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for the care of victims of torture



No Safe Place : Children of Mothers Fleeing
Torture and Sexual Violence

North East Conference on Sexual Violence November 2010



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Medical Foundation North East

Margaret Bird Counsellor/Caseworker



What do we mean ?

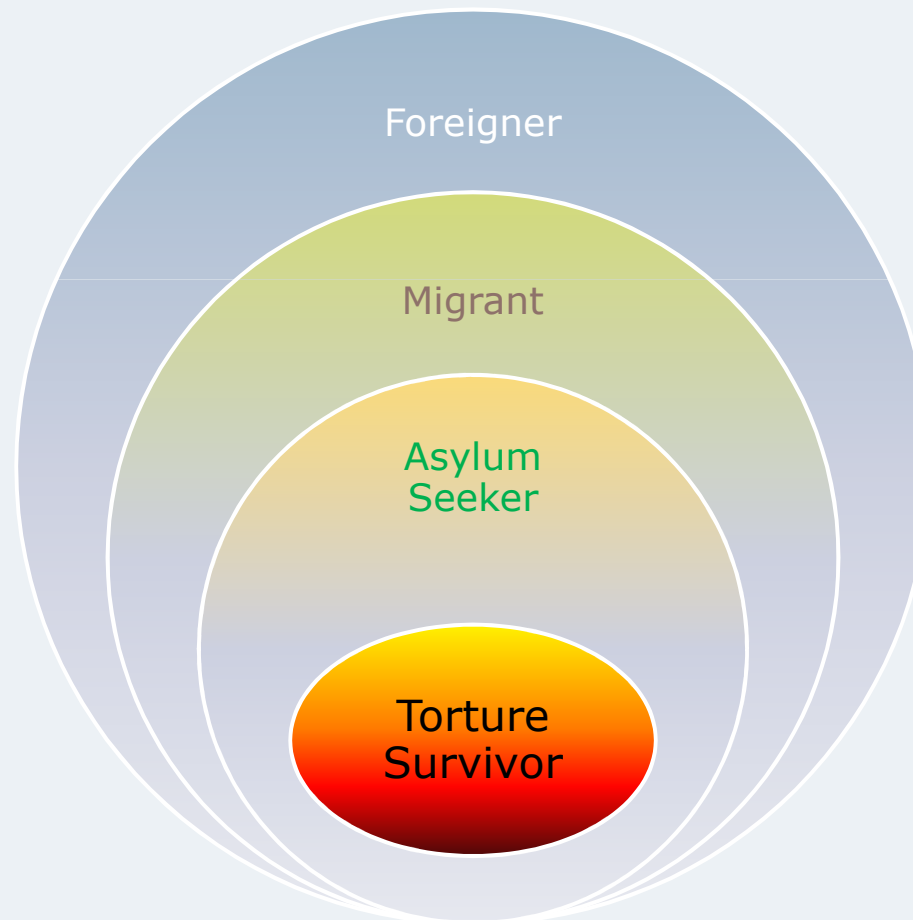
- ▶ **Asylum Seeker** – someone who is fleeing persecution in their country of origin, has arrived in another country, made themselves known to the authorities and exercise the legal right to apply for asylum.
- ▶ **Refugee** – someone whose asylum application has been successful and who is allowed to stay in another country having proved they would face persecution in their own country. Refugees in the UK have the same rights as permanent residents.



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Torture Survivors Context





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Multiple Contexts

People seeking support from Medical Foundation are living within multiple contexts -

- ▶ Triple Trauma Model – trauma, fleeing, exile
- ▶ Gender based persecution/use of sexual violence as torture – women’s experiences in CO and UK
- ▶ European and UK legislation
- ▶ Asylum Process in the UK – culture of disbelief; uncertainty; dispersal; detention
- ▶ Provision for basic human needs
- ▶ Psychological / Psychotherapeutic Issues
- ▶ Access to legal, medical and psychological support
- ▶ Power imbalances – structural, individual, including racism, sexism
- ▶ Professional’s / Supporter’s own responses/parallel processes/power position/history
- ▶ Parenting within extreme, terrifying and traumatic circumstances
- ▶ ‘Triple Jeopardy’ for children and young people

- ▶ Human rights – for whom?



