NATIONALISM IN THE CONTEXT OF POLITICS OF CHANGE IN SPAIN

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Abstract

Purpose – to discuss and disclose the role of nationalism in Spanish politics of change.

Design/methodology/approach – The main research objective and tasks have influenced the selection of qualitative methods, firstly explaining the sociocultural situation in Spain as well as historical context. The theoretical background of nationalism and a comparative approach are used to discover and explain certain types of nationalism in Spanish politics of change.

Finding – Podemos, Spain's second-largest political party on the left, is a representative of the politics of change, clearly expressing the intention to cherish the country's multicultural and multilingual reality in the socio-political situation after the 15-M movement. The phrase 'Spain is a nation of nations' was made popular by the leader of Podemos, Pablo Iglesias. Analysis of the recent socio-political situation in Spain reveals that Podemos intended to agree with Socialists (the PSOE party) to develop a plural national state, in which each national region could develop its government in an equal and cooperative manner. However, the far-right party Vox brought a completely opposite nationalist approach, which bans the Catalan independence movement and any thoughts of cultural diversity. Therefore, nationalism is now beginning to occupy a central position in Spanish politics of change.

Research limitations/implications – This study only pretends to begin investigations into the given topic and it must be broadened in the future, examining the growing nationalistic sentiment among the Spanish people – fuelled by such factors as rising economic inequality, increasing scepticism about globalization, and fears of economic, cultural and security impacts of immigration.

Originality/Value – This article analyzes the newest political issues in Spain through a particular approach to political changes in the country. The research results can be a significant addition to future investigations of recent political changes in Spain.

Keywords: nationalism, regional nationalism, politics of change, Spanish politics

Research type: research paper

Introduction

Since the Great Recession of 2008, Spain has faced a dynamic political reality, full of uncertainty, changes, and unexpected turns; these are referred to as 'politics of change' in this paper. This year, ahead of national elections in April, the nationalist Vox party surged as a strong opponent to Spanish political parties on both the left and right. The Podemos party emerged in 2014 as the main political expression of the 15-M movement, basing its ideology on deeper participatory democracy, feminization of politics, defence of public goods, and human rights. Podemos also seemed to be a promising ally for Spain's Catalonia region because the party supported the principle of Catalan self-determination, agreeing on the region's right to decide whether to remain a part of Spain. However, the newest wave of nationalism in Spain, incited by Vox, is completely anti-separatist. Therefore, it is of interest

to investigate the role that nationalism has in this political period in Spain. Recent events clearly indicate that Spanish nationalism and the Catalan independence movement are key problems remaining from the 2008 economic crisis (e.g., unemployment, public debt, declining gross domestic product, and political corruption). While analyzing the newest investigations in related fields and concrete examples from Spanish socio-political life, the main questions to be answered in this research paper are: ***What are the main features of politics of change? Why is regional nationalism so strong in Spain? How are new political formations reacting and participating in nationalism-based problems?***

Recent Political Changes in Spain as 'Politics of Change'

The term 'politics of change' is used in this research paper to describe the recent political reality in Spain. However, this term is not clear on its own and requires a broader explanation and understanding of the special socio-political context of the country. Therefore, the first part of this research paper is dedicated to the theoretical and practical approaches to the new politics and political change.

First, it is important to explain why the term 'politics of change' and not 'new politics' is used in this work. Spain has undergone important changes in its socio-political life during the past 30 years. This period of transitioning to democracy can be more related to the 'new politics', because it lasted several years and converted Spain into democratic welfare state. As Kendall L. Baker, Russell J. Dalton, and Kai Hildebrandt (1981) state, it takes time, typically one generation, to pass from 'old' to 'new' politics. By comparison, recent political changes in Spain began in 2008, coinciding with the global financial crisis. Therefore, the 'new' politics in Spain are still in their infancy, when even small changes are highly important.

