



Universidad  
Carlos III de Madrid



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On the cool autumnal evening of October 20 2011, the terrorist group ETA announced a permanent end to its military action. Forty-three years and 879 killings after its creation, this announcement closed an unfinished chapter in Spain's Transition to Democracy. Although Spanish cinema has looked at terrorism in more than forty films, including fiction and documentary (from *Comando Txikia/Txikia Command*, Madrid, 1976, to *La casa de mi padre/My Father's House*, Merchan, 2009), this is a controversial topic, as the reaction to Julio Medem's *La pelota vasca, la piel contra la piedra / The Rasque Ball: Skin Against Stone* (2003) would prove (see Chapter 26)<sup>1</sup>. For the purpose of my argument, I will analyse two films on the history of ETA which can help us understand how the representation of terrorism in Spanish cinema was determined by the often-unacknowledged open wounds that the Transition left behind. Both Helena Taberna's *Yoyes/Yoyes* (2000) and Miguel Courtois' *El Lobo/Wolf* (2004) depict real-life figures who enrolled in ETA in the 1970s<sup>2</sup>. The former genuinely believed in its cause, while the latter worked undercover as a secret service agent. Disappointed and betrayed by their comrades and ideals, the respective paths chosen by Maria Dolores Katarain (aka Yoyes) and Mikel Lejarza (aka Lobo) serve as metaphors for a complicated time in which it was not easy to distinguish heroes from villains.

ETA (the abbreviation for Euskadi Ta Akatasuna, which means 'Basque Homeland and Freedom' in Basque) was founded in 1959 and scored a major coup on December 20 1973 with the assassination of the President of the Spanish Government, Admiral Carrero Blanco.<sup>3</sup> In October 1974, ETA split into two different organizations: ETA (pm) (political- military) and ETA (m) (military). Following Francisco Franco's death, the two organizations began an intensive campaign of attacks. While ETA (pm) was virtually dismantled by the police force and its leader surrendered, ETA (m) resisted. During the 1980s, the so-called 'socialization of terror' strategy was put into operation. This included a series of brutal car- bomb attacks, such as those at the Hipercor shopping centre in Barcelona in June 1987 (21 civilian casualties), the Civil Guard Headquarters in Zaragoza in December 1987 (five officers and seven members of the same family were killed, including five young girls), and the Civil Guard Headquarters in Vic in May 1991 (ten casualties, including five children).<sup>4</sup>

Following unsuccessful peacemaking attempts by successive governments - the Algiers Talks in 1989 and the so-called Meeting in Zurich in 1999 - both major Spanish political parties joined forces to implement a new strategy based on police action and the political marginalization of ETA's supporters (the Organic Law of Political Parties in June 2002). Following another failed initiative in 2006 (the Loyola Agreements), an increasingly weakened ETA and its supporters were persuaded at last of the necessity to renounce violence in order to pursue political action. Thus, the announcement of a new truce in September 2010 paved the way for legalization of the Bildu and Amaiur political parties, both of which achieved excellent results in the local and general elections of 2011.<sup>5</sup>

### **The 'Bloody Transition' and Debates on Historical Memory**

Contemporary debates surrounding the Transition have included discussion of the politics of memory and how Spanish society has dealt with the trauma of the Civil War

and the ensuing repression. This topic was brought to the fore with the passing of the Law of Historical Memory, advanced by the government of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero in 2007. The result was a challenge to the canonical vision of the so-called 'Consensus of the Transition' celebrated, for example, in Victoria Prego's television documentary series *La transición /The Transition* (TVE2, 1995), which praised the actions of Adolfo Suárez, Manuel Gutiérrez Mellado, Santiago Carrillo and other key figures of the period. The historian Carmen Molinero has analysed how the Transition - or an idealized vision of what it constituted - now is exalted paradoxically from conservative positions, while at the same time being subject to censure by those on the Left who seek to vindicate historical memory:

[I]t is surprising that, in the context of the new readings of the Transition from dictatorship to democracy that are being carried out in Spain, the Left does not highlight the distortion that the Spanish Right makes of the politically meaning expressed by the term 'national reconciliation', accepting in some cases conservative groups' interpretation of the Transition. This is further proof of the evident paradox that, for over a decade, the Transition has been vindicated by those who resisted political change, while some of those who forced the introduction of democracy have allowed their main role to be overshadowed.