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Trauma



Types of Torture I

- ▶ Blunt Trauma: crushing injuries, whipping, beatings
- ▶ Penetrating Injuries: gunshots, shrapnel, stab wounds, slash cuts
- ▶ Suspension
- ▶ Burns: chemical and thermal, cold and heat
- ▶ Asphyxiation: wet, dry, chemical
- ▶ Electric Shocks
- ▶ Forced Human Experimentation



Types of Torture 2

- ▶ Traumatic Removal of Tissue / Appendages: via either direct avulsion or explosion
- ▶ Extreme Physical Conditions: forced body positions (prolonged constraint) and extreme heat/cold conditions
- ▶ Sexual Torture: sexual humiliation, trauma to genitalia including FGM and electrocution, rape and other sexual assault, forced to enact sexual torture
- ▶ Mental Torture: direct threats, sensory deprivation, solitary confinement, mock execution, witnessing torture, uprooting



Contexts of Sexual Violence

- ▶ Rape is used as a **weapon** in war, civil conflict as well as ‘non-war’ contexts, in the home as well as ‘dangerous’ places
- It may be used by men as a **perceived right within marriage**
- And as a **tool of control** to limit women’s behaviour, to control: when, where and how we can use public space
 - ▶ (e.g. judges have referred to the length of a women's’ skirts, accepting lifts, invitations to dance ...
 - ▶ ... if you do these things many people say that the rape is your fault



Some Effects of Rape / Fear of Reporting

Impacts of sexual violence are grave; women may be affected for the rest of their lives. It can lead to :

- Physical injury and serious / chronic medical problems
- Psychological damage
- Life-threatening consequences - HIV/AIDS
- Forced pregnancy, infertility , miscarriage
- Stigmatization / rejection by family members and communities or being 'punished' by further violence / death (many women feel shame, fearing rejection from husbands, families, communities if they speak about / report having been raped. The threat of divorce or possibility of becoming "unmarriageable" underlies many women's reluctance to voice their experiences;
- Further vulnerability (additionally it may not be safe to report to authorities as they may be the perpetrators or the system may not provide protection or redress)

Medical Foundation 'Justice Denied' Report (2009) www.torturecare.org.uk

Amnesty International www.amnestyusa.org/women/rapeinwartime.html



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Honour and Shame

“Violence against women is based on traditional views of women as men’s property, and as sexual objects.

Around the world, women have long been attributed the role of transmitters of culture and symbols of nation or community.

Sexual violence against women is often considered an attack against the values or "honour" of a society, community as well as the individual women, making it a particularly potent weapon

Amnesty International

www.amnestyusa.org/women/rapeinwartime.html



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Ways in which children may be affected

- ▶ Abduction to join an army of government or rebel soldiers (child soldiers)
- ▶ Rape / other sexual abuse before puberty or during adolescence
- ▶ Pregnancy during adolescence
- ▶ Being forced to murder and to rape during adolescence
- ▶ Being present at the abduction, abuse, torture, rape, or murder of parents / other family members
- ▶ Separation from significant attachment figures, eg being left behind, fleeing unaccompanied



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Escape



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Children's experiences

- Children who have experienced political violence, separation, loss and change can have their development severely damaged
- The events can affect a child's capacity to deal with new situations
- They may be unable to speak about their experiences



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Children's Experiences

- Young torture survivors are likely to suffer a series of psychological symptoms that intimately impact on their sleep, their ability to trust, their relationships, their ability to care for themselves, and their ability to engage with life in the present.



One framework : Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

Characterised by:

- Intrusion of traumatic experiences (eg nightmares, persistent memories, visions, associations)
- Anxiety /Arousal(eg panic, easily triggered, constant vigilance)
- Avoidance (eg distraction, dissociation, active forgetting)



Impact of Trauma on Children

- Adolescent soldiers are more likely than their more mature comrades to develop post traumatic stress disorder in combat
- Adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable to the trauma of sexual abuse
- The experience of terror and powerlessness during adolescence (and preadolescence) effectively compromises the three normal adaptive tasks of this stage of life:
 - the formation of identity,
 - the gradual separation from the family of origin
 - the exploration of a wider social world

Judith Herman



Impact of Trauma on Children

- The traumatic impact of abuse on children has a key consequence -

The fragmentation of the internal world

- Abused children experience a high level of disruption in their development and a sequence of experiences that are by definition overwhelming.