The word 'change' comes from the 15-M movement, when in 2011 Spaniards on the streets were asking for changes, especially political ones. Massive demonstrations occupied the streets and squares of 58 Spanish cities because citizens were dissatisfied with the current situation and made it clear that the 'old politics' no longer represented them. Even though it was a movement without a clear ideology, the anti-capitalist political agenda had significant importance and 'a leftist inclination was also preferential among the activists' (Martínez Lopez and Domingo San Juan, 2014, p. 2). It is worth mentioning that surveys at that time revealed that 70% of Spaniards positively valued the 15-M movement (Wert, 2012). According to Manuel Castells (2009), social movements are the primary drivers of social change and have the power to transform the way people are thinking. The 15-M can be a useful example of this concept because, in a peaceful manner, the movement successfully forced politicians to re-think their actions. It also opened a window for new political formations that could better understand the necessities of the Spanish society in crisis.

In March of 2014 a new political party known as Podemos was officially registered in Spain.[1] Podemos members introduced the party to the public with a document titled 'Make a Move: Convert the Indignation into Political Change'.[2] The party represented itself as 'in favour of a deeper participatory democracy, a defence of public goods, human rights, equality, and social control of economic powers' (Martínez López and Domingo San Juan, 2014, p. 24). According to political theorist Chantal Mouffe (2015), if not for the Podemos party, the efforts of the 15-M Movement would have come to nothing. Therefore, Podemos has played an

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[1] Podemos formaliza su inscripción como partido político. Retrieved March 3, 2019 from http://www.eldiario.es/politica/Podemos-Pablo-Iglesias-Ministerio-Interior_0_238326919.html

[2] Document 'Mover ficha: convertir la indignación en cambio político', Retrieved May 3, 2019 from www.vilaweb.cat/media/continguts/000/075/425/425.pdf.

important role in the recent Spanish socio-political changes. This party hegemonized the word 'change' while using it from the beginning.

Led by university professor Pablo Iglesias, Podemos had been in existence only two months when it participated in the 2014 European Parliament elections and won 1.2 million votes and five seats (Lopez Garcia and Boix Palop, 2014). It was a significant surprise for the two largest Spanish political parties Partido Popular (People's Party, PP) and Partido Socialista Obrero Español (Spanish Socialist Workers' Party, PSOE), and it represented the first threat to the two-party system in Spain.

It is important to understand when the politics of change began in Spain. It is well-known that the Spanish people started to feel the negative effects of the economic crisis in 2008. However, until the beginning of the 15-M movement in 2011, the position of the society was not so significant. With the 15-M movement, people joined together to resist the negative effects of the economic crisis, and, most importantly, criticized Spain's anti-democratic policies. Here, the insight of Martínez López and Domingo San Juan (2014, p. 30) stresses the importance of the movement: '15-M has impacted the Spanish political life in such a profound manner that it can be regarded as having inaugurated a new political cycle in which the movement, with all its different manifestations, has played a crucial role'. Therefore, when we talk about politics of change in Spain, its beginning can be related to the 15-M Movement. Finally, to summarize the previously mentioned political changes in Spain, now it is possible to highlight the main features of the politics of change in Spain:

- Started after the 15-M (2011) as a response to economic crisis and austerity;
- Irruption of new political formations (e.g., Podemos and Ciudadanos);
- End of the two-party system;
- Different way of doing politics (feminization of politics);
- Participatory politics/democracy (politics by the people); and
- Attention to the most vulnerable groups (e.g., unemployed people).

The next chapters of this article will explain nationalism in the politics of change.

Theoretical Background of Nationalism

To explain nationalism in the context of the politics of change in Spain, it is first important to have a broader understanding of nationalism itself and its peculiarities in Spain. Explaining nationalism is not a simple task because it differs in each country and depends on its contexts as well as the understanding of what is 'national'. To Jiménez Sánchez (2006), the nation-state model for liberal democracies is now facing a crisis. There are two reasons for this crisis: The globalization process not only has had an impact on nationalism but there are now nationalisms in the nation-states (MacCormick, 1999). Therefore, it becomes even more difficult to arrange the system when nations are multicultural, multireligious, and multinational. To explain this situation considering Spanish nationalism, it is also necessary to discuss regionalism and the reality of a plurinational country.

Ernest Gellner's theory of nationalism explains that 'nationalism is primarily a political principle that holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent' (Gellner, 1983, p. 2). To unite the state with its culture, the nation is necessary, but that does not mean it is a pre-existing or natural phenomenon. Gellner (1983) states that nationalism is a must for the process of modernization.

