Regional Organizations in African Security

Edited by
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Problematizing Regional Organizations in African Security

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ABSTRACT. The African continent is plagued by some of the most brutal and violent conflicts in the world. At the same time that warfare is changing, so has the state's capacity to provide security and political stability to its citizens. In this context, what is the role of new conflict management actors, in particular regional organizations? This article starts out by situating conflicts and peace operations on the African continent. It then moves on to problematize the role of regional organizations in African security with emphasis on three key topics: (1) the advantages and disadvantages of African regional and subregional organizations vis-à-vis other security mechanisms, in particular UN peace operations; (2) the official and unofficial reasons to intervene; and (3) whether security is actually protected by the peace activities carried out by the regional organizations.

INTRODUCTION

Some of the most challenging conflicts in the world over the past two decades are found in Africa (e.g., Burundi, Chad, Darfur, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Uganda). Despite the varied and complex nature of armed violence on the continent, most share a number of characteristics, which in the literature are sometimes referred to as "new wars" in contradistinction to "old wars."[1]

A characteristic of these wars is the new prominence demanded by, and given to, subnational actors and groups like rebel movements and mercenaries who often try to function as though they were recognized members of the international community. The actions of these actors and the nature of these

crises have undermined perceptions of the state in Africa as the dominant and significant actor in the international system. These groups have succeeded in introducing new practices into the conduct of armed conflicts, effectively contesting some archetypal conceptions of modern warfare (one reason why some scholars prefer the "new wars" label). Subsequently, the dynamics of these conflicts have also influenced, and indeed transformed, the patterns of subregional and external involvement in, and responses to, such crises. This has at least two important implications.

First, in many of these wars and conflicts, the distinction between combatants and civilians is unclear, as is that between who is "good" and "evil," "friend" and "foe," because loyalties are quickly changing. Second, even if most contemporary conflicts in Africa are often defined as "domestic," they are deeply embedded in a regional and cross-border context. As illustrated by the cases in Liberia, Sierra Leone, the DRC, and more recently Sudan/Chad, most conflicts on the African continent spill over into neighboring countries or draw regional actors into what is often better understood as "regional war zones." Although the Uppsala Conflict Database shows that the number of armed conflicts in Africa is decreasing (from 18 conflicts in 1999, to 12 in 2008),[2] the striking feature of African warfare is the regionalization of conflict.[3]

When the international community does intervene to mitigate armed struggles—most often in the form of a United Nations peacekeeping mission—the results have been mixed. Most of the difficulties are connected to the heterogeneity and complexity of conflict in Africa. During the Cold War, most conflicts in Africa followed the systemic logic of that order. They formed part of the bipolar struggle or were "solved" by way of interventions from superpowers, former colonial powers, or powerful neighbors. However, in the post–Cold War era a new pattern has emerged whereby conflicts are allowed to erupt (often erratically) and also continue, waiting for more appropriate solutions. In this regard, some peace operations have succeeded, while many others have failed to quell violence or restore order in the countries to which they were deployed. Presently, the UN leads (or co-leads) eight peace operations in Africa (Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Western Sahara, Central African Republic/Chad, Darfur, and Sudan). In total, there have been twenty-six UN peacekeeping missions in Africa since 1948.

Despite the increasing UN presence in Africa, over the past decade there has been another notable peacekeeping trend: *regional peacekeeping*, which has emerged for several reasons. One reason is the aforementioned pattern of the regionalization of conflict, which calls for the intervention of regional organizations and/or neighboring countries to address their common regional problem. Another reason is the weakness of the UN system to come up with relevant solutions. It is clear today that the UN has neither enough resources nor the political will to engage with all security problems, hence the growing

concern for security regionalism. As Haas already pointed out at the end of the Cold War, "regional security arrangements grow in direct proportion to disappointment with the UN collective security system."[4] According to Chapter VIII of the United Nations Charter, regional arrangements and agencies[5] can, and have been, empowered to engage in regional conflicts. Indeed, today the debate between the comparative advantages of either the UN or regional organizations to address violent conflicts has emerged among policymakers as well as in the research community as one of the most important issues in the global security architecture.