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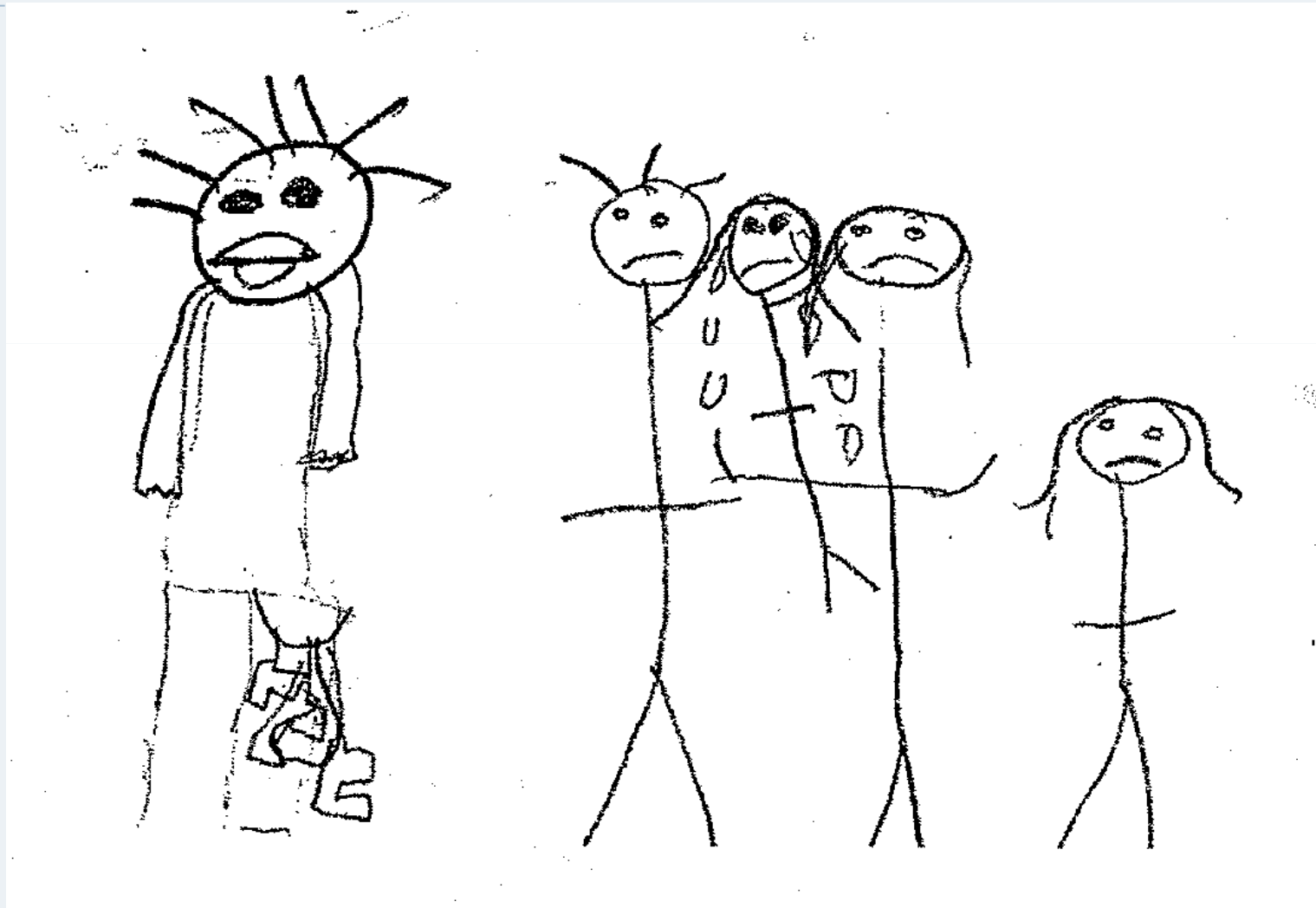
Exile



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Children in the UK

- ▶ May have been born as a result of rape
- ▶ May have fled separately and been later reunited with parent / carer / family members
- ▶ May have fled following parents / carers abduction, imprisonment, disappearance or murder
- ▶ May have lost siblings, left them behind or have siblings in CO never known
- ▶ May be subject to dawn raids
- ▶ May be detained in the UK
- ▶ May be removed forcibly from the UK