Furthermore, according to another nationalism theorist, Eric Hobsbawm, 'Nations as a natural, God-given way of classifying men, as an inherent ... political destiny, are a myth; nationalism, which sometimes takes pre-existing cultures and turns them into nations,

sometimes invents them, and often obliterates pre-existing cultures: That is a reality' (Hobsbawm, 1991). Hobsbawm sees nations from the bottom up and has 'portrayed the nation and nationalism as lacking uniformity in society and being susceptible to change' (Finkel, 2016). Hobsbawm (1991) also describes the development of nationalism step by step, dividing it into three different phases. First is a preliminary phase, when the idea of the nation is mostly cultural and folkloric. The middle phase is called 'pioneering' because political actors attempt to mobilize the nation and raise awareness among people. The third and last phase describes the events that can succeed before the birth of state or after it. In this phase, the national movement begins to acquire more support throughout the nation.

In addition to Gellner and Hobsbawm's ideas, sociologist Anthony Giddens adds political control as one of the primary contributors to the growth of a nation. Giddens (1990) argues that 'political defence of borders and territories unifies administrations, thus bringing a unity from the leadership down throughout the population' (Sabanadze, 2010). Another important perspective for Giddens is globalization, because nationalism is mostly seen as a response to this process. Giddens summarizes, 'Globalization is the reason for the revival of local cultural identities in different parts of the world. […] Local nationalisms spring up as a response to globalizing tendencies, as the hold of older nation-states weakens' (Giddens, 1990). Manuel Castells (1997) agrees with the idea that nationalism is fostered by globalization processes.

Therefore, today's nationalism is rather cultural and not political. Nationalism movements are more likely to defend an institutionalized culture rather than attempt to create a new state. When culture replaces structure, the search for identity is predominantly important, because, for Castells (1996), identity is the main source of meaning. Castells also puts great importance on the role of a language in nationalism. Language helps nations self-recognize and is a significant part of identity.

Regional Nationalism in Spain

After revising some of the most significant theoretical interpretations of nationalism, it is possible now to discuss nationalism and politics in such a plural and diverse country as Spain. Many scholars have analyzed Spanish nationalism (e.g., Villar, 1998; Muro, 2005; Alonso-González, 2015) and even more are interested in the Catalan nationalist movement (e.g., Guibernau, 2012; Castells, 2014; Iveson, 2017). Therefore, there are plenty of resources to describe nationalism in Spain and attempt to explain why its regional nationalism is so strong.

Spain has four official languages (Spanish, Catalan, Galician, and Euskera) and 17 autonomous regions. Some of the regions have a clear desire to separate from Spain – Catalonia and Basque Country in particular – and become independent nations. These two cases are better-known but each region in Spain actually boasts its own culture, customs, dialects, and therefore, regionalism-based identities. The Spanish Constitution (1978) accepts diversity of the country and states that the Spanish nation is composed of nationalities and regions, each of which have a right to self-governance.[1] Previously, in 1898, nationalism began to emerge in Catalonia and Basque Country 'as alternative sources of national identity and threatened the hegemonic position of Spanish nationalism' (Muro and Quiroga, 2005). At that point, Catalan and Basque political nationalisms were a response to the restoration process, 'when Spanish political elites failed to incorporate all sectors of society into the national ideal' (Muro and Quiroga, 2005).
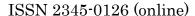
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[1] Spanish Constitution, 1978. Retrieved June 10, 2018 from http://www.congreso.es/portal/page/portal/Congreso/Congreso/Hist_Normas/Norm/const_espa_texto_ingles_0.pdf