(2010: 35)

This debate has been punctuated by the idea that the Transition was less than idyllic in its development and, in hindsight, allowed Francoism's elites to continue wielding large amounts of power without being held accountable for what had occurred during the dictatorship. According to the advocates of this position, the outcome of the Transition was not inevitable, but instead the result of choices made by Franco's heir and the new political parties, who were eager to gain advantageous positions within the new distribution of power. As the historian Ferran Gallego states:

In public opinion the foundational reference to that time has been established thereby attributing to it a reconciliation process eliminating not only the contrasting projects of the regime and the opposition for the country's future, but also turning the regime's elite into the motors of change, alongside a generous rhetoric attributed to the 'People', without distinguishing the option Spaniards of the time had.

(2009: 25)

Political violence is a particularly pertinent topic when it comes to studying the Transition. Álvaro de Soto (2005: 33- 34) has remarked how it was seemingly so ubiquitous throughout the Transition that it became representative of it. Moreover, the democratic process was shaped precisely by this violence and an increase in social mobilization (strikes and public demonstrations). They forced Francoist elites to revise their original project of trying to keep the foundations of the old regime intact: 'Sometimes there was a very real perception that political elites were following the

demands of citizens, forcing them to change their discourse and adapt its political action' (2005: 33). Mariano Sánchez-Soler (2010: 17-20) claims that there were almost 600 fatalities and a few thousand seriously wounded as a result of this violence. These figures explain the noteworthy title of his book, *La transición sangrienta (The Bloody Transition)*. Extreme groups on the Left (ETA, GRAPO, FRAP) and on the Right (Batallón Vasco Español, Guerrilleros de Cristo Rey) both participated in brutal activities, and the repressive police, alongside other security forces such as the Civil Guard and prison officials, violently prosecuted them. Two notorious cases were those of Agustín Rueda Carabanchel, an anarchist who died in prison in March 1978, and José Vivas, a neighbourhood activist accused of belonging to GRAPO, who died in the state security headquarters in Madrid in September 1980. These were not isolated events, as the killing of José Ignacio Arregui in Carabanchel prison and the infamous *Almería* case proved.<sup>6</sup> This constant violence, manifest at all levels, is represented in both *Yoyes* and *El Lobo*.

### **Yoyes: Death of a Heroine/Traitor**

The assassination of Maria Dolores Gonzalez Katarain was considered one of the milestones in rising social opposition to terrorism in Spain. Yoyes died on September 10 1986 after a member of ETA, the organization of which she gained leadership in the 1970s, shot her in the head while she walked the streets of his hometown, Ordicia. Yoyes was holding the hand of her three-year-old son at the time. She had spent years of exile in Mexico and France, and was protected from legal prosecution under the amnesty laws. When she returned to the Basque country to lead a normal life away from any kind of political activity, ETA accused her of treason. Although she tried to be discreet, she was used in a media campaign that linked her return to the efforts of Felipe González's government to create a split within ETA. For anthropologist Begoña Aretxaga, her assassination reflected the contradictory position of women in the imaginary of Basque nationalism:

The death of Yoyes could be read, in a sense, within the parameters of a classical tragedy: as a result of a conjunction of circumstances that intertwined in a combination of cultural models, historical events and acts of Yoyes herself.

(2009: 10)

Yoyes' diaries, whose last chapters dealt with her thoughts about a death she knew was imminent, were the basis for the posthumous award-winning television documentary *Yoyes* (1988), written by the novelist and journalist Jorge Martínez Reverte in collaboration with Mario Onaindia, a former ETA (pm) member and leader of the political party, Euskadiko Ezkerra.

A decade later, Yoyes was also the inspiration for first-time director Helena Taberna, who wrote the screenplay about her life together with long-time collaborator Andrés Martorell (Michel Gaztambide, a noted screenwriter and others also

contributed to the script). Taberna explained in an interview published on the website of the pacifist group Elkarri that after four years in development, the project obtained the necessary funding thanks to the feelings of optimism generated by the truce of 1998:

[I]n September 1998 everything came together: ETA announced a truce; in the San Sebastian Film Festival I contacted the producer and [actress] Ana Torrent; and the Basque Government gave me a grant that had been denied the previous year, which ensured a level of institutional support that was important for the producer. I shot the film in the best of all worlds: with excitement, hope and an intense feeling of joy.

