Silence and Articulating:
Lived Histories of the Trout Lake Anishinawbe

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The way in which some contemporary archaeologists conduct themselves as they work within the traditional territories of Canada’s First Nations has come under scrutiny. In some instances, archaeological activity has resulted in the silencing of First Peoples’ lived experiences in the grand narrative of Canada. While many Aboriginal people are currently aware of heritage poaching and work towards its prevention, most have little support and few resources to influence those who train archaeologists: Canadian universities. Archaeology is used to help resolve many contentious issues that are faced by First Nations, including land claims, land use management and resources extraction. Archaeologists and the archaeological process would benefit when a greater amount of respect is afforded to First Nations culture and heritage. This article will explore how one Aboriginal community, the Trout Lake Anishinawbek, has struggled with archaeological activity on their traditional territory.

THE SUPPRESSION OF ABORIGINAL HISTORY

Until now, formal historical narratives about Canada have originated and been communicated according to EuroCanadian perspectives (Gaffield, 2006; Paul, 2006). Canadians of European descent hold vast political power, educational authority and social control to the extent that they determine the events and key figures in mainstream historical accounts (Griffiths, 2004; Barton, 2006; Coutts, 1996). This form of domination has resulted in the Aboriginal peoples of Canada having their historical perspectives and cultural representations devalued and silenced (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). Silencing practices, which are only recently undergoing gradual change, began at European contact and continues to this day.

The history of Aboriginal peoples in Canada’s grand narrative is suppressed (Stanley, 2006). The Trout Lake Anishinawbek of northwestern Ontario provides one example of how Aboriginal groups have suffered from the
effects of a silenced history. Over the last 150 years, their traditional land use areas were the sites of Canadian nation-building activities: the construction of the first transcontinental railway, extensive gold-mining pursuits, and massive hydro-electric development. Resource exploitation and development has been devastating to the Anishinawbe people. Their internal economic activities have been so seriously compromised that they were forced into sedentary lifestyles. This was extremely detrimental to their long-standing cultural traditions. The lack of knowledge and interest by non-Aboriginal Canadians of how First Nations’ lives were thus marginalized is one cause of the silence in accepted historical recordings of this area (Hall, 1991). The identification and interpretation by Aboriginal people of the life experiences that comprise their histories, as well as key figures in their many lifestyle transitions are rarely mentioned in any textbook narration.

The absence of the lived histories of the Anishinawbe from public consciousness was furthered by the Department of Indian Affairs’ imposition of residential schooling, which provided an education that was imposed by the nation/state of Canada (Wilson, 2004). Most Trout Lake youngsters were forced to attend the Sioux Lookout residential school and were not allowed to speak their own indigenous language (National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2006). Such restrictions in school supported the goals of Canada as a nation: it met the acculturation intentions of the federal Indian Act and the hegemonic objectives of defining a national language (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. 1996; Billig, 1999). Students were therefore educated to meet the needs of EuroCanadian society and forced to adopt mainstream values (Law Commission of Canada, 2000). So began the erosion of Aboriginal cultural ways, including the socialization traditions that are embedded within language, such as values, judgments, belief systems, precepts, and principles (White, 2006). Land travel activities decreased and, as the years went on, became non-existent, as did the language that was associated with them. The discourse among the Anishinawbek about the older everyday ways-of-doing are becoming extinct as the Elders leave this life and take their words with them. The loss of language and deterioration of cultural traditions have caused an irreversible change in the collective memory of the people (Darnell, 2005).

FIRST PEOPLES AND ARCHAEOLOGY

The Trout Lake Anishinawbek’s traditional territories’ first and only ar-
A archaeological project to date was carried out in 2006, when an archaeological consultant and her team seriously violated the dignity and rights of the Aboriginal people there (Taylor-Hollings, 2007). The team’s fieldwork procedures represent an example of the theft of structures that were a part of the lived histories and public memories of the Anishinawbe people: the team employed an unethical research process and removed hundreds of pieces of cultural heritage artifacts. This specific archaeological venture into a First Nations’ heritage arena is only a part of, and by-product of the broader warping and silencing of historic traditions - a colonial process that began with Europeans denying the First Peoples a legitimate claim to their own past (Berger, 1991).

