

Male Dominance:

(Through strength for utility, but also under fear and anxiety)

by Sain Sucha

INTRODUCTION

There appears to be a general agreement among the social anthropologists that women are subjugated by men all over the world; although its degree, the means, causes and their justification (or repudiation) remain the topics of discord.

In this paper it is intended to present some recent theories which attempt to clarify the means and nature of this subjugation, and the criticism of these theories by the opposing researchers.

The major question asked here is that although the theories discuss and explain the subjugation of women as a class (category) by men as a class*, they fail to specify satisfactorily why this class of suppressed women was further divided into individuals and put into a one -- one relationship in most cultures as the dominated females.

An explanation based upon the feelings of inadequacy felt by most men in their sexual performance and its subsequent effect, which probably resulted in the isolation of women from other men and women, is put forward for further discussion.

* Throughout this article the word 'class' is used in its logical (mathematical) context, and without any Marxist economical connotations, except when used with the Marxist views.

We can judge the existing patterns of economical, societal and sexual relationships between contemporary men and women under two dissimilar values systems; and the structure, as well as the acceptance of these relationships according to these systems, would be quite different.

For such an analysis we could either assert that:

1. The human relationships are prescribed and ordained by some very able entity (entities) that has universal comprehension. Such entity (entities) created us in our present physical and mental form, and our mutual human relationships are based upon our belief and trust in this entity. The structure of our relationship is traceable in the myths, sagas and edicts that are related to such entity, and are given to us in written or oral form by our ancestors. The annulment of such edicts is not within human power.

or

2. The human relationships are the outcome of the results and inferences drawn by our ancestors during the course of their evolution, and the circumstances they have gone through and passed on to us as in our

biological and psychological inheritance. The structure of our relationship is traceable in the organisation of various cultures and societies and their past and present history, myths and sagas. It is through their analysis we can see how our ancestors in various periods of human life laid rules and regulations for male and female relationships that we received biologically and socially.

Bearing in mind that in this article I am looking at the human relationships at a scientific level, obviously there is no point in discussing such relationships which human beings can neither ordain nor nullify; thus, I would confine myself to discuss thoughts endorsed in the second section.

Recent commentators intending to explain the so-called imbalance between the male and female relationships (Ortner 1974, Fox & Steinmann 1974, Leibowitz 1975, Rubin 1975, Jordanova 1980) may, roughly, be divided into biological determinists, evolutionists, cultural anthropologists, structuralists and Marxists.

Each of this group has projected their picture of the development of the human relations where men, for one suggested reason or another, subjugated women, mainly, for the purpose of her utility within the domestic and reproductive sphere; and if, and when, women were employed in the 'productive' work outside the domestic sphere the value of their labour measured in terms of material repayment was, and is, generally lower than that of the male's, even when assigned to identical tasks.

The biological determinists rely primarily upon the muscle strength, anatomical differences and female's vulnerability during menstruation, pregnancy and post-delivery; period:

"Originally it was hard to question the allocation of roles based on the obvious differences between the sexes. The men were larger, stronger, and had more endurance. The women were smaller, weaker, and were subjected to mysterious periodic attacks of bleeding. The women also bore children and had to nurse them. There were long months when they were semi-restricted, both in the kind of work they could perform, and in their mobility"

(Steinmann & Fox 1974/17)

While the later representatives of this group go a step further in ethology and draw heavily from the new research in genetics and declare:

"that the human organism is 'wired' in a certain way so that it can process and emit information about certain facts of social life such as language and rules about sex, and that, furthermore, it can process this

information only at certain times and only in certain ways. The wiring is geared to the life cycle so that at any one moment in a population of *Homo sapiens* there will be individuals with a certain 'store' of behaviour giving out information at another stage to others who are wired to tract this information in a particular way"

(Tiger & Fox 1974/30)

Thus:

"In the same way, the rest of human culture lies in the biology of the Species."

(Tiger & Fox 1974/30)

And:

" In sum, we behave culturally because it is our nature to behave culturally because natural selection has produced an animal that has to behave culturally, that has to invent rules, make myths, speak languages, and form men's clubs, in the same way that the hamadryas baboon has to form harems, adopt infants, and bite the wives on the neck."

(Tiger & Fox 1974/38)

In other words, the notion which human beings may have about having a mind and its personal use in the choice of action, conscious planning, the judgement of a specific situation at a specific time under specific conditions is merely an illusion for that mind. In reality all that we do and think is genetically wired (and determined) for generations and for each person.

There is of course active voicing against any such determinism:

"The evidence from primate studies and the examination of human infants, adult hormones, and the behaviour of hermaphrodites and others who have been called 'sexual anomalies' (Hutt, 1972: Money & Ehrharnett, 1972) all point to the conclusion that biology constrains but does not determine the behaviour of sexes, and the differences between human males and females reflect an interaction between our physical constitutions and pattern of social life."