(cited in Anon, 2002)

The film was seen by 200,000 people in its initial theatrical run - a modest box office success, considering that the film's release came at a particularly unfortunate time: just three months after ETA committed its first killing following the truce in December 1999. Suddenly the project became controversial. This is the standard fate of Spanish films about terrorism. As Maria Pilar Rodríguez states:

The lack of commercial interest of this type of cinema seems to be another relevant factor for explaining the absence of movies dealing with terrorism. It is also worth noting the risk implicit in dealing with the subject, a risk which can be attributed as much to the difficulty of obtaining a final result that is not sensational or excessively one-sided as to the social and political edginess experienced in Euskadi at a time when there appears to be no hope for a peaceful solution in the near future.

(2002: 156)

However, *Yoyes* was well received by the critics, and won prizes at international film festivals such as Viña del Mar (Chile), Toulouse (France), Gramado (Brazil) and Cartagena (Colombia).

The film combines two timelines. In the first, beginning in 1973, the eponymous protagonist is a young anti-Franco activist who flees to France and, with the support of mentor Argi (Iñaki Arriera), gradually rises to prominence within the leadership of ETA. In the second, Yoyes arrives in Paris in 1984 following several years of exile in Mexico, and then returns to the Basque country, where eventually she is killed. She is depicted as an intellectual woman who falls in love with a quiet philosopher, Josean (Ernesto Alterio). Significantly, she is not attracted by the brute force of their comrades-in-arms, whose sexual advances she rejects in a couple of scenes. Yoyes renounces arms at the same time that she decides to begin a new life with Josean and have a daughter, who she later sends to the Basque country so she can learn the Euskera language and regain the national identity suppressed by her mother's exile.

Jaume Martí-Olivella has concluded that the sexual and emotional relationships established in the two timelines allow the film to establish a broader commentary on the persistence of patriarchal control structures:

Helena Taberna's film defies that reductive gaze while stressing the critique of the patriarchal condemnation, in this case articulated in the guise of a political rejection by the (male) ex-comrades of ETA. In the context of Basque cinema, *Yoyes* culminates the process of imagining and/or (en)gendering ETA, thus rendering visible parts of that invisible and spectral historical violence.

(2004: 76)

In Isolina Ballesteros's (2001: 148) view, the film deals with the topic of terrorism from a feminist or feminine point of view, and portrays the evolution of its main character from active commitment to disillusionment. So the film deals at the same time with the evolution from supporting violent action to the open condemnation of its consequences, and the difficulty that women face in balancing the personal with the political.

The film establishes a dichotomy between Yoyes' emotional evolution from asexual aloofness to the joys of married life and motherhood within the broader context of historical change. Yoyes' life is represented as being marked by violence: first, by political repression under Franco - evidenced in a tense scene at the beginning, which depicts the arrest of her brother and the beating that he suffers when he screams 'Gora Euskadi '. Then, after the dictator's death, her mentor Argi (the fictional version of José Miguel Beñarán, aka Argala) thinks it is time to pledge their commitment to political ends using violent means. In one scene he tells her: 'Ours is a class struggle, it is not only about the independence of the Basque country. We need people with intellectual training'. At the time, ETA's actions were celebrated within the wider network of Marxist groups fighting Franco's regime because of their common revolutionary inspiration (a support that many would regret later). In this sense, Yoyes is represented as a political thinker with a strong belief in social justice, which introduces the idea that the first generation of ETA members were idealistic young fighters forced into violence by circumstance. So, when Argi is killed in 1978 by an extreme right-wing group, she finds a new reason to keep fighting the now-democratic Spanish government.

Yoyes' ultimate disillusionment with violence comes with the bombing of Café Rolando in Madrid, which resulted in thirteen civilian deaths. Here the film-makers commit an enormous historical inaccuracy as a result of their excessive commitment to make Katarain a sympathetic figure to the viewer. The film deals too lightly with her involvement in blood crimes. This attack whose targets were police agents - the usual clientele of the café - resulted in thirteen mortal casualties, of which only one belonged to the police force. This created a fissure within ETA that resulted in a split between ETA (m) and ETA (pm). However, this attack did not occur, as in the film, in 1979 (that was the case of the deadly bombing of Café California 74, attributed to GRAPO) but in 1974, when Yoyes was beginning her activity within the group after fleeing to

France a year earlier.