Archaeologists are not usually trained to recognize that the life histories of ancient Anishinawbe people belong to the Anishinawbek themselves. Archaeologists are also not usually trained to view the opportunity of listening to those community members who want to participate in fieldwork, members who are the offspring of those ancients, as a privilege (Colwell-Chanthaphonh & Ferguson, 2004; Lippert, 2005). Some have speculated that the team that went into the Trout Lake Anishinawbek territory did not understand that its erudition was a form of controlling the past and the people, a concept so deeply ingrained within archaeological study and perspective that it is taken for granted, having become normalized (Battiste & Henderson, 2000). Because archaeology functions as a scientific process, archaeologists are perceived as having special insights and a claim to truth about the lives of the ancients – truths which are often disputed by the very people who have descended from those being studied (Deloria, 1992). Archaeologists have also traditionally overlooked the existence of alternative truths, such as those championed by Aboriginal people; they enjoy a position as the primary resource to those who are interested in aeons-old indigenous lifeways (Mithlo, 2004).

Because Aboriginal truth is subjugated by non-Aboriginal archaeological truth, archaeology and archaeologists are generally viewed by Anishinawbek as simply a continuation of contemporary colonialism, particularly in relation to controversies about non-Aboriginal land tenure. Many First Peoples perceive archaeological applications with suspicion and archeological outcomes as dichotomous to their own needs and desire to interpret and represent their own ancient histories. There is, however, an overlap in archaeological prod-
ucts and the manifestations of what is considered by Aboriginal people to perpetuate and expound their own historic experiences. Unearthed artifacts, for example, are seen by community descendants as something to be honoured for their place in the lives of their forefathers (Sioui, 1999); there is a passionate indigenous sense of relationship with these relics that transcends the borders of time and outside contact, a sense that remembers intergenerational shared experience. This view is vastly different from those who actually unearth most artifacts: they become involved to prove or disprove theory and academic stance, improve their own expertise, professional experience and standing within the competitive archaeological field, and for any number of other Western-oriented motivations. The assumption by the general public that archaeological findings belong in the public domain, regardless of the culture of origin, is another problematic issue for First Peoples. A corresponding controversial assumption is that archaeologists, not Aboriginal people, are the primary custodians of all unearthed heritage finds (Watkins, 2003).

ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE TROUT LAKE ANISHINAWBEK

A specific issue arose when an archaeological research project, funded and administered by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR), was carried out on the traditional land area of the Trout Lake Anishinawbek. The principal investigator (PI), an archaeological doctoral candidate with the University of Alberta, carried out the fieldwork. Both the OMNR and the PI signed off on the memorandum of understanding on the same day that the PI initiated the project in Trout Lake. While the main concern for most in the Anishinawbe community was the lack of proper consultation in setting up the project design, implementation and final reporting, there were other issues as well.

Very little information on the project was provided by either the OMNR or the archaeological team to the Trout Lake Anishinawbek; it was, in fact, mentioned only in passing to a Namegosibiing Heritage Protection Group member in a telephone discussion on other matters relating to Trout Lake. The OMNR identified the archaeological consultant as an occasional instructor at Lakehead University.

On the day prior to flying into Trout Lake, a member of the archaeological team met in Winnipeg with several members of the Namegosibiing Heri-
tage Protection Group who articulated their grievances to him. This archaeological team member admitted that the work was “bungled.” Nonetheless, he proceeded with the project, and while ensuring that at least one member of the team met with the knowledge keeper, Elder Tetibaayaanimanook, who lives in Red Lake, this visit cannot be considered a consultation, nor was informed consent acquired.

Proper conduct would have included the archeological consultant introducing herself as soon as possible after conceiving her ideas about an excursion into the Elder’s ancestral homeland. Perhaps most important, the archaeologist did not mention certain significant information about the scope of her intended work and did not request specific permission from the Elder about conducting a dig within a few metres of the graves of the Elder’s husband and only son. As well, it is customary, in such introductory sessions, to offer the Elder tobacco and ask for prayers to KitchiManitou as a sign of goodwill, respect and good faith. Tetibaayaanimanook should have been meaningfully consulted from the inception of the project and continually updated during the entire four-month planning stage.

