Constructive (Peace) Journalism as a Mediator of Proactive Tolerance – a Media-ethical Perspective

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Introduction: The societal functions of journalism

It is the genuine responsibility of journalists to decide which news item about which event is worth publishing, in which way and from which perspective. It is a matter of orientation towards the so-called news values[1] and the question: What is relevant for the public? Due to the increasing power of algorithms and the confusion caused by information floods on the internet, but also due to the restrictions on freedom of the press in numerous countries worldwide and the often one-sided propaganda coverage of conflicts and wars, the question arises: Which journalism is relevant for the public?

One of the tasks of relevant journalism is to bring *transparency*[2] to social conditions in compliance with the standard of *objectivity*[3] and to enable people to participate in the public sphere conveyed by the media and in the democratic culture of discourse and opinion.[4] Horst Pöttker therefore sees journalism as a profession "which concentrates its services on the task of providing correct and important information to the largest audience possible in order to create an optimum of publicity and transparency of social processes and conditions."[5]

Another central task of quality journalism is *criticism* and *control*.[6] It is not undisputed, but nevertheless very often affirmatively spoken of journalism as a "fourth power" – in addition to the three state powers (Executive, Legislative and Judiciary) of a free democratic constitutional

1 On news value theory see: Schulz 2011: 92.
2 It is essential for journalistic transparency that the intention of the statement, genre and format are made known (cf. Funiok 2011: 131).
3 Objectivity is "a central journalistic norm [...], which refers to reporting that is "object-oriented", i.e. describes events in the world "adequately" and does not distort them." (Bentele 2013: 246).
4 Cf. Meier 2018a: 17.
5 Pöttker 2018: 71.
6 Cf. Meier 2018a: 16.

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state.[7] The control function of journalism over these powers can actually be a particularly effective form of power, inasmuch as critical, investigative research manage to expose bad decisions, corruption and scandals in state, society, and especially among the economic and political elites. In order to be able to optimally fulfil this public task journalists must be able to work independently, freely without censorship or restrictions, and must keep their distance from government offices. Professional journalism is responsible for a correspondingly well-founded information offer. That is its central function in a democratic society. This also and especially includes the information from bad news for the purpose of initiating debates in society: "negatively influenced journalism is a self-purifying power of democracy"[8] and one of its correctives.[9] *Negativism*[10] is therefore one of the essential news values.

However, the reporting pattern of *Constructive Journalism* criticises this news value. Constructive Journalism is based on the thesis that an excess of negative news leads to a *negative bias* of media reports that ultimately has a negative impact on the audience and society.[11] According to the Mediamalaise theory[12], too much bad news for example cause a dangerous level of distrust in democracy and its proper functioning. *Peace Journalism* is a specific type of Constructive Journalism with regard to the specifics and problems of journalistic coverage in war and conflict situations.[13] But because Peace Journalism is older, it can be understood as the "older sister" of Constructive Journalism, which is its "younger big brother".

This article examines this type of journalism from a media ethics perspective, starting from the journalistic principle of *responsibility* as a central key concept of media ethics.[14] Constructive and Peace Journalism will be briefly introduced and critically discussed here. Against the backdrop of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, the article also outlines the extent to which the attitude of *proactive tolerance*, as developed and conceptualized by Ukrainian and German scholars from various disciplines in the project "Tolerance at the European frontiers – the dimension of

7 Cf. critically for example Boventer 1989.
8 Sauer 2015: 177.
9 Cf. Bohrmann 2018: 318.
10 Cf. Pürer 2015: 61,63.
11 Cf. Haagerup 2015; Kepplinger/Weißbecker 1991.
12 Cf. Oscar 2013.
13 Cf. also Krüger 2019 on this categorisation: http://journalistikon.de/konstruktiver-journalismus/ (last access: 07–22–2020).
14 Cf. Pürer 2014: 150.

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Ukraine"[15], can be combined with the concerns of Peace Journalism. In this context, the question will be examined in more detail to what extent Peace Journalism with its constructively prospective thrust can serve as a possible mediator of proactive tolerance.

