

FORM, FUNCTION, AND MEANING OF BEBASAN: THE ORALITY OF THE SAMIN IN BOJONEGORO

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ABSTRACT

The research aimed to describe the form, function, and meaning of *bebasan* as a cultural orality spoken by the Samin in Bojonegoro. The Samin community was a community group residing in Bojonegoro, East Java. Aside from their distinguished language, the Samin was also well-known for its unique orality called *bebasan*, representing its culture and society. It was deemed significant to document this national tradition as a form of expression spoken based on the habits and behaviours of the Samin community. In a society that upheld the culture of oral traditions, the Samin community had placed *bebasan* as one of the rules of life that they subconsciously needed to obey. The research employed folklore theory in order to explore and observe the meaning of *bebasan* as a part of traditional folklore. Folklore was inseparable from the conditions of society and the culture that encompassed it, so it was necessary to comprehend and give meaning to the folklore. A descriptive qualitative method was applied in the research. Data was obtained by recording and documenting the orality spoken within the Samin community. The results reveal that there are six forms of *Bebasan* which include directives and teachings on how to conduct oneself well in life. It is also observed that *bebasan* functions as a medium for advice, reminders, and teachings of life, all ingrained in the Samin community.

Keywords: *bebasan* form, *bebasan* function, *bebasan* meaning, *bebasan* orality, Samin community

INTRODUCTION

Folklore is always profoundly interconnected with the culture. It represents the entirety of the story that is a collective tradition of a society or a nation extensively, which has been extensively delivered using both oral and gesture forms, a continuous tradition from generation to generation. It is also generally believed that every oral tradition contains values of local cultures that need to be thoughtfully understood, studied, and utilized as a way of life (Susena & Budiyono, 2021). As one of the most widespread historical sources, oral traditions or oralities record the traditions and practices of the local community prior to their ability to write, which have been deeply ingrained with culture, customs, beliefs, values, and lifelong experiences. Folklore itself is a local identity deep-rooted in the life of a traditional society. The sense of belonging to certain traditions

which have been entrenched and become historical values induces the emotions of its members to be unified and integrated. The sense of shared fate and struggle are established prior to the local identity which has long been born.

The Samin community is a community group residing in two provinces of Java, Blora, Central Java, and Bojonegoro, East Java. Like most Javanese descendants, the Samin people are also a part of the Javanese community (Hidayati, Herman, & Retno, 2018). This community has long existed since 1859, extensively spreading to the north coast of Central Java, but most of its members are now dominantly residing in Blora and Bojonegoro. The meaning of Samin itself is *sami-sami angin*, or ‘together in doing good deeds, and are determined to expel invaders to establish peace’. Even in the past, the colonizers labelled them as irreligious, old-fashioned, poor, and dissident figures, and these stereotypes have

remained up until now (Wibawa & Syafiq, 2021). In fact, Samin actually also means that when someone is speaking, he/she must be as honest and genuine, and not do inappropriate things and must be in accordance with the actual circumstances (Feriandi, Malihah, & Maftuh, 2020). The reason underlying it is that Samin's teachings believe in the law of karma; therefore, they are not encouraged to do disgraceful actions for the sake of their community (Rosyid, 2020b).

This social and spiritual movement is initiated by Samin Raden Surowijoyo. Their residence is in the depth of a forest, where they intentionally seclude themselves from the local governmental laws with a single goal to preserve their traditions and teachings of life, which are different from society in general. They preserve and maintain their traditions from generation to generation rigorously and strongly oppose the materialism and capitalism adopted by the government. Because they are determined to maintain their values and traditions, it can be said that the Samin community has been left behind by other Javanese communities. However, they are actually able to preserve the noble tradition as a characteristic of Indonesian culture and heritage despite their struggle to keep up pace with others (Pinasti & Lestari, 2018). For example, the characteristics of behavioral traditions maintained to this day in the Samin community are *sambatan* (mutual cooperation) and being mutually helpful to each other (Rosidin, 2016). Other than that, when it comes to clothing, they often wear '*iket*' or a piece of black cloth with a typical batik painting where they circle it around their forehead (Prayudi, Susilo, & Prastiwi, 2016).