After the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), Francisco Franco's regime took the central stage and his dictatorship left the country divided regionally and ideologically. During Franco's regime, nationalism (based on national Catholicism), one language, and military principles appeared. After the victory in the Spanish Civil War in 1939, Franco imposed 'a military, proto-fascist, and ultra-montane canon of Spain, representing Catholicism as the essence of Spain, and emphasizing Castile as the "ethnic core" of the nation' (Muro and Quiroga, 2005). Castells (1996) emphasized the importance of identity search in nationalism. For Franco's regime, Spanish identity was something hyperbolized through various symbols and customs. However, it had no particular logic for what was 'Spanish' and what was 'anti-Spanish', keeping in mind that some regional traditions were ignored or forbidden, and some were chosen as the 'right ones'. For example, *corrida de toros* (bull fight) and *flamenco* dance were part of the national identity, even though both traditions came only from the Andalusia region and had nothing to do with the remainder of Spain, especially the northern part of the country. In the given case, other nationalities in Spain, such as Catalans or Basques, and their languages were not acceptable any longer. The regime forbade the use of Catalan language in public, and literature, movies, and other material in Catalan were no longer produced. Additionally, all symbols (flags, anthems, posters, and signs) were not only banned but also persecuted. Catalonia and Basque Country lost their autonomous statutes, because in Franco's regime the state was 'built on legal, administrative, and territorial centralism' (Muro and Quiroga, 2005).

Moreover, Francoist ideology was based on the intention to purify Spain and condemn what is 'anti-Spanish'. The use of violence, which was called 'creative and purifying' by Franco's followers, became a necessity for Spanish nationalists. This also provoked a negative and violent response from regional nationalists, such as Basques. In 1959, a terrorist group known as Euskadi ta Askatasuna (ETA) was established in Basque Country. The group based its ideology on Basque nationalism and fought against Franco and Spain for 'national liberation'. ETA's actions and ideology unified Basque nationalists and Spanish leftists, democrats, and Catalan nationalists (Muro and Quiroga, 2005). To summarize, the Francoist form of nationalism can be described as Catholic-traditionalist, which defended the ethnic concept of Spain (based on unification of religion and language) and employed centralist and authority-based policies. Denying Basque and Catalan identities, while forbidding the use of their own languages or symbols, sparked regional nationalism movements and led to a contrary effect: Spain was more divided when united.

Today, Spanish politics cannot be discussed without remembering its starting point, the period of transitioning to democracy (1975-1982) after Franco's death, which marked the end of the dictatorship. After passing through significant changes in the past 30 years, Spain 'has become an international example of a successful transition to democracy' (Bryne, 2011, p. 9). The country's economy was growing quickly, the government of socialists took care of public healthcare and education systems, a welfare state was created, and therefore people were satisfied with the new democratic regime (Bryne, 2011). As Franco abolished all possible forms of regional autonomy during his regime, it was important to decentralize power and provide more freedom to each region. Spain was divided into 17 regions and in each region, there were approximately 40 to 50 provinces. Each region began to function as an autonomous community. However, various regions exhibited different levels of regional identity and 'claimed their own political power within a decentralized state' (Muro and Quiroga, 2005). Catalonia and the Basque Country claimed more political autonomy and the Socialists were ready to discuss and accept their requests. In general, PSOE supported the idea of a plural Spain and its autonomous regions with their own financial and political systems and cultural identities, as long as they did not contradict the Spanish Constitution. During the

transition-to-democracy period, PSOE and other political entities agreed that Spain would combine parliamentary democracy and regional autonomy.

In 1996, PSOE lost to Partido Popular in the general election. It is interesting that the PP received the majority in the government with the help of regional nationalists: the Basque Nationalist Party, Catalan Convergence, and the Canarian Coalition. PP's discourse was pro-Spanish and did not even mention cultural diversity of the country; it also reinforced centralism. Montserrat Guibernau (2012) explains that Catalan secessionism and the 'right to decide' movement (whether to be a part of Spain) originated from second PP victory in the general election. After the election, 'sympathy and understanding towards Catalan demands for further autonomy and recognition were replaced by hostility embedded in a neo-centralist, conservative, and neo-liberal political discourse' (Guibernau, 2012). The PP ignored claims for more autonomy from Catalonia, Galicia, and Basque Country, and 'adopted an arrogant attitude towards former political allies' (Guibernau, 2012).

