worldview, however, people began to offer other theories. Some argued that the origin of clothing was functional-to protect the body from the environment. Others argued that some clothing was designed for sexual attraction – to display the body's beauty. Evelyn (2003)

Evidence that early clothing was indeed functional came from a 1991 discovery of a 5,000 – year-old male body, frozen on top of a glacier near the Austrian-Italian border. It was clothed in a fur cap, a crudely tanned leather cape, a loincloth (strip of clothe wrapped around the waist and between the legs), leggings and leather shoes. A grass cloak covered the fur and leather clothing. These clothes would have provided protection against the cold and rain. The iceman, as he is called, also had tattoos, which may have been marks of decorations or tribal identity, or were perhaps intended to provide magical protection .Erwin (2003)Clothes have two important aspects to them, the social and the individual. The former depicts them as far more than a simple physical garb, or a haphazard aspect of our appearance. Rather, they reveal attributes identifying with the social role, reflecting the time or period, the person, the status and all too often the gender. Ideally, clothes should be seen as expressing the chosen, an identity of the wearer who has selected his or her garments from personal experience and taste. Beddoe(1998).

Arueyinho (2002) noted that clothing has an important feature of all human societies. The primary purpose of clothing is said to be functional, as a protection from the elements. It also enhances safety during hazardous activities such as hunting and cooking by providing a barrier between the skin and the environment. Clothes incidentally also provide a barrier, keeping toxins away from the body and limiting the transmission of bacteria and viruses. Clothing at times is worn as protection from specific environmental hazards, such as insects, noxious chemicals, weapons and

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contact with abrasive substances. It can protect against many things that might injure the uncovered human body. Clothes act as protection from the elements, including rain, snow and wind and other weather conditions, even from the sun. Clothes also reduce the level of risk during an activity, such as work or sport. Conversely, clothing may protect the environment from the clothe wearer, as for example wearing of medical scrubs.

One of the primary purposes of clothing is to keep the wearer warm or in some cases cool. In hot climates, clothing provides protection from sunburn or wind damage, while in cold climates its thermal insulation properties are generally more important. Shelter usually reduces the functional need for clothing. For example, coats, hats, gloves, shoes, socks, and other superficial layers would normally be removed when entering or once inside a warm home, particularly if one is residing or sleeping there. Similarly, clothing has seasonal and regional aspects, so that thinner materials and fewer layers of clothing are generally worn in warmer seasons and regions than in colder ones.

In addition to the obvious function of providing protection and warmth, clothing serves many other purposes, most of them having to do with communicating our identity to others. Indeed protection and warmth may not have been the earliest purpose of dress. Many people have always lived in warm climates where clothing is not needed for protection from the elements, yet they have developed forms of dress.

In most societies, clothing is an aspect of norms of the society, in relation to standards of modesty, religious practices and social status. Clothing may also function as a form of adornment and an expression of personal taste or style. Clothes also have important social and cultural functions. A uniform, for example, may identify civil authority figures, such as police and army personnel, or it may identify team or group or even political affiliations.

Social Functions of Clothing

Clothing is an aspect of human physical appearance, and like other aspects of human physical appearance it has social significance. All societies have dress codes, most of which are unwritten but understood by most members of the society. Lambert (2005) the dress code has built in rules or signals indicating the message being given by a person clothing and how it is worn. This message may include indications of the person's social class, income, occupation, ethnic and religious affiliation, attitude, marital status, sexual availability and sexual orientation. Clothes convey other social messages including the stating or claiming personal or cultural identity, the establishing, maintaining, or defying social group norms, and appreciation comfort and functionality. For example, wearing expensive clothes can communicate wealth, the image of wealth, or cheaper access to quality clothing. All factors apply inversely to the wearing of inexpensive clothing and similar goods. .

Clothing can convey a social message, even if none is intended.' Valerie, (ibid) clothing is used to serve as class distinction. In assorted societies, people of lower rank reserve momentous items of clothing or decoration representing themselves as symbols of their social rank. Beddoe, (ibid) In American Indian tribes, their chief or leader wore elaborate headgear. In Ancient Rome, the wearing garments dyed with Syrian Purple were limited to senators. Only high-ranking Hawaiian chiefs could wear feather mantles or carved whale teeth. Only the Sheikh of Arabia could wear gold. In Africa, only the people from the royal family were allowed to adorn themselves with *Iyun*beads. In many cases in history, there have been elaborate systems of sumptuary laws regulating who could wear what. In fresh societies (including most modern societies), no laws prohibit lower-status people from demanding high-status garments, but the high cost of status garments most of all limits purchase increased by display. In current Western society, only the well-to-do can afford haute couture. The combination of social apartheid may also narrow garment choice.