The big brother: Constructive journalism as a reporting pattern

The meaning of the term Journalism can only be laid down by a pluralistic description.[16] Its *reporting patterns*[17] are no less diverse and display very different orientations. Constructive Journalism is still a young reporting pattern. However, there is a growing number of media in which it is used in different ways and there are also already initial positive empirical findings regarding the popularity of constructive journalistic formats.[18] Nevertheless, a detailed scientific media-ethical analysis of this concept against the background of the dominance of negativity in media reporting and its effects on media recipients is still a desideratum,[19] as scientists only did empirical research in this field.[20]

The Danish journalist Ulrik Haagerup, together with his colleague Cathrine Gyldensted, is considered a prominent detractor of negatively reporting journalism. They are pioneers of the concept of Constructive Journalism in Europe. According to Haagerup, "If it bleeds, it leads" is the common motto of sensational journalism.[21] "The negative orientation of the media therefore endangers the political process and democracy,"[22] is Haagerup's thesis. This way of media reporting draws the eye away from politics and poses an obstacle to social commitment. The media recipients' ability and willingness to act decreases and they lose the capacity to consider reported problems in a solution-oriented manner and, if necessary, to

15 Cf. Vogt/Husmann 2019.
16 The plurality of definitions of journalism as a "profession with blurred edges" and as a social functional system is also reflected in the diversity and emergence of journalism theories, see: Löffelholz/Rothenberger 2016.
17 Reporting patterns "describe variants of role models and professional views that have become part of journalists' personal attitudes, editorial routines and general professional culture" (Meier 2018b: 7); on the diversity and concept of reporting patterns see also: Meier 2018a: 194ff.
18 Cf. clearly arranged some examples in Meier 2018b: 9f.
19 Cf. as a preliminary study Schäfers/Sautermeister 2018.
20 Cf. as overview Beiler/Krüger 2018: 170ff.
21 Cf. Haagerup 2015: 14.
22 Haagerup 2015: 28.

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become active themselves. Thus this way of journalism is inhibiting the further development of a society. Haagerup wants to contribute to a more balanced and less one-sided coverage in the media. Therefore, the classic journalistic questions, Who?, What?, When?, Where?, Why?, How? and For the sake of which? are supplemented by the question of What now?[23] Constructive Journalism thereby aims at effects on three levels: Solution awareness and well-founded optimism among recipients (micro-level); increase of range, multiplication of positive associations that recipients have with the media brand (meso-level), and social progress through solution-oriented hopeful perspectives on existing problems (macro-level).[24] Constructive Journalism is thus a self-reflexive journalistic approach that considers its pragmatic dimension constitutively and prospectively taking responsibility for an impact-sensitive selection of information.

Constructive Journalism has ever since been the subject of controversial discussions among communication scientists and journalists. The basic direction of criticism of Constructive Journalism can be summarized as the rejection of a mere replacement of the negative bias of media reporting by a positive bias.[25] Therefore representatives of Constructive Journalism reached the consensus that a complete abandonment of the news factor "negativity" has to be rejected.[26] Also, Constructive Journalism is not aiming at replacing classical journalism, but rather at supplementing it.[27] It is also a controversial question whether Constructive Journalism is necessary at all, whether it is compatible with the common professional standards of journalism, and whether it can be implemented in journalistic practice accordingly.[28] There is a danger of being overtaxed and overestimated, which goes hand in hand with political activism and a mentality of world improvement and thus contradicts the journalistic mandate to report neutrally.[29]

The ethical question of social consequences of journalistic practice arises when, in contrast to Constructive Journalism, too many "bad news" encourage recipients to be pessimistic about the solution of political and social problems and keep them passive with regard to their own commitment, participation in democratic discourse, and the compromise-oriented

23 Cf. Meier 2018b: 6.
24 Cf. Krüger 2016: 98.
25 Cf. Sauer 2015: 178.
26 Cf. Haagerup 2015: 196.
27 Cf. Sauer 2017a: 27.
28 Cf. Ruß-Mohl 2016: 138.
29 See clearly arranged: Sauer 2017b: 29f.