The quality of the single visit with Tetibaayaanimanook is problematic in view of the fact that the PI did not speak the Anishinawbe language. The quality of communication between the Elder and the archeological team in light of the language difference may raise concern. The PI did not provide an interpreter so that her project could be correctly understood in Tetibaayaanimanook’s first language. Meaningful consultation would have allowed all community members, particularly the Elder, much more time than a few hours to deliberate on the matter of a first-ever archaeology dig on their traditional land use area. The archaeological team’s subsequent behaviour suggested that they believed that a brief meeting immediately prior to the actual work had resulted in valid consent, and continued on with the project.

Most Anishinawbek of Trout Lake are members of the Lac Seul First Nation, but others traditionally belong to the Pikangikum First Nation. As this is common knowledge within the community, the archaeologists should have asked the Chief and Council of each of these First Nations for permission to do the work. The research team completely omitted this vital step. While the PI claimed that she believed the OMNR had consulted with the entire community, archaeologists should not take for granted the accuracy of what government agencies tell them regarding the quality of consultation they carry
out with Aboriginal communities. The archaeological team did not exercise due diligence and take responsibility for its own decision regarding a lack of consultation with the Aboriginal groups, and this demonstrates the extent to which archaeologists believe they can bypass and ignore the rights of Aboriginal descendant community members.

Consultation is more than just informing groups about one’s intentions. The archaeologists could have used consultation in a more appropriate manner: as a means of being better informed and better prepared. As well, it is simply good manners, both personally and professionally, to seek Aboriginal opinion and input on any proposal that impacts in any way on their traditional land use areas. The archaeologists should have at least been listening with an open mind to what many of the Anishinawbek people had to say about the team, the work (including if it should have been conducted), the extent of the work, and the findings. Currently, most Trout Lake Anishinawbek perceive the archaeological group as outsiders fulfilling their own professional and academic ambitions.

THE ISSUE: A WIDER PERSPECTIVE

Because of the fluidity of human lifestyles, such as the erosion of collective memory over time and the fact that various fragments of knowledge die out with the passing of Elders, some archaeologists, to varying degrees, seek out traditional stories and collective memories from descendants of pre-contact communities to help piece together the time and space between ancient and contemporary days (Mason, 2000). Within the late stages of the twentieth century however, elements within their practise that archaeologists had always claimed as their own, such as where and how to conduct excavations and how to interpret archaeological finds, has increasingly become inaccessible to them. One reason for this is that, concomitantly, Aboriginal people in Canada were beginning to assert their rights to sovereignty, which includes the claim for self-interpretation in heritage and cultural representation. Consequently, this is resulting in increased gate-keeping of traditional knowledge by descendant communities; this restricts the previous free access that archaeologists had appropriated and had come to unquestioningly enjoy and exercise as their own right (Nicholas, 2006).

As these reigns continue to tighten, it becomes imperative for archaeologists to recognize the importance of working with descendant communities
and consider cooperative strategies with Aboriginal people, a methodology that works well for their own interests as well. The obscure meanings, motives and perceptions behind ancient peoples’ ways-of-doing within a specified landscape are enhanced by the input of participants descended from those groups. Many community members retain knowledge from the past that includes worldviews consisting of any number of suppositions about humankind’s role within the universe. These worldviews include the notion that human exchanges with other types of creation and the perception about how time passes have an important bearing on all relationships (Battiste & Henderson, 2000).

Indigenous epistemologies and other perspectives can serve as valuable resources in the formulation of archaeological interpretation as well as scrutinizing related concepts, ideas and underlying assumptions. These types of relative truths are invaluable to archaeologists who would do well to cooperate and consult with surviving carriers of those ancient traditions. Archaeologists should also be aware that Aboriginal people tend to reconstruct the past through oral histories and intergenerational ethnographic information; relying solely on tangible ethnohistoric recordings as part of this process is generally not well-received by Aboriginal informants (Deloria, 1992). However, the prominence of landscape archaeology is significant because it is congruent with the high contextual perspective of most Indigenous people. Western science has provided the only framework for archaeological interpretation in reconstructing the lives of the ancients whom Aboriginal people have always called grandmothers and grandfathers. Alternative frameworks must be accommodated for interpretations that already exist but which, instead, are generally muted within the overall Westernized notions of archaeology. Only recently has awareness of the value of including the voices from descendant communities been recognized. Such awareness needs to be vastly enhanced among archaeological practitioners (Sioui, 1999).