Saminism was initially brought up by Samin Soerosentiko and included *Sedulur Sikep*, popular teaching which encourages opposition against the Dutch as their form of resistance outside the violent acts (Setyaningrum, 2018). This form involves refusing to pay taxes, as well as rejecting all the regulations and laws made by the colonial government (Nurdin & Adzkiya', 2021). Then, over time, these teachings trigger an emotional attachment which eventually forms a particular social identity (Rahmawati, 2018). Ultimately, the beliefs held by the Samin community make it part of the many religions on earth, which are born from the philosophy handed down by its leaders from generation to generation (Nurmala & Rusmawati, 2020).

The Samin has their own language, which is slightly different from the Javanese language in general. More often than that, other communities are faced with obstacles when they want to interact with the Samin, which emerges the differences in values with the surrounding communities (Fauzia & Kahija, 2019). One of the outcomes of this dissimilarity is the well-known oral tradition, or orality, which takes the form of tales representing their tradition and culture. Samin's folklores are culturally thought-provoking for sociolinguists to observe and learn, as this tradition becomes an inherent part of the community's unique characteristic and has always been preserved from

generation to generation (Liani, Fadilla, & Danugroho, 2021). So far, pieces of research concerning Samin's orality only revolve around the cultural level. For this reason, the researcher is interested in observing this unique language phenomenon as an effort to document the distinguished orality of the archipelago, especially in the East Java province. Cultural identity, especially for the Javanese descendants, is items of intelligence as well as genuine wisdom created and passed down by the Javanese people across generations (Mojo, Hadi, & Purnaweni, 2017). This makes the creation of folklores inseparable from the tradition and culture they represent, and it is significant to explore and define these folklores in question. Especially if the culture is not adhered to, its authenticity will fade over time (Nasution, 2017).

One of the forms of the local cultures is an orality which develops amidst the community, namely *bebasan*. Sawitri et al. (2019) have stated that *bebasan* is a collection of expressive utterances which have a high value containing good or bad messages to motivate people and are filled with wisdom in the form of beautiful parables. The Samin's *bebasan* also signals imagery. This tradition has long existed in the Samin society and has taken the form of utterances representing the behaviors of the Samin themselves. Typically, *bebasan* is used as the Samin's life compass; thus, it concomitantly possesses a certain meaning for them to be passed down verbally (oral utterances, unwritten) to the next generation (Rosyid, 2020a). Therefore, to thoroughly examine this orality, the researcher would like to dig deeper into the function as well as the meaning of *bebasan* as an orality spoken by the Samin.

Following the background of the research, the problem that arises can be formulated: how is the form, function, and meaning of *bebasan* spoken by the Samin in Bojonegoro? As for the purpose, the research intends to describe the form, function, and meaning of *bebasan* spoken by the Samin in Bojonegoro. It is hoped that the findings from this thought-provoking analysis will result in a novel phenomenon which has previously not been observed by other researchers before.

Jepang is one of the hamlets in Margomulyo with an area of approximately 74.733 hectares where the Samin resides. The daily life of a Samin typically involves farming, and most of the villagers are farmers. In 2015, The Institute of Geography and Statistics (BPS) calculated that the population of Jepang amounts to 787 people, consisting of 404 men and 383 women. In this particular hamlet, the well-known Samin residents are led by Mbah Hardjo Kardi, a faithful follower of Saminism as well as the elder of the Samin community in Jepang. The Samin community is currently divided into two groups, the inner and outer Samin. Those who belong to the outer group can be considered to have blended into ordinary society. Meanwhile, its inner counterpart is a group of direct descendants of the Samin community (Danugroho, 2020). Moreover, referring to Rosyid and Kushidayati's (2020) research,

it is revealed that the Samin community is divided into two in their daily lives. One of them is accustomed to modernization, and the other is still firmly defending their old ways and authentic identity.

In general, the livelihoods of the locals in Jepang can be identified in several sectors, namely agriculture, services/trade, industry, and others. To support their daily lives, most Jepang residents rely on raising livestock. This habit is supported by the abundance of grass fields as one of the natural resources. Another large-scale resource is firewood, as the hamlet itself is surrounded by a sizeable forest. However, although the members of this village have slowly been transforming from traditional to modern life, they still uphold the teachings or traditions of Saminism (Hanifah, 2019).