Plate 1

Status or Identification with one's social group is clearly a very important aspect of dress. Through our dress we all signal our affiliation with a social group.' Modern scholars believe that clothing provides a mark of identity and a means of nonverbal communication. Chavarria (2002), In traditional societies, clothing functions almost as a language that can indicate a person's age, gender, and marital status, place of origin, religion,' social status, or occupation. In modern industrialized societies,' clothing is not so rigidly regulated and people have more freedom to choose which messages they wish to convey'. Nevertheless, clothing can still provide considerable information about the wearer,' including individual' personality, economic standing, even the nature of events attended by the wearer.' When a woman who usually wears blue jeans puts on a frilly, flowered dress, she may be stating that she wants to look more traditionally feminine. Clothing performs important social' and cultural functions.' A uniform, for example, may identify civil authority figures, such as police and army personnel, or it may identify team, group or political affiliations.



Plate 11
Psychological Functions of Clothing

Clothes also play an important role in the sense that they affect the mind and the self-image of the wearer.' Clothing does represent the individual. 'But, when that exterior self is subconsciously dictated (e.g. through fashion magazines and advertisement) women will conform believing that they look beautiful because that is the image that is considered attractive. They then believe that what they look like is who they are. Thus the need to conform becomes so ingrained within the female image that she loses her individuality and becomes the image society has defined as Self-expression which is another function of clothes. Women select or use clothing to strive toward or to maintain a salient self-concept by reference to meanings of clothing operative within their subculture, If women regard clothing as a tool for validation of the self or inclusion in social interaction through which the self can be established, they may value clothing more than other objects as part of the self. They may perceive clothing as central to the self and psychologically become linked to clothing. The centrality and psychological linkage of the person to clothing is what is meant by the psychological closeness or proximity of clothing to self.

The proximity of clothing to self-concept has evolved within the context of quality of life theory building and assessment and has been useful in explaining the contribution of clothing to perceived life quality. For some adults,' clothing has been found to contribute to a sense of well-being or quality of life along with other domains of life important to individual (e.g. family, housing, work) Fulfillment of needs is important to a sense of positive quality of life Charama (2002) perceive that clothing is a need satisfier rather than a basic need as long as it is not consistently required cross culturally for life maintenance. Clothing satisfies basic physiological needs. Many studies have shown that higher order needs, such as belonging and self-esteem, if the psychosocial needs satisfied by clothing are also considered along with the basic physiological needs, clothing can contribute to a quality existence.

Cultural Functions of Clothing

Kroon (1999) observed that Clothing often bears culturally shared meanings. While interacting with other, we have learned these cultural meanings from birth. In everyday life, we realize and validate ourselves as we communicate our thoughts, values, attitudes or feelings to others and receive responses from others, both verbally and non-verbally. Through processes of discourse and appearance, we facilitate not only share meaning but also self-formation.

Clothing also derives meaning from the environment in which it is worn. In most cultures brides and grooms as well as wedding guests wear special clothes to celebrate the occasion of a marriage. The clothing worn for rituals such as weddings, graduations, and funerals tends to be formal and governed by unwritten rules that members of the society agree upon. In general, wearing clothes with the color of black is a sign of mourning. Ceremony or ritual may be the purpose of certain specialized forms of dress reserved for certain occasions or people; such as wedding attire, or liturgical dress. The members of team sports wear identical jerseys to distinguish themselves from other teams. Even in the military, each unit (army, navy, air force) have their distinct uniforms. In the 18th century, a middle-class widow's weeds (clothes) were worn for 21 months. Then, during the 19th century and the early 20th century, there were black armbands for men that announced bereavement.

Clothes can also proclaim dissent from cultural norms and mainstream beliefs, as well as personal independence. An old woman wearing tight fitting jeans and topless blouse is a dissent from cultural norms among the Yorubas where old age is respected and old women are expected to wear culturally befitting clothes that are non-revealing.

Traditionally, Hindu women wear sindoor, a red powder, in the parting of their hair to indicate their married status; if widowed, they abandon sindoor and jewelry and wear simple white clothing. However this is not true of all Hindu women; in the modern world this is not a norm and women without sindoor may not necessarily be unmarried.

In many Orthodox Jewish circles, married women wear head coverings such as a hat, snood, or wig. Additionally, after their marriage Jewish men of *Ashkenazi* descent begin to wear a *Tallit* during prayer.

Men and women of the Western world may wear wedding rings to indicate their married status, and women may also wear engagement rings when they are engaged.