Also, in the last half of the twentieth century, archaeological practice has increasingly been affected by governments and various industries such as mining, tourism and forestry when assessing land use relative to Aboriginal rights and land claims. Overall, this move has been driven by political reasons including those for “certainty” which, from a federal government perspective, means that the cost of unresolved land disputes is measured in terms of lost or delayed investments into the natural resources sectors.
Archaeology plays a major role in determining the extent to which certainty sides with non-Aboriginal interests.

Both nationally and internationally, the field of archaeology is largely politically motivated and controlled by non-Aboriginal interests (Trigger, 1998). For their part, provincial governments regulate archaeologists mainly through the supporting mechanisms of licensing which, until recently, has had no relevance to Aboriginal interests. This is paradoxical: archaeology is a Western scientific tradition while the field of work itself is almost exclusively the Aboriginal peoples (Mason, 2000). The past few decades have seen an increased acknowledgement by non-Aboriginal archaeological practitioners of the validity of Aboriginal interests, but progress for and by Aboriginal people regarding archaeological rights progresses slowly.

REPARATION

The Anishinawbek of Trout Lake, including the Namegosibiing Heritage Protection Group, wish to add their voices to the mosaic of archaeological record and documented history of their traditional territories. The challenge related to such an undertaking is how to accomplish this in a respectful and honourable way for all descendant community members, particularly for the Senior Knowledge Custodian. While there is recognition that the voices of two people within the community were heard during the archaeological fieldwork, these are in no way representative of the entire people. Community-wide inclusivity may be characterized by awareness-raising interviews and consultations that had started from the inception of the project and continued throughout, and provided opportunities for interested individuals to participate. As well, representatives from the Lac Seul and Pikangikum First Nations should have been invited to mentor as research assistants and cultural advisors; this would have helped establish a research framework beneficial for and congruous with the indigenous traditional practices of this northwestern Ontario region.

A more general objective of making reparation to Aboriginal people regarding archaeological error is to establish and expand the humanistic parameters of scientific findings, and to incorporate these into a framework that furthers Indigenous thought and values (Sioui, 1999). The dichotomous methodologies of Western and Aboriginal research need to be bridged, although not (necessarily) melded together. Archaeology as a profession and
archaeologists as individuals should welcome Aboriginal people into all aspects of an archaeological process because of its inherent involvement of Aboriginal land and heritage. Aboriginal people are frequently receptive to the choice of having the opportunity to participate in all or parts of the various stages of archaeological activity. Strategies that foster cooperation and inclusion would shift the focus towards resolution of critical issues of mutual concern and interest rather than perpetuate confrontations about the contested past.

PRINCIPLES OF INFORMED CONSENT

The archaeological team did not follow the principles of informed consent when it met with the Senior Knowledge Custodian, Tetibaayaanimnook. The issue of consent was, in fact, unmentioned in any context by either OMNR or the archaeological team in any communication prior to or during the excursion.19

Informed consent involves full information about risks, benefits and possible alternatives to the inquiry at hand. It consists of information sessions that are educational in nature. First Nations people, in particular, must have sufficient understanding of what they are consenting to, and the process of reaching an understanding must include open two-way communication between the Community Descendant Member20 (CDM) and the person(s) seeking consent. Because Aboriginal CDMs belong to a culture separate from those of the dominant culture, their worldviews must be taken into account; this could involve not only translation into their first languages, but also interpretation of all related concepts. To ensure thorough communication, dialogue must be on-going during all phases of consultation and fieldwork. As well, CDMs must be competent to consent, and act freely, and not under duress; information must be presented in a way that does not pressure or attempt to coerce them into giving approval. Informed consent is only valid when given voluntarily.