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solving of political challenges.[30] Particularly in the current media and publicity changes, public value concerns[31] cannot be discussed without considering the responsibilities of the actors involved in the structuring fields of media production, distribution and reception that are relevant to media ethics.[32]

Against the background of these problems, Constructive Journalism aims to contribute to more quality and trustworthiness of the media. It tries to answer the question, why the characteristics of Constructive Journalism are necessary conditions for mass media and journalism in order to fulfil their role and function in democracy and society. Journalistic media can see the debates on "fake news" of recent years as an opportunity to specifically restore previously lost trustworthiness through a stylistic and substantive reorientation of reporting, so that the media can be seen again as aguarantor of verified information. These debates as well as the criticism of Constructive Journalism outlined above point out that, from a normative point of view, realism in reporting in accordance with the logic of journalistic function and the regulative principle of objectivity remains indispensable. It is quite central that this is not an epistemological, but rather a regulative understanding of objectivity. On the basis of a reconstructive approach, objectivity can be understood as a (partial) reconstruction of reality through media that can be verified intersubjectively in principle and is carefully understood as an approximation.[33]

The older sister: the peace journalistic idea as a constructive reporting pattern

Due to the existence of a whole pool of similar or emerging reporting patterns, the co-developer of Constructive Journalism, Cathrine Gyldensted, speaks of it as an "umbrella term"[34]. Peace Journalism is understood here as a specific variant of the umbrella concept "Constructive Journalism". Altmeppen et al., on the other hand, assign Peace Journalism to the reporting patterns of Advocacy Journalism.[35] And indeed, Peace Journalism is at least also oriented towards advocacy as it gives hostile or oppressed and powerless social groups the opportunity to bring their own views and

30 Cf. Wolling 1999.
31 Cf. Beiler/Krüger 2018.
32 Cf. Altmeppen/Bieber/Filipović 2019.
33 Cf. Bentele 2016: 62.
34 Quoted according to Grüner/Sauer 2017: 8.
35 Altmeppen/Evers/Greck 2018.

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concerns into the media public. A journalistic focus on the suffering and on victims of all those involved in the conflict also has genuinely the character of advocacy.

The aim of Constructive Journalism is to help solving problems. The aim of Peace Journalism is to help solving conflicts. Peace Journalism is one of the oldest conctructive journalistic concepts. The Norwegian social scientist and founding father of peace and conflict research, Johan Galtung, spoke for the first time in the 1970s of Peace Journalism as the solution-oriented alternative model to war journalism, that is oriented by escalation, violence, and victory,[36] and which primarily follows the logic of measuring strength. The juxtaposition of these two conflict reporting patterns, which were conceived as antagonistic, can be teleologically described as follows with Altmeppen et al.: "Whereas in war journalism victory represents the end point of reporting and it devotes itself to a new source of conflict, peace journalism aims at a sustainable non-violent solution and demands post-war reporting."[37] In this sense, Galtung contrasts Peace Journalism as "high road" with the "low road" of conventional sports stadium-like war reporting.[38] Similar to representatives of Constructive Journalism, Galtung also bases his approach on the news value theory, "according to which international news is selected according to similar criteria as national or local news. Negative events (e.g. disasters, riots or coups d'état) are considered particularly interesting."[39] According to this approach, Peace Journalism, like its big brother, relies on a lower orientation of the news value "negativism".

Peace Journalism, however, does not represent a uniform model.[40] The different approaches are based on different concepts of peace, violence and non-violence, which cannot be described here in detail.[41] In principle, however, this conflict-sensitive journalism is always about solution-oriented and thus peace-promoting reporting, especially in polarized situations such as conflict and war. Like its "big brother", Constructive Journalism, Peace Journalism also has a very specific "standard of fact presentation"[42]. This journalistic communication is essentially based on de-escalation, avoids stereotypes, works towards linguistic disarmament and can there-

36 Cf. Wetzstein 2018: 10.
37 Altmeppen/Evers/Greck 2018: 185.
38 Cf. Galtung 1998: 3ff.
39 Kempf 2019: 5f.
40 Cf. the four different models according to Altmeppen/Evers/Greck 2018: 184ff.
41 Cf. for example Kempf 2019.
42 Altmeppen/Evers/Greck 2018: 179.