Plate 111

Religious Functions of Clothing

A Sikh or Muslim man may display his religious affiliation by wearing a turban and other traditional clothing. Many Muslim women wear head or body covering (*Sartorial hijab, buraqa or niqab, chador and abaya*) that proclaims their status as respectable women and as considered a means for covering the Awrah. A Jewish man may indicate his observance of Judaism by wearing a yarmulke. Muslims usually wear white robes and a cap during prayers. Religious clothing might be considered a special case of occupational clothing. Sometimes it is worn only during the performance of religious ceremonies. However, it may also be worn everyday as a market for special religious status. For example, Jains wear unstitched cloth pieces when performing religious ceremonies. The unstitched cloth signifies unified and complete devotion to the task at hand, with no digression. Charama, (ibid) Sikhs wear a turban as it is a part of their religion.' The cleanliness of religious dresses in Eastern Religions like Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism and Jainism is of paramount importance, since it indicates purity.

Clothing figures prominently in the Bible where it appears in numerous contexts, the more prominent ones being: the story of Adam and Eve, Josephs cloak, Judah and Tamar, Mordechai and Esther'. Furthermore the priests officiating in the Temple had very specific garments, the lack of which would make one liable to death.' Jewish ritual also requires rending of one's upper garment as a sign of mourning. This practice is found in the Bible when Jacob hears of the apparent death of his son Joseph. (Beddoe, ibid).

Physical Functions of Clothing

Clothing may also signal participation in leisure activities. Certain types of recreation, especially active sports, may require specialized clothing. For example, football, soccer and hockey players wear matching jerseys and pants designed to accommodate such accessories as protective pads.

Most sports and physical activities are practiced wearing special clothing, for practical, comfort or safety reasons.' Common sportswear garments include short pants, T-shirt, tennis shirts, tracksuits, and trainers. Specialized garments include wet suits (for swimming, diving or surfing), salopettes (*for skiing*) and leotards (*for gymnastics*). Also, spandex materials are often used as baser layers to soak up sweat. Spandex is also preferable for active sports that require formfitting garments, such as wrestling, track & field, dance, gymnastics and swimming.

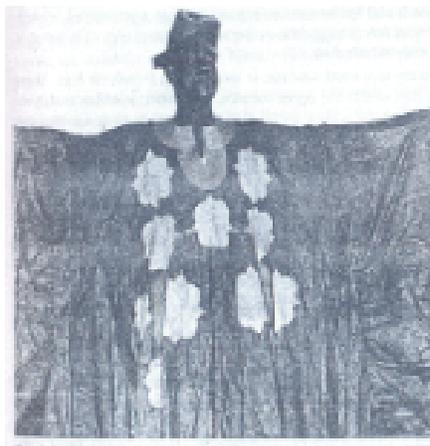


Plate 1V

Ethnic and Political Functions of Clothing

In many regions of the world, national costumes and styles in clothing and ornament declare membership in a certain village, caste, religion, political party etc. An example is the *Awo* cap of 1975 among the Yoruba's of Western Nigeria to show affinity for UPN, a popular political party. People may wear ethnic or national dress on special occasions or in certain roles or occupations.

A Yoruba woman declares her tribes with her *iro* and *buba*. A Hausa declares his with his *babanringa* while an Igbo man declares his with his *buba*, wrapper and feather cap.

Beauty/Seductive Functions of Clothing

Beauty/Seductive is also important purposes of dress. Most people want to look attractive, at least under certain circumstances. But what is considered beautiful is also subject to variation. Ideals of beauty also change over time within the same culture.

Modern western culture recognizes cues such as (in women) extreme stiletto heels, close-fitting and body-revealing black or red clothing, exaggerated make-up, flashy jewelry and perfume, as being sexually appealing.' A man, who is shirtless, wearing a

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tightly-cut shirt that is unbuttoned to his sternum, or tight trousers, would be recognized as dressing in a sexually provocative. Clothing can also be used to express interest in a particular sexual activity or role.' One trend in the 2000s is a line of T-shirts that has iconic 1950-style depictions of the baseball positions pitcher and catcher, which are intended to correspond to the top and bottom sexual positions.

Compared to men's clothing, women's clothing tends to be attractive, often intended to be looked at by men. In modern industrialized nations, women are more like to wear makeup, jewellery, and colourful clothing, while in very traditional cultures; women are protected from men's gazes by modest dress.

Moral Functions of Clothing

Ogunduyile (2005) noted that another function of clothing is the maintenance of decency.' In the Bible, Adam and Eve covered their bodies when they realized that they were naked after eating the fruit from the forbidden tree. In some Islamic countries, women were required to cover the whole of their bodies except the face. In most societies, it is indecent for men and women to mingle with others without wearing clothes. With more relaxed standards in modern times, this function is being undermined as some clothes tend to be provocative that the distinction of decency is becoming blurred.