Archaeological consultants seeking consent must work towards establishing a trusting environment through which informed consent is the only outcome; this prevents external agendas and motives from entering into the consent process. An additional key activity of this work is to develop a consent template for all archaeologists to follow, a tool that is suitable and sensitive to the status of Aboriginal CDMs, one that would appropriately further both archaeological and indigenous efforts.
Legal literature and work on ethical behaviour emphasizes that valid consent consists of the following considerations:

- Informed consent is a process, not a visit,
- Aboriginal community members must always be treated with dignity and respect,
- Competency must be established in a way that is respectful to all CDMs,
- Aboriginal CDMs must be able to understand the information being presented; use of translators and interpreters must be included in the process when there are language differences within the group,
- Informed consent must encompass the needs, values, beliefs, traditions and worldview of the CDM,
- The CDM must receive sufficient understanding through full information disclosure about risks, benefits and possible alternatives; this is achieved through effective dialogue and two-way communication until consent is derived, or denied,
- CDMs must be placed in situations whereby they give consent voluntarily, and not under duress or threat,
- The informed consent process must adhere to the ethical, legal, cultural, and pragmatic realities of CDMs, and
- The process must work only towards reaching informed consent and end when consent is either achieved or denied.

Based on this listing, it is clear that the archeological team did not have the informed consent of the Senior Knowledge Custodian to enter into Trout Lake and conduct an archaeological excursion. Archaeologists must be aware that neglecting to acquire informed consent is a manifestation of an unethical, colonial mentality that further marginalizes an already disempowered people.

CONCLUSION

The histories of the Aboriginal people in Canada are described in this way by historian Bill Russell (1984-85):
In the DIA [Department of Indian Affairs], a single government department created and maintained custody over the records of not one but a number of “societies” or culturally distinct native groups and controlled their relationship with each other and with the larger white society. DIA records were more than those of a government bureaucracy: to a large extent, they formed the written history of a people. (p. 53)

The works of DIA as historian of the First Nations continues to require a great deal of amendment to the many serious distortions and denigrations that it has propagated over the past 150 years. Appropriate and accurate representations of the heritage of Aboriginal peoples need to be founded on unbiased research that is conducted and adjudicated by Aboriginal people themselves who understand the fallacies and dynamics of all aspects of Western colonialism, including those within the archaeological profession. Practitioners, such as archaeological consultants, particularly those espousing and exhibiting scientific colonialism, still readily conduct their activities in First Nations’ territories without adequate consultation and informed consent. Archeological teams such as the one that conducted research in Anishinawbe territory in Trout Lake, Ontario, continue to be protected by university administrations and government departments which refuse to consider that Native people, particularly as community descendant members, have undeniably strong rights to archaeology.

Archaeologists must do more than simply ensure that Aboriginal peoples are included in archaeological studies in a mirror version of their own practices. They need to recognize other narrations, other ways of knowing and interpreting heritage resources, and the importance of partnering in essential ways with Native persons or groups who also wish to obtain archaeological recordings. They need to be educated out of traditional colonial mentalities that perpetuate voracious claims to archaeological materials and to the past and to the people that those finds represent. They must be willing to correct the wrongs of their practices, mend the damage that has resulted from those wrongs, and acknowledge that many types of knowledge are beyond the realm of Western understanding. The indigenous community must be consulted in a way that is meaningful to them in order to establish collaborative and healthy relationships in archaeology, since every inch of the vast continent of Turtle Island is someone’s sacred homeland and traditional territory.
NOTES

1 Indian Control of Indian Education (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972) was the first document that recognized Native Canadians’ need for self-interpretation in education; Native people saw education as a way of reclaiming cultures, societies, languages, worldviews and histories. Wertsch acknowledges that alternative collective remembering is emerging, particularly that not sectioned by the state (2002, p. 175).

2 Primarily, CPR’s transcontinental line (1875–80) connected Fort William (now a part of Thunder Bay), Ontario to Winnipeg in the newly-declared province of Manitoba (1870).

3 The Red Lake Mine is Canada’s largest gold mine and also the world’s lowest-cost gold-producer, and the richest. Barrick Gold Corp. (which bought out Placer Dome), Campbell Red Lake Mine and Goldcorp (formerly Dickenson Mine) are the mega-mining corporations that have infiltrated into this area of Aboriginal country (Joyce & McGibbon, 2004, pp. 94-95).

4 This became operational in 1929. See Lac Seul First Nation website, homepage: http://lacseul.firstnation.ca/ (accessed May 22, 2007).

5 An example of this common practice is articulated in J.A. LaSpina’s article, “Designing diversity: Globalization, textbooks, and the story of nations” in which a third grade textbook was found to have omitted, in a photograph of two people, the name of the Native gentleman while ensuring that the other, a white man, was named (2003, p. 669-670).