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fore possibly be a suitable (complementary) genre of journalism for the situation in Ukraine.[43] In view of the conflict and its duration, a long-term establishment and promotion of Peace Journalism would be needed there. To propose Peace Journalism in relation to the Russia-Ukraine conflict is ultimately based on the thesis that a particularly decisive field of conflict in the context of this conflict is the struggle for the sovereignty of interpretation in the media. According to the media ethicist Thomas Hausmanninger, the general power differentials must be taken into account here, which in this form can essentially be identified in the age of the Internet as follows: "Media production determines what is communicated (agenda setting), and distribution determines to whom it is accessible. Both thus constitute communicative power. Power also arises at the level of reception: "Whoever can appropriate media products receives more communicative power."[44] Censorship, manipulation and intimidation of journalists are added to this as the price of this struggle for interpretative sovereignty and communicative power. These negative consequences point to the necessity of a new view of a more moderating and mediating role of the media.

Responsible Peace Journalism – explication of the ethical perspective

Positional reporting patterns such as Peace Journalism with its specific societal demands usually pose particularly urgent journalistic-ethical questions.[45] From a media-ethical point of view, the key ethical category of the journalist's *responsibility*[46], which is interpreted in specific areas, is an obvious starting point for normative reflections on Peace Journalism. According to its intention, Peace Journalism can be described as a responsible journalistic approach to wars and conflicts.[47] In this context, responsibility can be understood primarily in the sense of an impact assessment, taking into account the moral intrinsic value of journalistic actions[48] with regard

43 Cf. Meier 2018a: 200; Bilke 2008.
44 Hausmanninger 2005: 262.
45 Cf. Altmeppen/Evers/Greck 2018: 178.
46 See: Bayertz 1995: 4. See on the status of the key category of responsibility for applied ethics: Honnefelder 2016: 665ff.
47 Cf. Wetzstein 2018: 9.
48 Cf. for example Birnbacher 2017: 190.

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to the conflict situation and development.[49] The normative idea of Peace Journalism with Irmgard Wetzstein can also be further specified, in critical contrast to the conventional way of reporting on conflicts, as a "journalism committed to peace and reconciliation, forming a social awareness of non-violence and seeing itself as the antithesis of war reporting, which is often criticized as propaganda."[50]

The journalistic-media-ethical concept of responsibility presented in this text is more or less understood as a "regulative guiding principle" of a "second-line ethics" in which, according to Wolfgang Wieland, subject areas are regulated "whose boundaries and basic norms are already predetermined."[51] These basic norms for responsible Peace Journalism include first and foremost *objectivity* and *transparency* as already mentioned. Similar to the "umbrella concept" of Constructive Journalism, the normative debate continues on whether Peace Journalism thwarts central quality journalistic values and norms that are part of the journalistic-professional-ethical "basic law", especially the norm of objectivity, whether its programmatic approach is allowed to belong to a journalist's field of activity at all and whether it is even feasible.[52] A further basic problem of media ethics arises in the adequate concretization of the concept of responsibility for the purpose of action orientation. The theological ethicist Gerfried Hunold noted that empirical communication science research with its theoretical hermeneutics "remains contourless, despite all the convergence of efforts, not only in its epistemological but also in its practical results. What should remain possible and responsible under which conditions?"[53] In answer to the question of what behavior is responsible for the media, the concrete contexts with their conditions and constraints under which journalists find themselves in practice are often not sufficiently considered in theory.[54] Responsibility, however, requires contextual concreteness if it is not to be a general, powerless appeal.[55] Contextual sensitivity is necessary, especially in view of the high normative objectives of Peace Journalism, so that it remains realistic and does not tend towards an activism that impedes rather than promotes the long-term goal of conflict resolution and peace.