Modesty is another commonly cited purpose for dress. Yet the definition of modesty varies greatly from place to place, and even within the same locality, over the course of time. In Muslim cultures, for example, both men and women cover most of the body in public, as do people in many other times and places. However, in other times and places exposure of various parts of the body may not be a concern. The universal human feeling of modesty must have also originated from this anxiety to be distinguished from animals, to put human order into overwhelming natural creation.' Animals live their sex lives completely in the open and mix with any degree of kin.' Human beings control their sexuality and respect the stringent and universal prohibition against incest. Clothes also formed a clever disguise and an excuse for acceptable types of behaviour and disrespectful treatment of some women, such as prostitutes or maidservants. (Wollstonecraft, 1994).

Women Dress Forms

The dressing habits of the Yoruba woman are influenced by time and fashion like their men's. Titled and influential women like their male counterparts also use dress forms that suit their social statuses, hence they often go for expensive dress materials. These dresses are intended to boost their personalities; they are for prestige rather than mere function. The economic power determines the quantity and quality of a woman's dress forms, especially when used for occasional purposes. Yoruba women's dress forms consist of the head-wears, upper and the lower body dresses.

According to Johnson, (1987) women's dress was much simpler than men's. It consisted of two or three wrappers and a head-dress or circlet completed their dress style. Traditionally, the *buba* is said not to be longer than the navel and its sleeves go down to the wrists. To these, married women add a third which is used as a shawl to cover the head and back. Unmarried women generally used two wrappers, the under wrapper fixed above the breasts, used to be made of fine cloth was heavier. The upper wrapper was fixed about the middle of the body and was made of light cloth. He describes '*iro*' also as similar to the covering cloth, but the difference is that the seams of the *iro* are wider than those of covering cloth, (*asoibora*).

From the age of puberty, underneath all these and immediately next to the body was worn a short apron or petticoat reaching the knees and tied round the waist with a strong cord or sand. This, according to Johnson, *istobi*.

Johnson (1987) also notes that the outing dresses for women were not common but the few dresses were of expensive materials. Hand-woven cloths like '*sanyan*', '*etu*', '*alaari*' and other forms designed were employed. Later, imported materials such as damask, alagbaa and aran were used in dress forms for outing.

Eve de Negri (1976) agrees with Johnson (1987) and Arueyingho (2002) submitted that on the general dressing habit of the Yoruba women, that is, '*gele*', '*buba*', '*iro*' and '*iborun*' or '*ipele*' are material used for occasion, but '*sanyan*' is a hand-woven cloth, beige, with fine white threads woven into it and made from the cocoons of insects, and '*alaari*', a cotton local weave which is crimson with stripes of green, black and white. The most expensive of all was according to her, '*topola*', a very precious all-crimson cloth with its edges having a trimming of perforations.

In her opinion, earlier Yoruba women's clothes were all made from home-spun cloth woven in standard breadths of 10 of 5'' wide.' Cloths, which were about one yard wide, were imported first from Oro or Ila in Igbomina area and were known as Akoko cloths, because they are woven mainly by Akoko women.'

Today, the adult Yoruba woman used the head-gear, '*gele*' or '*idiku*' the blouse, *buba*, the wrapper, *iro* and the shawl '*iborun*' or '*ipele*'. The *Iborun* was usually draped over the left shoulder or tied round the waist as fashion. *Oja*, the baby carrier is different from '*iborun*'. It used to be given to a bride by her mother or mother-in-law either during marriage or when she has a baby. "The draping of the blouse and head-gear, appears determined by time and fashion.



Plate V

The Head Dresses (Gele)

Ogunduyile (2005) perceived that the headgear measuring about 31 inches by 42 inches of an industrial textile or about 18¹/₂ by 70 inches of a traditionally woven fabric is wrapped round the head in a number of styles. Materials with trade names like Jubilee, Ace, Excellessor, Butter-fly, Five Stars, Supermit and the like are also draped into assorted head-gear styles given local names such as *Kojusoko* (face your husband), *Isale Eko* (a place regarded as the original settlement of Lagos indigenes), Better Life (a welfare programme by one of the past military administration), Family Support (another welfare programme by another military administration), , Ray Power (an independent radio station at Alagbado area of Lagos) and National Theatre (the National Arts Theatre in Lagos). It is important to note that when expensive head-gear like the ones mentioned is used, blouses, wrappers and shawls of corresponding high quality are also used. *Idikui* is a scarf that is used for casual occasion or outing.