6 These noteworthy events and traditions include: pre- and early Contact governance systems, ancient seasonal migratory routes, the signing of the Treaty 3 adhesion at Lac Seul in 1874, life changes due to capitalist enterprises mainly during the twentieth century, and more recent economic livelihood activities.

7 During most of these times, the first key step towards official recognition of a language other than English had not yet taken place -- the Official Languages Act was adopted in 1969.

8 For example, in the old days, the Trout Lake elders included the nightly gathering or changing of spruce boughs for bedding for their dogs at each landing – a job that was reserved for the youth. As groups became more sedentary, this activity became less and less relevant and eventually, non-existent – and so was the language that was associated with it. As well, traditional methods of ensnaring beaver within their lodges is no longer practiced by the few trappers today who
are occasionally still on the land; instead, they utilize the more contemporary conibear technology.

9 Seixas (2006, 11) includes in this category: symbols, practices, statues, commemorations, and place names.

10 Many Aboriginal people see this position as unwarranted.

11 Domanska (2006, p. 340) discusses the view of French anthropologist Latour who believes in the agency of things; he claims that “things enjoy a particular status in their relations with people” – this is exactly according to indigenous thought. Some Anishinawbek who find ancient things or any “material remnant of human activity” (as it relates to their forebears) talk about the closeness they feel with their grandmothers and grandfathers.

12 Namegosibiing Heritage Protection Group is a small body of concerned citizens, who while not all living in Trout Lake, have an intimate tie to the land there and advocate for the protection of its resources, particularly its cultural heritage artifacts. The use of original names (eg., Namegosibiing) is one method by which the Anishinawbe are reclaiming their own histories and representations of heritage.

13 Pikangikum is about 110 kilometres miles north of Trout Lake. More recently, Trout Lake Anishinawbe membership is from Curve Lake, Sandy Lake, Pikangikum and Fort William First Nations and the Ojibway Nation of Saugeen.

14 Echo-Hawk and Zimmerman (2006) discuss the Ancient One/ Kennewick Man which is one example of archaeologists and Native Americans taking their dispute to court over repatriation and reburial issues about this ancient who was unearthed in Umatilla territory. Even though the Native Americans and their supporters lost, this case provides continuing controversy over who should have won. Also see Zimmerman (2005, p. 268) and Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson (2004, p. 6).

15 Trigger (1998), an archaeologist and critical analyst, discusses a new perspective on how to understand the archaeological past: through the epistemologies of the ancients. He discusses the fact that having to infer what they seek from physical remains, archaeologists increasingly find themselves challenged by the complex connection between their interpretations and the epistemology of the cultures they uncover. Many contemporary Aboriginal people would agree that the epistemology of the ancient Aboriginal people would not be much different from what it was in pre-Contact times, and indeed not much different from today’s (Personal communications, Brian Scribe, June 20, 2007. Scribe, an Aboriginal an-
thropologist, is a member and co-chair of the Aboriginal Heritage Committee which is situated within the Canadian Archaeological Association).

16 A major difference between a high context (HC) culture and a low context (LC) culture is that HC cultures are communicated not so much through conversation as through nuances and other implicit coding expressions – this is a commonality among indigenous cultural expressions. The exact opposite is true of LC cultures which are highly dependent on explicit verbal articulation; in these cultures, conversation is the primary form of communication (Taylor, 1995, pp. 233-235).

17 Certainty would define the rights of Aboriginal people and federal/provincial/territorial jurisdictions so that all levels of government can encourage and attract investors (Woolford, 2005).

18 For First Nations groups, certainty has very different implications. The permanent definition of the parameters of rights would bring significant uncertainty as the economic, legal, and cultural contexts in which Aboriginal groups are embedded are constantly changing as a result of court decisions and subsequent appeals.

19 In e-mail correspondence to the author (November 15, 2006 1:19 PM), the PI mentions her very brief session with Tetibaayaanimanook, suggesting that the important matter of protocol was a simple matter of “good fortune” and that she felt it was “okay to proceed”.

20 The words “community descendant member”, abbreviated as CDM, denotes the person whose consent is being sought.

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