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49 Cf. Funiok, Rüdiger 2011: 41; on the subject of Ethics of Attidudes and/or Responsibility in journalism cf. Kepplinger/Knirsch 2000.
50 Wetzstein 2018: 9.
51 Wieland, 1999: 95.
52 Cf. Wetzstein 2018: 15.
53 Hunold 2001: 3.
54 Cf. Pürer 2014: 151.
55 Cf. Funiok 2011: 63.

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In any case, the authorities to which journalists have to answer in terms of objective and transparent reporting (within the framework of their individual possibilities of action) are the people for whom they report (their audience), but, furthermore, especially in war and conflict reporting the people about whom they report.

In addition to the questions of desirability and feasibility, there is a further media-ethically relevant aspect: the limited journalistic scope of action caused by the context of the system and thus structural incompatibilities of peace journalism, which consequently stem from the logic of media function. In analogy to the voluntary self-control of the media institutionalized on a structural level, for example in the German Press Council, peace journalistic responsibility is also initially about a voluntary "normative self-commitment of the subject"[56], i.e. of the individual journalist. The journalist's professional role-specific sense of responsibility is particularly challenging in view of the publicity of his or her actions.[57] However, this individual responsibility cannot be separated from the editorial-institutional and structural level of the media subsystem's function for society and its subsystems in the sense of a graduated responsibility[58].

An understanding of Peace Journalism in which the central subject of action is the individual journalist might ignore the system-theoretical dimension[59] together with the functional dynamics and attentional logic of the media as the determining factors and the origin of possible incompatibilities. The advocacy role of Peace Journalism collides heavily with the claim of objective reporting[60], especially in the case of one-sided partisanship in a lobbyistic manner.[61] The implementation of the peace journalistic idea of constructing a media mediated peace discourse is therefore sometimes a (too) big challenge,[62] especially for journalists alone. Without integration into a broad network of civil society, for example, the peace journalistic ideal runs the risk of remaining ineffective before the horizon of the respective conflict or war.

Nadine Bilke's approach seems to be more promising.[63] She wants to profile Peace Journalism as quality journalism. She assigns the central val-

56 Kaufmann 1992: 41.
57 Cf. Heesen 2011: 270
58 Cf. Brosda 2010: 266.
59 For system-theoretical approaches in media ethics see: Scholl 2010.
60 Cf. Altmeppen/Evers/Greck 2018: 183.
61 Cf. Bilke 2008: 261.
62 Cf. Wetzstein 2018, 16.
63 Cf. Bilke 2008.

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ues and criteria of journalistic quality such as objectivity, transparency and relevance to the "conflict sensitivity of journalism as a key criterion"[64]. In this sense, Kempf defines the central peace journalistic objective as "ensuring the quality standards of truthful, objective and neutral reporting even in times of conflict and crisis"[65]. In view of the drawings made here, from a media-ethical perspective the most responsible way to understand and practice Peace Journalism consistently as quality journalism is to weaken some of the weaknesses of this reporting pattern. Peace journalists as well as constructive journalists must remain self-reflective and guided by the demand for objectivity. The tension between the norm of objectivity and a consistent desire for peace cannot simply be resolved in the end.

Constructive (Peace) Journalism and Proactive Tolerance in the Context of the Ukrainian Conflict – Attempt at a Synthesis

In a pluralistic and functionally differentiated society, journalism can contribute to tolerance as a key virtue of democracy by allowing as many groups in a society as possible to participate in public discourse. *Proactive tolerance* as an explicit appreciation of the factual diversity of opinions, viewpoints and life plans in a society, without having to relativize one's own standpoint or identity, is characterized by its conflict-preventing and potentially de-escalating effect.[66] This attitude also characterizes Peace Journalism through balanced reporting that does not easily take sides unilaterally in conflict situations.