Triple Jeopardy

Refugee children suffer increased vulnerability due to –

- ▶ *Children and young people themselves* - Disturbing nature of terrifying experiences – difficult to ‘hold’ or put into words
- ▶ *Their parents or carers* – often find it just as difficult to hold those experiences in mind; additionally refugee adults very often may not know their way around the system or how to access help
- ▶ *Potential Support agencies* - Mental health services for children and young people often finding it very hard to hold terrifying overwhelming nature of refugee experiences in mind; furthermore services often not set up to manage quality of refugee children’s vulnerabilities and multitude of loss, deprivation and horror, plus practical dilemmas in UK

Jeremy Woodcock



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Children of Traumatized Refugee Parents

Some Possible Impacts :

Overloaded by situation

Distress and disturbance of parent

Fear of losing parent

Fear that parent's life will be threatened again in exile

Deterioration in child's mental health



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UNCRC

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

- ▶ Sept 2008 - UK had to withdraw a 'reservation' to the UNCRC with regard to children subject to immigration control
- ▶ In accordance with the UNCRC the best interests of the child will be a primary consideration (although not necessarily the only consideration) when making decisions affecting children.



Interface of Legal and Psychological Processes

- ▶ Common assumption that severe violence and torture will be easily remembered.
- ▶ Discrepancies in stories are used to undermine credibility and refuse asylum claim.
- ▶ Lack of information aimed at lawyers.
- ▶ Life and death decisions made by people who have little understanding of these significant psychological processes.



Interface of Legal and Psychological Processes

- ▶ Decisions over whether to grant asylum predominantly based on the asylum seeker's story.
- ▶ Story must be consistent and appear credible in the eyes of the Home Office.
- ▶ Expected to recall very specific details about events.

I WAS TORTURED
IN MY OWN COUNTRY
I THOUGHT I WOULD
BE SAFE IN BRITAIN
BUT INSTEAD THEY
DON'T BELIEVE ME
AND THEY'RE GOING
TO SEND US BACK



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www.torturecare.org.uk tel 020-7697-7832

Artists for Justice & Peace January 2012



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NB:

- ▶ Rape as a method of torture can also affect recall and disclosure of information.
- ▶ *Bogner, Herlihy and Brewin 2007*

- Significant relationship between feelings of shame and PTSD avoidance symptoms:
 - Avoiding thoughts and feelings about traumatic event
 - Having difficulty remembering important parts of the traumatic event

Plus frequently issues of language and cultural barriers



Children in immigration detention:

- ▶ are made to feel as if they are criminals – for example ,
Being subject to dawn raids, long journeys in caged vans, roll counts, encountering racist abuse, witnessing violence and watching their parents being handcuffed and forced onto aeroplanes.
- ▶ When the Chief Inspector of Prisons asked what would make life better, detained children said they would like to go swimming and to return to their schools.



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Experience



Exacerbation





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Children In Immigration Detention

- ▶ **2009 : 1065 children believed to have been detained**
- ▶ **Powers to detain children still remain with the UK Border Agency**

Recent Research: Medical Justice Report (2010)

‘State Sponsored Cruelty’ :