Yoyes ends up trapped in an impossible situation. The organization that she belonged to is determined to execute her for betrayal, and the structures of the new democratic state (including the Ministry of Security, led by a Socialist politician, and the influence of a newspaper) exploits her personal sacrifice for their own benefit. However, she knows that something more important is at stake in her return to the Basque country, acknowledging the symbolic value of her former leadership role when she screams: 'I am not anyone, I am Yoyes, damn it!' In that last scene Katarain dies fighting for a personal independence that is seen as more important than any political or identity claim: the right to decide what direction her life should take without interference from anyone, whoever they may be - her former comrades in ETA, the extreme right-wing groups who kill ETA members, the Spanish socialist government, and even a brother who is still close to the terrorist organization. In one earlier powerful scene, Yoyes dreams about her hometown, seeing traditional marionette dancing: a metaphor for the slow realization that her fate always was going to be subject to the mercy of others.

### **El Lobo: No Turning Back**

*El Lobo* is a thriller that recreates the story of Mikel Lejarza, a secret service agent who infiltrated ETA in 1975 and facilitated the arrest of 150 members. This story, as recounted by its main protagonist, was featured for the first time in a non-fiction book written by two investigative journalists from *El Mundo* newspaper: Manuel Cerdán and Antonio Rubio (2003). In 1997 the newspaper, famous for its coverage of corruption and state terrorism under the socialist government of Felipe González, established an audio-visual division headed by *El Mundo's* deputy director, Melchor Miralles, for the production of documentary films both for television and theatrical release, inspired by current events. Lejarza's story was an obvious choice, but the ambitious scope of the project led to a partnership with veteran producer Julio Fernández (also the owner of the distribution company Filmax). The director, Miguel Courtois, was hired because of his credentials in French cinema and television, and joined the film when a script had been completed already by the playwright Antonio Onetti. Eduardo Noriega was chosen to play Lejarza, named in the film as Txema Loigorry, and was accompanied by José Coronado as Ricardo, Lobo's boss and French film star Patrick Bruel as Nelson, a fictional depiction of the head of ETA (pm) Iñaki Pérez Beotegi (aka Wilson). Although the reviews were mixed, *El Lobo* was a major commercial hit, with more than 1.5 million tickets sold, taking almost €8 million at the box office.

This success with audiences can be attributed to outstanding production values, a narrative rhythm which is both tense and fast-paced, and Noriega's charisma. However, it is also relevant that for the first time in Spanish cinema, the main

characters in a film that deals with this topic were not the terrorists, but the law enforcement officers trying to hunt them down. The political and social climate in which the film was released is especially relevant for my reading. As noted previously, following the break of the truce by ETA in 2000, both the People's Party and the Socialist Party devised an anti- terrorism strategy based on police action and the elimination of groups sympathetic to ETA from public and political life in Euskadi. The Batasuna, Euskal Herritarrok and Herri Batasuna political parties were banned successively, as were the *Egunkaria* and *Egin* newspapers. The implementation of various legal actions extended the jail sentences of those convicted of terrorism. Thereby, ETA was stripped of any ideological support, and characterized as just another criminal group. Any possible political negotiation was ruled out, and increased police action ensued. *El Lobo* came at a time when Spanish society had left behind the prejudice against police forces which had been tainted by their association with Franco's repression. From a commercial perspective, the story of an agent willing to sacrifice everything (family, identity and even physical appearance) to stop the criminal activity of ETA seemed a good box-office draw.