How does this debate apply to Africa? Over the past two decades the continent has provided the testing ground for major regional peacekeeping interventions. Peacekeeping operations have been deployed by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in Liberia (1990–1998 and 2003), Sierra Leone (1997–2000), Guinea Bissau (1998–1999), and Côte D'Ivoire (2003–2004); the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in Lesotho (1998) and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (1998); the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC) in the Central African Republic (2002–2008); the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) also in the Central African Republic (2008–); and, finally, the AU in Burundi (2003–2004 and 2007–), Sudan (2004–2007), Somalia (since 2007), and Comoros (2006 and 2008). Inter-governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) also has experience in peacemaking in Sudan and Somalia.

Moreover, African leaders have been leading the way in the establishment of regional mechanisms to handle peace and security issues. The creation of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) in 2002 is perhaps the most important development in the security field during the past decade. In addition to creating the necessary decision-making bodies in Addis Ababa, such as the Peace and Security Council, the Military Staff Committee, and the Panel of the Wise, APSA will be comprised of the African Stand-by Force (ASF) based on five regional brigades to be established by each of the subregional organizations (ECOWAS, SADC, IGAD, ECCAS, and Arab Maghreb Union [UMA]). The setting up of the regional brigades, in compliance with the African security architecture framework, has to accommodate—often with some difficulties—the existing peace and security schemes that have been developed by these very same regional organizations.

When the African heads of state and government decided to reshape the Organization of African Unity (OAU) into the African Union (AU), one of the main impetuses behind the transformation was the declared will to tackle "African problems through African solutions." This vision has also been forcefully supported by the international community, in particular Western powers. There exist, however, fundamental differences of outlook and style among the regional organizations, reflecting different perceptions of threat, historical

experience, and cultural background, with correspondingly different strategies toward the maintenance of peace and security.

This special issue is motivated by the fact that the role of African regional organizations in conflict prevention, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding still remains an underresearched topic. We argue that the determination with which the international community has delegated power to regional organizations has not been matched by a thorough understanding of this process. The article gives prominence to some key questions that hitherto have not received enough systematic and comparative treatment in the debate: (1) the advantages and disadvantages of African regional and subregional organizations vis-à-vis other security mechanisms, in particular UN peace operations; (2) the interaction between the "official" versions to intervene and the underlying interests of involved actors; and (3) whether security is actually protected by these organizations. Before problematizing these three issues in detail, it is necessary to situate security regionalism in a wider conceptual and theoretical context.

DEBATES ABOUT SECURITY REGIONALISM[6]

Regionalism and security can be related in many different ways. One has to do with the choice of unit of investigation—for example, a regional security complex—defined by Barry Buzan as "a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national security cannot realistically be considered apart from one another."[7] The concept has been rethought in a multisectoral and constructivist direction, making the actual delimitation of the unit more nuanced but not easier since different security sectors (economic, environmental, societal) may define different regions.[8] The idea of securitization further adds to the fluency of the concept.[9]

In an alternative approach developed by Lake and Morgan, regions are defined in terms of the mode of security management or "regional order."[10] Regional orders can shift from simple balance of power systems or concerts to more comprehensive communities or integrated polities. Lake and Morgan suggest an alternative definition of regional security complex: "the states affected by at least one transborder but local security externality."[11] More recently, Tavares suggested that the regional unit of analysis should be defined by its content and proposed the idea of regional peace and security clusters (RPSC), defined as a set of peace and security relations that occur in a broad territory (region), driven by agents, operating at various levels of regional integration, who use various instruments to change the patterns of security, conflict, and positive peace.[12]

Another link between regionalism and security concerns the regional implications of a local conflict. These depend on the nature of the security complex and the way various security problems are vertically and horizontally

linked in particular regions, which can be highly varying. Most and Starr have demonstrated, with substantial empirical data, that if a war begins on a nation's border, that nation might then become involved in a new military conflict depending on the perceived changes in the nation's vulnerability, uncertainty, risks, and the opportunities that accompany the onset of the military conflict. In general, they assume that the likelihood of diffusion is particularly high among states in a region because such states interact more extensively than other states.[13]

The regionalization of conflict is tightly connected to the third link: the role of the region for regional security, conflict management, and peacebuilding. That there may often be a role for regional cooperation in the case a conflict has spread within a region is more or less self-evident. However, it has also become increasingly evident during recent decades that many so called "national" or "domestic" conflicts can be understood and dealt with only in their regional contexts.[14] This is particularly the case in Africa.