Folklore includes various cultural products such as tales, stories, saga, legends, traditions, songs, rites, literature, arts, and traditional clothing (Danandjaja, 1986). The development of folklore prioritizes the oral route. From time to time, folklores are either innovative or rarely changed. As folklore is anonymous, a person or individual is not entitled to monopolize ownership rights. Generally speaking, folklore is a preserved tradition by the supporting locals voluntarily and enthusiastically without any necessary coercion to obtain a peaceful life.

In its literal definition, folklore can be separated into two words, 'folk' means a group of people with the same ideology and culture that can be distinguished from other groups, and 'lore' means custom or culture (Endraswara, 2013). In other words, folklore is a part of civilization that is traditionally inherited across generations and collectively with different means of oral, gestures, or aids as commemorations of previous traditions.

Therefore, folklore has a significant role in the life of a community and inattentively becomes the guiding principle passed down continuously across generations regardless of one's social status. Folklore can be divided into three types: oral folklore, partial oral folklore, and non-verbal folklore (Danandjaja, 1986).

Oral folklore is a type of folklore which is purely oral. The forms include (a) folk speech such as accent, nicknames, traditional ranks, and titles of nobility; (b) traditional expressions, such as proverbs, adages, and bywords; (c) traditional riddles such as puzzles; (d) folk poetry such as *pantun*, *gurindam*, and poetry; (e) folk prose, such as myths, legends, and fairy tales; and (f) folk songs. Partial oral folklore is a mixture of oral and non-verbal elements. It takes forms of beliefs, folk games, folk theatre, folk dance, customs, ceremonies, festivities, and others. Non-verbal folklore is not orally delivered, but the process of making one is taught orally. There are two forms of this folklore, namely material and non-material. Material non-verbal folklores include folk architecture, handicrafts, traditional food and beverages, as well as traditional medicines. On the other hand, the non-material ones include traditional gestures, sound signals for communication, and folk music.

From this overview, the scope of folklore includes tales, stories, saga, legends, traditions, songs, rites, literature, arts, and traditional clothing. The development of folklore prioritizes the oral route. From time to time, folklores are either innovative or rarely changed. As folklore is anonymous, a person or individuals are not entitled to monopolize the ownership's rights. Generally speaking, folklore is a preserved tradition by supporting locals voluntarily and enthusiastically without any necessary coercion.

Many oralities are carried out initially from discussions on oral traditions using a historiographical point of view. Orality is a tradition related to the habits or customs of using spoken language in conveying daily experiences from one person to another. It is also a message or testimony passed down orally across generations to come. Oralities as parts of traditions are interconnected with a certain society's habits and customs, using a distinguished oral language in communicating their daily experiences from one person to another. It can be concluded that the term oral tradition, or orality, is synonymous with oral folklore (Endraswara, 2013).

The Samin can be considered as one of the ethnic groups in Indonesia from their various traditions and cultures to their distinguishing characteristics, as previously described by Barth. As a result, the Central Java Provincial Government has recognized the Samin as one of the ethnic groups in Central Java out of the four existing groups residing in the same province.

Research on the Samin community in Bojonegoro has been carried out extensively by other researchers. The first research on the local cultures of the Samin, *mantra*, is conducted by Rizal (2015). The research itself is categorized as qualitative as it produces descriptive data in the form of written discourse. As the outcome, the religiosity value of the Samin community in Jepang within the *mantra* can be observed in the form of a request for help from the Samin to God Almighty to subdue the prohibition of cases in the life of the Samin in Jepang. Javanese cultural values are employed in the research, as these values are the noble values of Javanese culture or ethnicity. The values are divided into Javanese religious values, philosophical values, ethical values, and aesthetic values.

The second research is conducted by Hidayati and Shofwani (2019), which indicates that there is a form of defense through the socialization in the form of *ngangsu kaweruh* Samin, or the Kange Yune Samin festival, which is held annually in the *sura* month and the tradition of the *sura* ceremony in accordance with the Islamic values.

The third research is conducted by Rusmawati, Khasanah, and Khilmi (2021). They conclude that there are three *macapat* songs about Samin's teachings. The songs are *Dandang Gula*, *Pangkur*, and *Pucung*. As for their respective values, it is described that *Dandang Gula* holds the rules for maintaining the behaviour of fellow humans and nature, *Pangkur* is about marriage and family relationships, and *Pucung* guides humans

on how to live properly on earth.