Despite being presented as a historical film, *El Lobo* alters the names of all the real-life figures, including its main character. This is a dramatic licence which shows that the approach to the period, the final years of Francoism, is based on speculation. An approach of this kind is not altogether surprising, given that the narrative recreates the adventures of a secret agent whose life remains shrouded in secrecy. However, *El Lobo*, both in promotional material and in interviews with the cast and artistic team, was presented to the audience as being as faithful as possible to the mission carried out by Lejarza. For example, its producer, Melchor Miralles, emphasized this point in a press conference before the premiere (included as an extra in the two-disc edition of the film): 'If not to the exact millimetre, it can still be said of each and every sequence that things happened just as they are shown in the film: This allows *El Lobo* to engage in political commentary in a manner far more complex than the generic conventions of a thriller traditionally allow. In the same press conference, Miralles tried to clarify that there was no biased agenda in the film:

I have never been an active member of any political party and I can, therefore, hardly make a militant movie if I've never been a militant. Do I have an ideology? Yes. I have only one militant personal conviction, one on which I think all of us here can agree: that is the absolute rejection of any kind of violence, or the use of violence as a political language.

The most obvious manifestation of this position comes with the introduction of a character named Asier (Jorge Sanz), a young ideologue of ETA (pm) who is murdered in cold blood by his own comrades for pushing too hard for the conversion of terrorist activity into political action. It is not difficult to assume that Asier is based on Pertur,



a prominent ETA (pm) leader who disappeared in July 1976. Despite the fact that his alleged murder was attributed to both members of ETA (pm) and extreme right-wing groups then operating in France, *El Lobo's* choice of one of these two scenarios sends a clear political message to the viewer. Although history shows that the leaders of ETA (pm) took a different path in 1982 (the dissolution of the band and its reintegration into society), *El Lobo* portrays an unreconstructed terrorist organization which closes the door to any possible negotiation, and therefore can be defeated only by police action.

This reading is supported further by the way that state terrorism figures prominently in the narrative, including the murder and torture undertaken by the Spanish secret services. The film shows the activity of extreme right-wing groups in the French Basque country, including the machine-gunning of restaurants frequented by ETA activists. The violent means are shared by the police in the film. In a pivotal scene, they succeed in planting a bomb at an ETA meeting, almost killing the leaders of the group (and Lobo with them). After one of Lobo's bosses, Pantxo (Santiago Ramos), is tortured and killed by his own agents, the crime is concealed with an excuse that he is on a secret operation somewhere in Europe. Screenwriter Antonio Onetti explained in an interview (included in the DVD release) that *El Lobo's* story is not only about a secret agent fighting a terrorist organization, but also about how key institutions of Franco's regime refused to accept the arrival of democracy:

I was more interested in the time than in the characters. We are talking about the years 1973-75, which are key moments in the history of Spain. It's the end of the dictatorship: democracy is coming, and that meant that everything was exacerbated [...] It is the time when the mask of the dictatorship is removed, it is not *desarrollismo*<sup>7</sup>. It's every man for himself.

At the end of the film, Mikel tries to keep his cover intact until he can dismantle ETA (pm) totally - but the powers-that-be have decided to bring forward the operation. Mikel finds out that the real purpose of the whole operation was to weaken, not destroy, ETA, and thereby halt the transformative process that was on the horizon. A propaganda coup to manipulate Franco's imminent death was also part of this strategy. 'We need them to regulate changes', Ricardo says to Lobo in order to justify the organization's survival. In the film's last scene, Mikel, now with a new face, buys a newspaper announcing the death of Franco. His family, identity and dreams are gone forever.

## **Conclusion**

Contemporary Spanish cinema has used authentic historical background in order to represent terrorism in *Yoyes* and *El Lobo*. Although these films responded to different aesthetic, generic and even political positions, more careful analysis allows us to

conclude that they share remarkable similarities in their portrayal of the sociopolitical context of the Transition. Similarly, they also share the same disappointment with how the democratic change took place. Although in *Yoyes* and *El Lobo* ETA's activity is represented in a negative way - and the films do not conceal the disturbed psychology of its members - ETA's struggle is inserted within a dynamic of action and reaction to the equally bloody attacks of repressive and corrupt police forces. This links the films with traditional approaches to terrorism in Spanish cinema. In *Yoyes*, when Argi, the member of ETA (m), is killed by an extreme right-wing group, the choice made by Yoyes is clear: 'If they want war, we will give them war.' In *El Lobo*, the incorruptible secret agent Pantxo is tortured and killed by members of his own unit with connections to extreme right-wing group not willing to accept the onset of democracy.