Indeed, with the rise of so-called "new regionalism" in recent decades, regional organizations have become actors in their own right. A number of them—including AU, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), ECOWAS, EU, and SADC—have acquired some kind of institutionalized mechanism for conflict management and regional peacekeeping. Regions, through their regional agencies, have transformed from objects into subjects, making their relationship to the UN much more complex than current policy and academic debates tend to recognize. This leads us to the first of the three key issues.

REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS VERSUS OTHER SECURITY MECHANISMS

Most observers claim that the UN constitutes the foundation of a rules-based world order. Go-it-alone strategies outside of a UN framework—for instance, through NATO plurilateralism or U.S. unilateralism—are anathema.[15] Regionalism constitutes the main rules-based alternative to UN–based multilateralism, and its role has been intensively discussed at various junctures during the past century. Yet, even if the UN Secretary-General's reports, *In Larger Freedom* (2005)[16] or *A Regional-Global Security Partnership: Challenges and Opportunities* (2006), both conclude that multilateralism and regionalism can be complementary; the prevailing belief is that "UN primacy must be kept in all cases."[17] This is the vision enshrined in the UN charter. It authorizes the regional bodies to engage with pacific settlement of local disputes (Art. 52), including traditional peacekeeping (Chapter VI), before referring them to the Security Council, or with peace enforcement (robust peacekeeping) after Security Council authorization (Art. 53). In this conception, the region is simply an intermediate actor that undertakes tasks determined

at and delegated from the multilateral level. The main purpose of regional agencies, according to this perspective, is to contribute to a multilateral system controlled by the UN Security Council.

Some proponents of this line have certainly developed greater recognition of the role of regional organizations. Ramesh Thakur, for instance, has acknowledged that there is an increasing gap between legality and legitimacy in multilateralism and that the UN cannot deliver a legitimate world order on its own. Regional arrangements closer to home can in this view counter perceptions of "external imposition" by a distant global UN. Yet this approach stresses that, to be legitimate, such regionalism must be compatible with and contribute to UN–based multilateralism. For Thakur, regional organizations can fill some of the gaps within multilateralism, but they must do so within the UN framework.[18] In other words, it is a vertical order whereby multilateral sanction is necessary for regional interventions to be legal and fully legitimate.

However, contemporary realities of global politics do not accommodate this idealized hierarchical order. Emerging regional formations assume a degree of actor capacity that traditional regional agencies lacked when the UN charter was drafted. For example, whereas the Charter of the Organization of American States (OAS), signed in 1948, mentions that the organization is a regional agency for UN purposes (Chapter VIII), the AU's right to intervene is somehow disassociated from the UN charter. Whereas the UN charter authorizes regional agencies to enforce peace with the overall objective "to maintain international peace and security," the AU has given itself the right to intervene when, for example, there are "threats to legitimate order." The role of the United Nations Security Council in such interventions is yet unclear. This shows that the conventional hierarchical relationship between multilateralism and regionalism is being transformed, sometimes even challenged.[19]

In fact, research on the relationship between multilateral and regional interventions is above all limited to peacekeeping, conflict prevention, and humanitarian intervention, and this debate is somewhat separated from the broader literature about regions and regionalism.[20] In addition, the literature under the banner of intervention is overwhelmingly dominated by a normative position that favors multilateralism as the preferred mode of intervention.[21] This has lead to a lack of genuine debate between multilateralists and regionalists and to a lack of systematic comparative research on the two different modes of managing security and building peace. This special issue seeks to remedy this weakness by providing elucidatory empirical data on the role of regional organizations in comparison to other modes of security management. As a starting point, it notes that African organizations are one out of a wide range of other actors that may provide peace and security (e.g., the UN, states, foreign powers, international nongovernmental organizations)

and calls for a critical assessment of the advantages or disadvantages of delegating power to the regional and subregional organizations. This is an issue of critical importance in the academic and policy debate.