The research uses the same research subjects as the preceding studies; however, the focus of the research is different, as this focuses on Samin's orality, *bebasan*. In other words, the research aims to investigate the form, function, and meaning of *bebasan* as an orality treasured by the Samin community in Bojonegoro.

METHODS

A descriptive qualitative method is applied in the research to comprehend what the research subject is experiencing holistically and is described in a specific natural context by utilizing various scientific methods (Hartanto, 2019). The main objective of descriptive research is to solve the issue within the phenomenon systematically and factually based on the existing data (Yanti, Antosa, & Adiputra, 2020). For this reason, the research presents data, analyzes, and lastly, interprets it.

The method of data collection employed for the research is fieldwork to archive or document the phenomenon at hand. There are approximately three stages that an on-site researcher has to go through if he/she wants to be successful in his/her endeavours. On-site pre-research stage, before starting the research, that is, going to a place or area where a researcher wants to conduct the research, he/she must first make a research design. The design should at least contain some basic information, including the form of the folklore and how to collect the information and the data.

In the research, *bebasan* is the chosen form of folklore, or orality, while the data is collected through interviews. While the on-site research stage, upon arriving at the research site, a researcher must build a close relationship as soon as possible, as a harmonious relationship built based on mutual trust with the objects of research or the informants will help the research progress smoothly, especially when collecting the data. In the research, the researcher threads a close relationship with the members of the Samin community in Bojonegoro. Lastly, in the interview and documentation stage, the form of the interview is either directed or indirect. Indirect interviews are usually more relaxed and offer the informant the maximum opportunity to provide information regarding a phenomenon. The research gives their informants, the leaders and members of the Samin community, chances to provide information as many as possible regarding *bebasan* whilst recording their responses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Samin residing in Bojonegoro as an ethnic community upholds the tradition of oralities and places it as one of their ideology and rules of life, which is subconsciously conformed to. This can be

observed from the wise words and phrases uttered by the research objects, which contain many teachings related to everyday life.

In conveying the main points of the teachings to the followers, the elder or the leader of the Samin uses lectures (*sesorah*) at home or in the field. From these lectures, what have been conveyed becomes important teachings which are always repeated orally by the successors and followers to obey. These are what ultimately emerged as oralities in the form of *bebasan* ingrained in the life of the Samin.

More often than not, *bebasan* is always uttered by the elder, Mbah Harjo Kardi. *Bebasan* always comes directly from his utterances. It has to be noted that Mbah Harjo Kardi is the current elder or leader of the Samin in Bojonegoro; thus, all the sources of *bebasan* in this research come directly from the person himself. As for the locals, when asked to be the reliable informants, they always refer to Mbah Harjo Kardi.

Based on the recorded data, *bebasan* can be grouped into six forms (see Tables 1 to 6). In analyzing *bebasan*, the process of translating the whole language is carried out first, then interpreting the meaning of *bebasan*, and last but not least, analyzing the form, function, and meaning of *bebasan* according to the sentence structure or the unity of the sentence.

The analysis of the recorded *bebasan* as the research results and discussion is described in these explanations.

Table 1 Form 1 (*Bebasan* in the Form of Advices)

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- a. *Urip kudu sabar lan trokal* (Patience and striving for the best are significant virtues of life)
 - b. *Ampun ngantos iri, drenki, lan srei marang liyan* (Never be jealous, envious, and suspicious of others)
 - c. *Urip Ampun ngantos ryo sapada* (Never fulfill your life with arrogance towards others)
 - d. *Ampun pek pinepek, kutil jumput, bedhog, nyolong* (Never take, steal/corrupt, rob, or run off with someone's property)
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Table 1 shows the form, function, and meaning of *bebasan* form 1 (advice). A complete translation of *bebasan* form 1, "Patience and striving for the best are significant virtues of life. Never be jealous, envious, and suspicious of others. Never fulfil your life with arrogance towards others. Never take, steal/corrupt, rob, or run off with someone's property." The form of this *bebasan* is oral utterances, and although separated, the original speech is unified on purpose. The complete paragraph is an expression of advice for the followers not to commit disgraceful acts that can harm others.