PSOE returned to power and won the general election in 2004 with a new leader, J.L. Rodriguez Zapatero, who became the prime minister. Zapatero supported Catalans and their wish for more autonomy; he backed the new statute of autonomy, which was projected in Catalonia by the local PSOE branch. Despite that, PSOE could not convince the PP to support Catalans' claims. The new statute of autonomy for Catalonia was challenged by PP, and it was not approved by the Spanish High Court. Massive strikes were held in Catalonia under the slogan, 'We are a nation. We decide'.[1] At the same time, Spain was mired in economic crisis. According to Casero-Ripollès and Feenstra (2012), several reasons encapsulated people's disgust for the current socio-political situation in Spain. First, public spending cuts left some social groups less well-protected. Second, high rates of unemployment that in 2011 had topped 24% affected the overall welfare of the state.[2] Third, political corruption scandals and the two-party system, which did not allow success for smaller parties due to Spain's electoral order, also encouraged people to strive for change.

In the 2011 general election, PP again celebrated victory together with a new leader, Mariano Rajoy. The new prime minister had a clear position on Catalonia's question; in 2005 he had stated, 'There is only one nation in Spain and it's the Spanish nation'.[3] The rejection of Spain's diversity provoked even more rage in Catalonia as well as in other communities. The PP again adopted its position of ignorance, which clearly reveals that regional nationalism in Spain is related to political ideologies and the tradition of centralist rule. With this said, it is necessary to move to consider Spain today and explain how nationalism is changing in the context of politics of change triggered in 2011 by the 15-M movement.

Nationalism and Political Changes in Spain

The period of politics of change in Spain starts with the 15-M movement, which can be characterized as a 'plural, horizontal, non-party movement, with a broadly middle and working-class base' (Casero-Ripollès and Feenstra, 2012, p. 5). It is necessary to mention that the 15-M movement and its protests were mainly peaceful, without an intention to 'overthrow

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1 'Somos una nación, nosotros decidimos' Retrieved January 14, 2019 from http://www.rtve.es/alacarta/videos/programa/manifestacion-barcelona-somos-nacion-nosotros-decidimos/825631/
2 Spain's unemployment rate. Retrieved April 7, 2019 from http://www.tradingeconomics.com/spain/unemployment-rate
3 Rajoy: 'Sólo hay una nación, la española'. Retrieved April 7, 2019 from http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/articles/1460/theories-of-nationalism-a-brief-comparison-of-realist-and-constructivist-ideas-of-the-nation
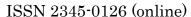
or take control of the established political power' (Casero-Ripollès and Feenstra, 2012, p. 5). The Spaniards were more likely attempting to start a dialogue with politicians to achieve the change they sought. Consequently, this allowed the movement to gain wide social support, recognition, and legitimacy as a result of its nonviolent means of protest (Martínez Lopez and Domingo San Juan, 2014).

Even though the 15-M movement appears to lack a clear ideology, Rubén Díez García (2014) puts it into a question. Most of the 15-M activists defined themselves politically as socialists (20%) and liberals (16%), or lacking any type of political ideology (15%) (Díez García, 2014). What is more, 15-M had nationalists among participants (6%). The variety of political descriptions also reveal that 15-M was not a singular movement but rather had a diverse character. It is not possible to say that 15-M has nothing to do with nationalism, because it softened regional nationalism in Spain as a uniting and complex ideology for a significant part of the nation.

At the start of 2015, a survey conducted by the Centre for Sociological Research of Spain stated that Podemos could be the second political force in the next election. In the spring of 2015, Spain celebrated local and regional elections. In these elections, Podemos decided to participate not directly but together with small local parties or other political formations in various regions and cities. This means that Podemos joined small political groups (such as En Marea in Galicia, En Comu Podem in Catalonia, and Compromis in Valencia) that had a particular regional ideology. Scholars admit that it was a highly smart move for a young party (Podemos had been in existence for less than one year), because the party did not have enough time to mobilize in every region and gain support (Martínez López and Domingo San Juan, 2014). From the beginning, Podemos was a strong competitor to nationalist parties in different Spanish regions. Podemos supported the principle of Catalan self-determination and agreed to the region's right to vote and decide whether to remain a part of Spain. However, Podemos opposed Catalonia's secession from Spain, believing that in a hypothetical referendum Catalans would vote to stay.