It is sometimes argued that regional organizations offer large comparative advantages relative to UN operations or other types of interventions (unilateral, plurilateral, or ad hoc interventions).[22] First, as the members of a regional organization share the same cultural background, they are likely to be more in tune with a conflict at hand. Second, personal relationships with the leaders have developed in the past, which results in greater understanding of the situation and may result in fruitful dialogue based on personal trust. Third, as time management is essential in a crisis situation, regional organizations could offer a more timely response, compared to bureaucratic global organizations such as the UN or foreign states. Fourth, as the members of a regional organization are the ones who would suffer more directly the impacts of the conflict, they have a legitimate vital interest at stake in preserving regional stability. Do these theoretical comparative advantages apply in the African context?

WHY INTERVENE?

The synergies that have been created toward supporting African agencies trigger an important question: what leads African regional and subregional organizations to intervene in violent conflicts? Is the decision-making process led by a "just" and egalitarian intention to prevent and resolve conflicts, or may one find unofficial triggers for the interventions? It is almost commonsense to say that international policies are enveloped by a cloud of rhetorical statements that sometimes camouflages the true intentions of policymakers. This special issue aims to highlight this ambivalence by pinpointing the interests and the pressures involved in a country's decision to support a regional peace operation. Our objective in this regard is to deconstruct the stated and official reasons to intervene in order to try to capture a more comprehensive picture of African peace operations, including the fundamental question of what is happening on the ground as a way of better understanding why peace operations and interventions are actually carried out in Africa. In the decision to intervene, there may be ideological or political interests. One may also find personal linkages between leaders, kinship affiliations, or family ties that help to explain the outcome. Peacekeeping is also a lucrative business, and economic interests may be at stake.

In order to better understand the importance as well as complexity of this question, let us try to assess the reasons behind the AU's intervention in Darfur. Its original mandate was to monitor compliance with the N'djamena Agreement, assist with confidence-building measures, and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance. From a regional stance, Sudan offered an opportunity for the AU to demonstrate its ability to resolve African conflicts. South Africa and Nigeria were elected to the AU's Peace and Security Council

in March 2004 and wanted to embolden the AU. Darfur was, therefore, a test case for the Peace and Security Council's ability to play a central role in preventing and resolving conflict across the continent.

Apart from these triggers, troop-contributing countries (Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Senegal, Gambia, and Kenya) seem to have pursued their national interests through these interventions. As well, Nigeria and South Africa's hegemonic status and their self-perception as continental leaders encouraged their interventions. To stay away from intervening in a vital conflict like Darfur was not an option. Smaller countries had different agendas. Rwanda, for instance, was led to intervene for reasons that were associated with its 1994 genocide and to prevent the Sudanese people from suffering an equal level of oppression and violence. It is illustrative that when Rwanda first deployed its troops in Darfur in 2004, the AU mandate did not specifically authorize AU troops to protect civilians, but Rwandan President Paul Kagame insisted that Rwandan troops would intervene if civilians were threatened.[23] In addition, Rwanda was strongly persuaded by the United States to intervene. The United States regarded Darfur as a major concern and compelled Rwanda, a regional ally, to intervene. Washington supplied the military equipment and the logistics necessary for the intervention (namely it airlifted the Rwandese army).

There are many important questions related to the question of what triggers the interventions. For instance, why has the African Union intervened with a peacekeeping mission in Burundi and Darfur/Sudan crisis but remains dislocated from the conflict in Uganda (active since 1987)? Other interventions, like ECOWAS in Liberia and in Sierra Leone are believed to have camouflaged the economic and political self-interests of Nigeria. The increasing enthusiasm of the international community for African regional organizations has overlooked some of the unofficial (biased) causes for military interventions in conflicts. Once the biased causes for interventions are identified, shall regional organizations still be considered an asset in peace and security? Are regional organizations instrumentalized by regional players in the complex game of influence, ethnic interests, and individual motivations? The articles in this special issue seek to identify causes and types of interventions beneath the official and rhetorical tone of political discourse.