The function of the previous *bebasan* is as a reminder and advice that in living their life with other people, one should not be arrogant and/or take others' property which does not belong to him because it can be considered a detrimental act towards other people. Considering its form, this *bebasan* can be evaluated

as an oral principle which has to be adhered to in the Samin community. This *bebasan* has a distinctive meaning, which warns its followers to not keep a sense of pride in themselves. Moreover, they are reminded that taking others' belongings can be regarded as stealing, even when scattered on the street. Therefore, it is forbidden to take others' things as it is not one's right to possess them.

Table 2 Form 2 (*Bebasan* in the Form of Prohibitions)

<i>Bebasan</i>
<i>Aja drengki, srei, tukar padu, dahpe kemeren, aja kuntul jumphut, bedhog nyolong</i> (Never bother others, never fight, be jealous, and steal other people's belongings, for they are not your rights to take)

Table 2 shows the form, function, and meaning of *bebasan* form 2 (prohibitions). This form of *bebasan* is delivered orally and in the form of prohibitions by mentioning several examples of disgraceful behaviours that its followers are not allowed to carry out. The function of this *bebasan* can be regarded as declarative, which includes advice and rules for any social interaction in the Samin community. This *bebasan* warns its followers that there are rules which must be adhered to and ones which must not be violated. The meaning of this *bebasan* is to encourage its followers not to disturb others' peace, as it can also mean that he has done disgraceful acts which will eventually damage the relationships between the people. Moreover, this *bebasan* also urges its followers not to run off with others' property which does not belong to them, as it will also damage fellow human relationships.

Table 3 Form 3
(*Bebasan* in the Form of Meaning and Purpose of Life)

<i>Bebasan</i>
<i>Wong urip kudu ngerti uripe, urip siji digowo selawase</i> (One has to understand his life, for life equals to his soul and there is only one soul for everyone forever)

Table 3 shows the form, function, and meaning of *bebasan* form 3 (meaning and purpose of life). This *bebasan* takes form in oral utterances as an expression of the meaning and purpose of life. The function of this *bebasan* is as a direction or a reminder of the principles of life, as the content of this *bebasan* has a valuable advice about the purpose of life. Upon receiving this *bebasan*, its followers are expected to know the purpose of their lives to lead them to a clear path.

This *bebasan* is a part of noble teachings about human life. In living their life, humans must know the purpose of their life. As they only live once, it is

important to know which direction they will walk to achieve their goals so that they will not be carried away by measly purposes and disgraceful acts. This *bebasan* has a similar context to living with good or bad deeds. If life is filled with good deeds, then the person's path will be illuminated with the light emanating from his good deeds as the rewards. On the other hand, if life is filled with bad deeds, then the punishment or torment of hell will await him later on.

Table 4 Form 4
(*Bebasan* in the Form of Stories about Death)

<i>Bebasan</i>
a. <i>Wong enom mati uripe titip seng urip</i> (For every young man who dies, his life will be carried out by those who live.)
b. <i>Bayi uda nangis 'nger..' niku sukma ketemu raga.</i> (The crying of a baby means that his soul just met his body.)
c. <i>Mulane wong niku mboten mati, nek ninggal sandhangan.</i> (At the end, a person is not dead, he just strips his clothes away.)
d. <i>Kedah sabar lan trokol seng diarah turune.</i> (One must fill himself with patience and attempts for good deeds for his generations to inherit.)
e. <i>Ora mati nanging kumpul seng urip.</i> (One is not dead but is gathering with those who live.)
f. <i>Apik wong selawase sepisan, dadi wong selawase dadi wong.</i> (A person's good deed is once and forever, but he is forever a human.)

Table 4 shows the form, function, and meaning of *bebasan* form 4 (stories about death). A complete translation of the *bebasan* is, "For every young man who dies, his life will be carried out by those who live. The crying of a baby means that his soul just met his body. In the end, a person is not dead; he just strips his clothes away. One must fill himself with patience and attempt for good deeds for his generations to inherit. One is not dead but is gathering with those who live. Once a person performs a good deed, he is forever a good person."