After the European election of 2014 and the regional elections of 2015, two main changes in Spanish politics can be seen. First, Podemos and its partners won the election in Spain's two largest Spanish cities, Madrid and Barcelona, where Manuela Carmena and Ada Colau, two representatives of the ideas of the 15-M and political changes, are in power now. Second is the rising popularity of the centre-right party Ciudadanos, which was created in 2005 in Catalonia, but now can be called the main competitor for Podemos. These two parties are usually compared but the issues of economy or equality always separate them. In Ciudadanos' case, the party is also 'breaking walls' as it transitions from the regional to the national level. Its first party message in 2006 emphasized a position against Catalan nationalism and attracted individuals from both the left and right. According to Rodríguez Teruel and Astrid Barrio (2015, p. 603), 'Ciudadanos stands out as a peculiar case of a peripheral actor that is successfully challenging national parties. To some extent, one might ask whether the success of C's entails a new way of driving the nationalization of the Spanish party system at the expense of the traditional parties'. Therefore, Ciudadanos later moderated its discourse and still was more appealing for Spanish-speaking and anti-independence Catalans than local nationalist parties were.

Manuel Castells (1997) indicated that language helps nations to self-recognize as well as unite its members. Even though in Francoist Spain there was an attempt to increase the dominance of Spanish language over other minority languages, the country has a long tradition of linguistic diversity. As a result, the government of Spain has implemented a variety of language policies to tone down the pressure and confusion between languages in Spain. Nevertheless, in some autonomic regions such as Catalonia, the problem of dominant

language as well as cultural identity is still a vivid question. It can be said that Podemos is the first Spanish party interested in language variety in Spain. In the programme for the general election of 2016, Podemos suggested that students in schools should have an opportunity not only to study foreign languages but also all four official languages of Spain no matter which region they call home. It was a completely new approach towards plurilingualism in Spain; until then, Catalan, Galician, and Basque languages were studied only in particular regions.

Additional proof of Podemos' approach to Spanish diversity and ethnicity was its intention to establish a Ministry for Plural Nationalities. After the general election on 10 December 2016, Podemos and PSOE had the opportunity to form a governing majority. However, Catalonia's referendum remained a barrier to forming their government. As the Catalan crisis grew deeper, Podemos suggested that PSOE agree to the formation of 'a plural national state, where all the national regions can develop their government under an equal and cooperative manner without any restrictions'. Podemos added that it 'is an obligation for our own identity as a country'. The idea was to organize a referendum on Catalonia's independence through a new Ministry for Plural Nationalities. However, the parties did not agree and the government was not formed in 2016.

The newest wave of nationalism in Spain was ignited last year by the far-right party Vox. Even though the party was established in 2013, it was recognized only after the elections in the Andalusia region on 2 December 2018, when instead of one seat in the regional parliament, it surprisingly won 12 seats. Vox completely rejects the idea of the Catalan independence movement and touts an 'all Spanish' agenda. The Vox manifesto '*100 medidas para la España viva*',[1] includes topics such as the banning of political and civil society organizations and a guarantee of education in the Spanish language everywhere in Spain (with an optional co-official language). Basically, the ideas of the Vox party are the opposite of what was proposed by Podemos. Vox fosters the idea of a united Spain but this does not include any comprehension of cultural diversity. In general, the growing popularity of Vox and the radical far right has created significant tension in the Spanish political arena.

Conclusions

Since the Great Recession of 2008, Spain has undergone many important political changes, explained as the 'politics of change' in this article. Most of today's political changes stem from the 15-M movement, which brought Spanish people together to achieve better social and economic conditions when these were considered anti-democratic during the economic crisis. The 15-M movement launched new political formations that sought to address the necessities of a Spanish society in crisis. One of these formations, the Podemos political party, a representative of the politics of change, became a strong competitor to nationalist parties. This was mainly because the party supports the idea of a multicultural and multilingual reality in Spain and has agreed to organize a referendum for Catalonia. Regional nationalism in Spain has its roots in the Francoist regime, when the main ideology was based on the intention to purify the Spanish nation; therefore, the country was left regionally and ideologically divided. Today, Spain continues to struggle to manage its cultural diversity. As the Catalan independence movement is growing stronger and there is no overall political consensus about cherishing the country's multicultural and multilingual heritage, nationalism in the context of politics of change remains a significant issue in Spain.

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1 VOX manifesto 100 medidas para la España. Retrieved April 30, 2019 from https://www.voxespana.es/noticias/100-medidas-urgentes-de-vox-para-espana-20181006

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