WHOSE SECURITY?

Conventionally, security is closely associated with the security of the state. In this sense, security is tied to territorial integrity, national security, and state-centric welfare provision objectives rather than to the individual per se. In the early-to mid-1990s, however, a paradigmatic shift occurred wherein state security was problematized and the individual became the locus of human security concerns. The focus on human security in combination with

state security is significant for understanding the change of the security discourse and the fundamental challenge to sovereignty during the 1990s. Implied in concepts such as "human security," "human development," "human emergency," and "humanitarian intervention," is the idea of a transnational responsibility for human security and welfare (the responsibility to protect, R2P). This discourse has after 9/11 been overshadowed by the discourse on global terrorism, but the R2P concept still has wide support. This normative order has had a deep impact on regional organizations, not least in Africa.

Though subject to debate regarding its extent, most observers will agree that globalization in its various forms tends to erode the policymaking capacity of states, at least in the south, which in turn implies a need to problematize state/national security. In the case of many African states, globalization challenges governments to provide public goods, such as domestic security.[24] In an oft-discussed study, Berdal and Malone argue that the forces of globalization also generate an environment that enables elite groups in weak states to engage in self-interested economic dealings not only domestically but also internationally by means of "trade, investment, and migration ties, both legal and illegal, to neighbouring states and more distant, industrialized economies."[25] In effect, a blurring takes place between the international and domestic realms, something that is either largely ignored or artificially separated by traditional or realist discourses.[26]

The false dichotomy between international and domestic affairs has significant implications for human security (and human development). A conventional state-centric approach legitimates states policies with respect to citizens by placing the domestic domain beyond the parameters of inquiry ". . . [as] the exclusive referent object of security was the state; what happens to the state matters and what happens to the people within is of second-order importance."[27]

Indeed, sometimes the state is merely a fiction (at least in certain parts of the world, including parts of Africa), and as an actor the state may be fueling conflict and threatening human security. At other times, the state undoubtedly provides human security in a hostile environment. It is therefore important to recognize that nonstate actors are also part of the security logic, both in a positive and a negative sense. In this partly new situation, it is relevant to ask who threatens whom and who should be secured from what. The state cannot be taken for granted, but it cannot be wished away either. The state is thus both part of the problem and its solution. One important task is to unpack the state and investigate when and for whom the state and regional security mechanisms are a threat or a shelter.

ORGANIZATION OF THIS ISSUE OF *AFRICAN SECURITY*

This special issue gathers some leading scholars on Africa's security. In the first article Ulf Engel and João Gomes Porto provide an update on the

implementation of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). In particular, they reflect on the principles underlying its architectural design, which is discussed as a security regime in the making. Engel and Porto show the fundamental role played by the new AU Commission and identify some of the constrains that it is facing in the setting up of APSA.

Their article sets the stage for the thorough assessment carried out by Paul Williams on the AU's peace operations. Between 2003 and 2008 the AU deployed peace operations involving approximately 15,000 soldiers to four states: Burundi, Sudan, the Comoros, and Somalia. Williams provides an overview of the AU's peace operations in these cases and addresses fundamental questions about how successful these operations have been, what challenges they raise for the Union's peacekeepers, and whether this tempo of operations is sustainable.

The following four articles focus on subregional organizations that have been particularly active in the security field. Cyril I. Obi provides a comparative analysis of two decades of ECOWAS–initiated peacekeeping missions in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau, and Côte d'Ivoire as a basis for understanding Africa's most advanced regional peace and security mechanism. Obi analyzes the evolution of the ECOWAS Peace and Security Framework and identifies its merits, shortcomings, and challenges.

Tim Murithi assesses the conflict system affecting the Horn of Africa, with a specific focus on the role of the Inter-governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in Sudan and Somalia. The article shows that these two interventions simultaneously illustrate the strength and weakness of IGAD as a subregional actor. More specifically, the Sudan case demonstrates IGAD's appropriateness in managing the conflict between the North and South, given the marginalization of the AU and the UN. On the other hand the Somalia case illustrates the chronic limitations inherent in not only IGAD but also other regional organizations in Africa.