Children in Immigration Detention

documents childrens and families experiences

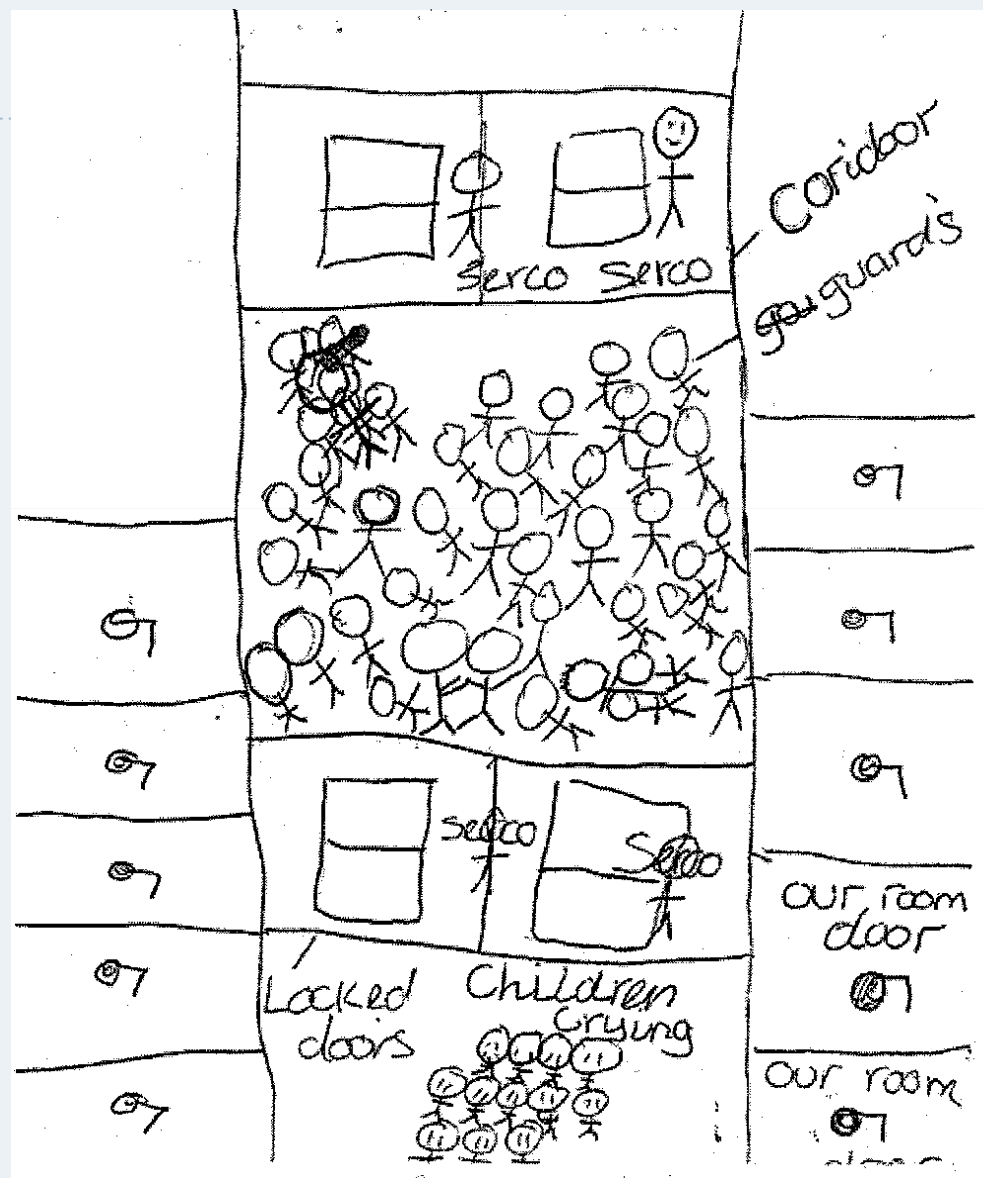
in detention in UK

www.medicaljustice.org.uk



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Some Protective Factors

Adequate emotional expression

Supportive family relations

Good peer relations

Positive networks and social communication

Importance of good supportive environment



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Working together



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Some resources

- ▶ www.torturecare.org.uk
Medical Foundation Report : **Justice Denied** : *Experiences of 100 torture surviving women*
- ▶ www.amnesty.org
Amnesty Report : **I can't afford justice** : *Violence against women in Uganda*
- ▶ www.medicaljustice.org.uk
Medical Justice Report : **State Sponsored Cruelty** : *Children in Immigration Detention*
- ▶ www.childrenssociety.org.uk
Children's Society Report : **Going It Alone** : *(Children in the asylum process)*
- ▶ www.refugeecouncil.org.uk
- ▶ www.drc.vday.org *Campaign against rape of women in Congo*
- ▶ www.asylumaid.org.charter *Women's Asylum Charter*
- ▶ www.womenagainstrape.net
(Rights and information sheet for survivors of rape seeking asylum in the UK)
- ▶ www.csel.org.uk *Centre for the Study of Emotion and Law; research papers*



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**STOP RAPING
OUR GREATEST
RESOURCE**

Two survivors under the age of 9. PHOTO: PAULA ALLEN © 2007

STOP RAPING OUR
GREATEST RESOURCE
**POWER TO
WOMEN
AND GIRLS**
OF DEMOCRATIC
REPUBLIC OF CONGO

V DAY
FOR WOMEN

unicef

STOP RAPE
CONGO



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Medical Foundation

- ▶ MLR (incl Psych & Couns)
- ▶ Human rights work
- ▶ Research and Publications
- ▶ Political influence
- ▶ Volunteers
- ▶ Supporters
- ▶ Placements

People using services

- ▶ Holistic Assessment
- ▶ Individual therapy sessions
- ▶ Trauma Work
- ▶ Groupwork
- ▶ Creative activities
- ▶ Supervision / Consultation
- ▶ Training /awareness raising
- ▶ Supporting development of other services



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