Plate V1

The Upper Body Garments

The upper body garment, *buba* are two types, depending on the lengths of their sleeves, which could be short or long. The short-sleeved *buba*, is a blouse made of a rectangular piece of cloth folded to form a symmetrical shape that measures about 18 inches long and 29 inches wide. It could be as short as to expose the navel.' The sleeves are elbow long and have arm-holes which are of the same size as the cuff which varies from 10 to 12 inches, modified to individuals taste. The long *buba* is similar in shape to the short sleeved type but sleeves are different from the former in length and width. It is wider and reaches the hip level. 'The sleeves could be as long as the wrists or slightly beyond them and could be wider than those of short sleeve *buba*.

According to de Negri, (1976) the *buba* was not always worn in the past, as it was introduced by missionary ladies at the turn of the 19th century for reasons of modesty. Some village women were also observed to have their arms slipped from the sleeves of the *buba* and left it hanging freely around the neck and over the breasts, in the heat of the sun. She adds that it was an offence to wear the *buba*, hanging loose from the skirt cloth. It is an offence sometimes excused when the wearer is within her compound.

The *ipele or shawl* is a rectangular piece usually made up of six of the ten pieces of traditionally woven textile used for *gele and ipele*, or industrial materials which measure about 44 inches wide and 80 inches long.



PlateV11

The Lower Body Garment

The *iro*, wrapper is a rectangular shaped textile material of about 50 inches wide and 80 inches long. It is important to note that the size of the *iro* could also vary according to the size and economic power of the wearer.' When *buba* is small as in the

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short sleeve type, the corresponding wrapper (*iro*) style is either knee long or shin long.' The *iro* is draped over the *buba* at the waist level and reaches the knee or shin,

When the *buba* is large, the corresponding wrapper style is *iro* that is ankle long. The *iro* is draped over the *buba* at the waist level to reach the ankle. According to Mrs. Akinboyede, in an oral interview submitted, 1980 and 1995 *their* *iro* was ankle long. Between 1950 and 1960, *iro* and *buba* and *gele* were made of different materials

Materials used for *buba* and *iro* could be of the same material while the *gele* and *ipele* could also be of the same material different from those of *buba* and *iro*. At times all the dress forms are of the same material. Some of such materials could be hand-woven or industrially produced

Yoruba women also use to have under wears, *tobi* and *yeri*, *Tobi* which is an under wear of women is a rectangular piece of cloth with narrow seams, wrapped round the buttock and secured to waist with a long belt that has a hole. *Igbani* is a purse made of long piece of cloth for keeping money and tied to the waist as part of the dress form of the Yoruba women of old. *Ilabiru* is similar to men's *bante*, and used to serve as the equivalent of modern sanitary pad for women. The difference between sanitary pad and *ilabiru* is that sanitary pad is discarded after use but *ilabiru* is washed and dried in privacy to be reused. Hence the Yoruba dictum: "*Asogbogbokolaasalorun*, which means not all washed clothes are dried in the sun.

The under wear for *iro* used to be *yeri*, which is a piece of rectangular cloth gathered at the top and wide enough to be draped round the waist and buttocks to reach the shin. It is similar to the modern skirt.' The bottom is flared while the top has a band which serves as a belt and a purse for keeping cash. De Negri observed that some women in the villages may be seen wearing only the skirt-cloth, usually pulled high over the breasts and tied with the usual scarf-like narrow cloth, or the second matching cloth.

According to her, traders and girls in the village usually wore the cloth pulled up short for work or at informal times. Often their knees were exposed, and the skirt used to be an embroidered, brightly coloured cotton petticoat with plenty of machine made designs. The shortness allows for hurrying from place to place.

De Negri (1976) opines that originally, the small garment *tobi* or *yeri* was the sole garment worn by women and used to be given at puberty.' It was usually worn with the waist beads, *lagidigba*, which only used to be worn before puberty. In some villages, some women may occasionally be seen working on the farms wearing only *tobi*.

Conclusion

Clothing has been a non- verbal aspect of culture which is a simpler spoken language. It is a sign that carries message and conveys meaning in the same way and the significance of particular distances varies from culture to culture.

The present civilization has made Yoruba clothing witness a sense of modifications. Women's clothes are governed by what is called the seduction principles that is, they are sex conscious clothes, while men clothes are governed by hierarchical principles that is they are class – conscious clothes.

Generally, the purpose of clothes for women has been to make them more sexually attractive and for the men clothes are to be enhancing their social status. And today Yoruba clothing has witness to series of modification and innovation in our major traditional dresses such as *Iro, buba, gele, sokoto*, and based on the new development of fabrics.

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