These explicit links continue with the arrival of democracy. Yoyes' return to the Basque country coincides with the activity of GAL, a terrorist group which had been funded by senior officials of the Ministry of Security during the Socialist government. In *Yoyes'* last minutes, one of the members of GAL meets a ministry official, Don Roberto (Adolfo Fernández) - a relationship that the latter finds embarrassing, but does not disavow. *Yoyes* and *El Lobo* suggest that not only do those responsible for crimes committed under Franco's dictatorship remain unpunished, but also that the new democratic state was unable to purge the totalitarian elements of the old regime - even following the ascent of the Socialist Party to power in the 1982 elections. What *Yoyes* makes explicit is only suggested in *El Lobo*, but it is no coincidence that, following the film's commercial success, its main creative team (Miralles, Courtois and Onetti) came together again for a much less successful film that delved into the state crimes committed under the socialist government: *GAL* (Courtois, 2006). This sequel was undermined by an over-the-top performance by Jordi Mollá as corrupt policeman José Amedo, although perhaps the mixed feelings in Spanish society about the use of violent means to stop ETA when the group was committing its bloodier attacks was the principal explanation for its commercial failure.

During the 1990s, Spanish public opinion underwent drastic change in how it viewed terrorism. However, as we have seen, contemporary Spanish cinema reveals an awareness of its origins within the context of Franco's dictatorship. Both *Yoyes* and *El Lobo* may be questionable as historical recreations, but they share the idea that despite its overall success, the Transition also involved senseless violence and the inability to establish a state that, freed from the worst excesses of the Franco regime, could be founded on a genuinely democratic basis. The tragedies of *Lobo* and *Yoyes* also speak of the failure of democratic institutions and their corruption, as well as of the legacy of endemic violence nurtured by Franco's dictatorship. A clean slate as regard the past was beneficial not only for many who had fought for democracy, but also for others who had fought against it. Both films thereby speak of broken promises entailed by the model of consensus that was implemented in place of a clear break with the past.

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## Notes

- 1 Far a thoughtful review of the controversy, see Barrenetxea Marañón (2006).
- 2 *Yoyes* and *El Lobo* are historical representations of the Spanish Transition produced in the same period, and both are based on real, well-known figures, so they are excellent case studies for considering how Spanish cinema has approached the past from a factual perspective. At least two equally interesting films from the 2000s also represented the problem of terrorism in the context of the Transition: *Sé quién eres! I Know Who You Are* (Ferreira, 2000), in which the amnesia suffered by the main character serves as a metaphor for the so-called *pacto del olvido* ('pact of oblivion'); and *La voz de su amo/His Master's Voice* (Martínez Lázaro, 2001), a violent thriller about corrupt police and business people that delves into the fragile nature of the nascent democratic state.
- 3 Luis Carrero Blanco was appointed prime minister in June 1973, a position previously held by Franco himself. Carrero Blanco, a close friend of the dictator, was a navy veteran who had served in the Civil War with great distinction. His appointment placed him in a privileged position to supervise the changes that inevitably would occur following Franco's death. His murder was not only a psychological blow to the regime, but also had important consequences, as his successor, Carlos Arias Navarro (a prosecutor and former Mayor of Madrid), lacked the same political weight; King Juan Carlos I could easily dismiss him when he began to be an impediment to democratic transformation.
- 4 A good introduction to the history of ETA is Elorza et al. (2006). An excellent account of the ideological context of Basque nationalism and political violence can be found in Watson (2008).
- 5 The process of normalization in the Basque country after the end of ETA remains an ongoing process. A good summary of the situation following ETA's announcement can be found in Abend (2011).
- 6 The use of torture against suspected members of terrorist groups was a source of frequent complaint by national and international civil rights organizations. The *Almería* case was the inspiration for the film *El caso Almería/The Almería Case* (Costa, 1983), in which Antonio Banderas played the part of one of the three victims tortured and killed by members of the Civil Guard after being mistaken for members of ETA.
- 7 *Desarrollismo* was an economic policy during the 1960 oriented towards the

liberalization of the Spanish economy. This policy, driven by the so-called technocrats of the government (most of them members of the religious group Opus Dei), was fundamental in the widespread distribution of consumer goods, alongside development of the tourist industry. This process of modernization and openness was embodied by popular comedies and musicals starring Marisol, Manolo Escobar and Paco Martínez Soria, which offered a sometimes ironic representation of new realities of urban development and the arrival of female Swedish tourists wearing bikinis.

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