This *bebasan* takes the form of oral utterances in the expression of stories about death. Each sentence unites as a single paragraph of a complete *bebasan*. The main functions of this *bebasan* are as advice and teachings on life. The advice refers to the infinite cycle of life and death and its meaning. At the core of this *bebasan*, a message is conveyed to every human that they, in essence, never die but only strip their bodies and their spirits are with those who are still alive. Moreover, this *bebasan* also advises those alive to prioritize good acts and behaviours because if they are instilled deep in life, they can become an advantageous trait that can be looked upon across generations forever, for their children and grandchildren to come.

This *bebasan* means that every living thing does not actually experience death since they only

leave their bodies away like one strips their clothes. The spirit of the dead is never lost or wanders away but lives with the living. If the person is known for their good deeds, they will forever be remembered as a good man.

Table 5 Form 5 (*Bebasan* in the Form of Parable of Human's Characteristic)

<i>Bebasan</i>
<i>Pangucap saka lima bundhelane ana pitu, lan pangucap saka sangga bundhelane ana pitu</i> (An utterance begins with five ends with seven, and an utterance begins with nine ends with seven)

Table 5 shows the form, function, and meaning of *bebasan* form 5 (parable of human characteristics). The context translation of this *bebasan* is, "A man should be cautious with what they want to say because it may begin with a specific issue but ends with another issue, unrelated as it may." This particular *bebasan* takes form as an oral utterance in the form of a parable of human characteristics.

The function of this *bebasan* is to lead its followers to have a good speech, manners, and etiquette when interacting with others. Essentially, a man must maintain their speech so that the words coming out of their mouth would not offend or hurt the feelings of others. The meaning of this *bebasan* lies in the advice that a man must prevent the words coming out of his mouth from hurting others as humans are naturally selfish creature and wants to win against others. The symbol of odd numbers five, seven, and nine means that humans want to be different from others. Or generally speaking, they tend to dominate each other, which leads them to subconsciously hurt other people's feelings with their utterances.

Table 6 Form 6
(*Bebasan* in the Form of Human's Speech Acts)

<i>Bebasan</i>
<i>Sukma ngawula raga, raga ngawula suara</i> (A soul follows its body, and the body follows its voice)

Table 6 shows the form, function, and meaning of *bebasan* form 6 (human speech acts). Context translation of this *bebasan* is, "The soul of a human belongs to its body, while the body follows his voices or utterances." This particular *bebasan* takes form as an oral utterance in the form of human speech acts.

The function of this *bebasan* is one of the principles in leading any social interactions. All utterances coming out of someone's mouth surely have consequences if they are not maintained by the speaker. Thus, to prevent harming others in the process, one must be careful with what they want to

say, not to cause something unwanted in the end. The meaning of this *bebasan* is that the soul of a human can be nurtured since it belongs to a body. On the other hand, a human's outer appearance, his body, can look good or bad depending on his utterances and voice. If the utterances are bound to be virtuous, both the soul and body will also be of high quality. However, if the utterances are disgraceful and bound to hurt others, then the soul and body will both be tainted.

CONCLUSIONS

Bebasan spoken by the Samin residing in Bojonegoro is an oral tradition or orality heavily ingrained with life's principles and teachings. The research observes that there are six forms of *bebasan* which serve as teachings or guidelines of life for the Samin, namely: form of (1) advice, (2) prohibitions, (3) meaning and purpose of life, (4) stories about death, (5) parable of human's characteristic, and (6) human's speech acts.

These forms contain the how-to of life and guide its followers to adhere to the principles if they want to lead a high-quality life. *Bebasan* also functions as advice, reminders, as well as guidelines to live a virtuous life which are voluntarily adhered to by its followers.

Regarding its contribution to the Samin community, the research wants to eagerly introduce and serve as a reminder of the existence of Samin's teachings to the general community where they are already accustomed to forgetting the value of their heritage, which should be implemented and integrated with the foundation of Indonesia's existence as a community, a people, and a nation.

The discussions reveal that *bebasan* contains many virtues of life. However, for future research, more efforts are necessary to dig deeper into what lies behind the existence of *bebasan* itself. In particular, future research must explore the historical background of the emergence of *bebasan* to examine the possible connection with the origin of *bebasan* in the form of orality. Furthermore, the research of function and meaning must be supplemented with contexts to provide a clear and objective analysis of *bebasan* as a unique orality.

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