Angela Meyer deals with regional peace operations in Central Africa. After a short overview of the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa's (CEMAC) peace operation in the Central African Republic (CAR), her article concentrates on the reasons why its capacity to create self-sustaining security has been rather limited. The main emphasis is placed on the underlying interests of involved governments, which have largely compromised the mission's ability to serve the population's needs as well as broader human security. This gap between rhetoric and reality raises the question of whose security is actually protected. Meyer concludes by discussing major challenges for CEMAC's successor, the Economic Community of Central African States' (ECCAS) Mission de Consolidation de la paix en Centrafrique (MICOPAX).

Maxi Schoeman and Marie Muller analyze the ability of SADC as a subregional organization to provide peace and security within and between its members, using the conflicts and interventions in Lesotho and the DRC as case studies. The authors pay particular attention to the discrepancy between

"official" and "unofficial" reasons to intervene and to the issue of whose security is protected. Schoeman and Muller conclude that although the SADC region cannot be described as a zone of war, there is nevertheless no genuine capacity for promoting the well-being of the people of the region and that SADC is inherently a "sovereignty-boosting" form of regional governance rather than an ascending security community.

This special issue also incorporates a practitioner's perspective by João Gomes Cravinho, Portuguese Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation and one of the people responsible for the design of the EU–African Union Strategic Partnership. Cravinho argues that African regional organizations have an opportunity to consolidate and develop their vision of peace and stability on the continent. The main problem, according to Cravinho, is that these regional organizations still lack the depth of resources and experience for them to act alone. As a result of the external dependence, the author also challenges the popular vision about "African solutions to African problems."

The concluding article makes a comparative analysis of the role of regional organizations in African security using the empirical evidence provided by the six case studies included in this special issue. It is structured according to the three general questions posed in this introduction: (1) the role of African regional organizations vis-à-vis multilateral security mechanisms, (2) the causes of intervention, and (3) whose security is actually protected by the peace activities carried out by the regional organizations. The article concludes by looking at how these three questions contribute to the larger debate on how we define security.

NOTES

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2. Lotta Harbom and Peter Wallensteen, "Armed Conflict, 1946–2008," *Journal of Peace Research* 46, no. 4 (2009): 577–587.

3. Rodrigo Tavares, "Regional Clustering of Peace and Security," *Global Change, Peace and Security* 21, no. 2 (2009): 153–164; Peter Wallensteen and Margareta Sollenberg "Armed Conflict and Regional Conflict Complexes, 1989–97," *Journal of Peace Research* 35, no. 5 (1998): 621–634.

4. Michael Haas, *The Pacific Way: Regional Cooperation in the South Pacific* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1989), 93.

5. The distinction between the concepts of "agency" and "arrangement" concerns the degree of formality of the entity in question. A regional agency is a recognized organization with legal personality and an organizational structure (secretariat) located in a member country. A regional arrangement, on the other hand, is a grouping of states under a treaty for a specified common purpose without any organization to personify that arrangement. In this second case, organizational functions are carried out by the member states themselves. See Rodrigo Tavares, *Regional*

Security: The Capacity of International Organizations (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 9.

6. Some arguments in this section build on Björn Hettne and Fredrik Söderbaum and Rodrigo Tavares, "Regional Security in a Global Perspective," in *Africa's New Peace and Security Architecture: Promoting Norms and Institutionalising Solutions*, eds. Ulf Engel, João Gomes Porto and Doug Bond (vol. 1, Aldershot: Ashgate, forthcoming).

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22. Björn Hettne and Fredrik Söderbaum, "Intervening in Complex Humanitarian Emergencies: The Role of Regional Cooperation," *European Journal of Development Research* 17, no. 3, (2005): 449–461; Tavares, *Regional Security*.

23. See "Darfur: Rwanda Troops to Protect Civilians," *Human Rights News*, August 17th, 2004.

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27. ibid.