Looking at the current status quo of the media system in Ukraine, the need for a fundamental renewal of journalism there becomes clear. The media and the democratic-ethical functions of journalism mentioned at the beginning are comparatively weak here: In the ranking of press freedom in 2020 of the organization "Reporters without Borders", Ukraine currently occupies only the 96th place out of 180 of all countries examined.[67] With hundreds of radio stations and print media, Ukraine's media landscape is admittedly diverse. But editorial offices are usually under pressure here. In recent years, for example, most major television stations have

64 Altmeppen/Evers/Greck 2018: 188.
65 Kempf 2019, 5. McGoldrick, on the other hand, is critical of the objectivity norm for the cause of peace journalism: See: McGoldrick 2006.
66 Cf. Vogt/Husmann 2019.
67 Cf. the country report Ukraine by Reporters without Borders: https://www.reporter-ohne-grenzen.de/ukraine/ (last access: 05–28–2020).

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been bought up by powerful oligarchs. They then dictated the content of political reporting and thus silenced critical programmes. Ukrainian media are also bullied by the granting of state licenses. Expectations of reform directed at the new president Volodimir Selenski have been "at best partially fulfilled. The media landscape is highly polarised, and the vicious circle of violence against media workers and impunity is unbroken. In addition, there is judicial harassment and threats by nationalist groups."[68]

In relation to the first question at the beginning of this article, this means from the point of view of media ethics: Such a largely unfree and gangly journalism is only of limited relevance to the audience, or rather: to the pluralistic audiences of a society. Under the conditions of a hardly existing freedom of the press and information, journalists are like gatekeepers who do not or cannot allow gates to be opened to critical and explosive information. In such a situation, media coverage and the creation of a public sphere in which the broad spectrum of a diverse society is given space are not guaranteed. These are therefore the most urgent construction sites on the Ukrainian journalism and media system. The establishment of Peace Journalism here must only go hand in hand with the solution of these problems, which as a whole prevent independent, critical, and transparent journalism in the country.

Solution orientation instead of a focus on victory is the guiding perspective that Constructive Journalism as Peace Journalism brings to conflict reporting. It is not intended to replace war and conflict propaganda with mere peace propaganda, but rather to consistently keep the classic standards of quality journalism guided by transparency and objectivity. As a graduated responsibility not only of the journalistic subjects of action, but also of the editorial offices and journalistic companies and institutions, it also applies to a self-reflective professional journalistic quality assurance. Furthermore, Peace Journalism as a special variety of Constructive Journalism is carried by proactive responsibility, in that the consequences of reporting for the further development of a conflict are taken into account constitutively and constructively. It implies proactive tolerance as a concept of conflict: "Tolerance does not solve these conflicts, but it can reduce their destructive power to a tolerable level and at best give them a positive, constructive dynamic."[69] A proactive concept of tolerance understood in

68 https://www.reporter-ohne-grenzen.de/ukraine/alle-meldungen/meldung/journalisten-unter-druck-von-vielen-seiten/ (last access: 05–28–2020).

69 Vogt/Husmann 2019: 7.

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this way requires contextualization and concretization.[70] Promoting this within reporting can be a contribution of a quality Peace Journalism.

Taking into account the above-mentioned factors and prerequisites, Peace Journalism can also contribute to the media communication of proactive tolerance in conflict situations, but also in advance in conflict prevention. This can be achieved by conveying a principally moderating attitude towards the plurality of religions, cultures, ideologies and political convictions that goes hand in hand with the specific understanding of proactive tolerance. A basic condition for functioning Peace Journalism, however, is a generally high level of professional ethics in the journalistic system of a country in accordance with the regulatory principle of objectivity of self-reflective journalists. To enable transparency and participation, to exercise criticism and control and, in accordance with the main concept of Constructive Journalism, to search for well-founded perspectives of hope in social problems and conflict situations, is a minimum requirement. Peace Journalism would ultimately lose relevance and trust if the professional ethics and the systemic conditions and restrictions in journalism in a country as a whole were to pose a major problem.

Peace Journalism is no substitute for classic quality journalism in view of the Ukraine-Russia conflict. However, it can be promising as a complement to it, provided that it remains committed not only to the de-escalation and peace perspective, but also to the quality criteria of journalistic reporting. Only in this way constructive Peace Journalism can do sufficient justice to the function of journalism for a democratic society and to a peace reporting aiming for a promotion of tolerance.

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70 Cf. Vogt/Husmann 2019: 7.

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