(Rosaldo & Lemphere, 1974/5)

Also:

"The sexual division of labour is established by rules stipulated within each social group. Such rules are sex-related (and age-related), although not necessarily determined by either sex or age. Instead, social rules and tasks become associated with sex and age by an educational process of some kind, whether formal or informal. In preliterate societies the recitation of myth and the performance of ritual serve as educational processes."

(Bamberger, 1974/277)

Thus, on one hand there are advocates who insist that whatever we do or think is predetermined over millions of years through a process of natural selection and has become a genetic part of human-animal, making him a kind of robot which might have misconceptions about personal knowledge or of conscious development through a process of mutual learning and understanding during human discourses. Their opposites contend, just as solidly, that human action is a result of education and cultural activity within each social sphere, and a specific person would behave differently if exposed to different programmes during his life time.

According to the biological determinists and evolutionists the unbalance in the relationships between human males and females is a consequence of partly the bodily determined functions – male's physical strength, higher speed and stamina; female's weaker constitution, disability during menstruation and longer periods of time given to care taking during and after pregnancy – and partly the result of the extension of the dominant role which males achieve during these periods when women need care-taking:

"Enough specific experience would lead to the conclusion that the pregnant women, the menstruating woman, and nursing woman should stay home. Perhaps even the most primitive mind finally came to the general conclusion that all women should stay at home."

(Steinmann & Fox, 1974/18)

A rather simplistic view about the domestication of the women! It appears that the authors of these lines never thought that besides menstruating and nursing women, in those societies there must be a host of wounded and disabled men too – after all the men we are talking about were hunters, warriors and braves: men in a constant state of combative action against wild animals or other equally strong but unfriendly men. If the recent history is any guide then the number of wounded and disabled persons is empirically always a multiple of the dead in war-like activities at the local or larger scale. And such men need as much nursing and care, if not more, than any menstruation or pregnant women.

Nevertheless, there is a general consent that the male's muscle power, along with his mastery of weapon, while female's confinement to the domestic sphere and child-caring did play a definite role in the domination of women by men, at least in the early stages of human

societies when our forefathers are said to be mainly hunters and gatherers.

Kathleen Gough puts this case as:

..to the extent that men have power over women in hunting societies, this seems to spring from the male's monopoly of heavy weapons, from the particular division of labour between the sexes, or from both.

Although men seldom use a weapon against women, they possess them (or possess superior weapons) in addition to the physical strength.

(Gough,1975/70)

Once women were domesticated and put under the men's control not only did their mode of physical existence change, but their status as a thinking being also seems to have been relegated and its range was confined to the realm of home – this is a view which is propagated by most of the male anthropologists and some female anthropologists too who have declared the woman as the second sex (de Beauvoir.S. 1953, Ortner1974). Sherry Ortner, who caused quite a stir among female anthropologists, declared that woman is a universal victim of male dominance:

"The universality of female subordination, the fact that it exists within every type of social and economic arrangement and in societies of every degree of complexity, indicate to me that we are up against something very profound, very stubborn, something we cannot..."

(Ortner 1974/67)

What, on the other hand, Ortner does not discuss in detail is that this alleged inferiority of women is recognised by which group – by men alone, by women or by men and women.

C.P.MacCormack comments:

"Ortner states that "everywhere, in every culture women are considered in some degree inferior to men". But she does not say by whom they are considered to be so. By men? By women? By how many? In field work I have talked with women chiefs, women heads of descent-groups, heads of women secret societies, and women house-hold heads who would not agree with the sweeping thesis as it stands. They would say that women are inferior to men in some ways and men are inferior to women in some ways, giving productive talks in the division of labour as examples."

(MacCormack 1980/17,18)

Actually, we have two concepts here which are easy to get mixed with each other – Subordination and Inferiority. That women are subordinated in most culture is a historically verifiable fact, that they are also always considered inferior within the same cultures is often a

conjecture which may or may not be true. Not all subordinated beings are considered inferior by the dominants. And not all subordinated beings consider themselves inferior to those who dominate. The classical examples would be the old and current civilizations of China and India which despite their repeated subordination by the foreign savages considered themselves as culturally superior to their suppressors, and regarded the conditions of domination as merely circumstantial. Similarly, women may have been dominated by men in most cultures but this does not mean that they consider themselves as inferior to men. Not even all men who dominate women consider these women as inferior in all cultures – instead in many cultures' men are actually afraid of women and have gone to extra-ordinary lengths to construct myths and legends to nullify two natural superiorities which each normal woman has against a normal man:

(1) Her ability to procreate.

(2) Her natural privilege, when she has a free choice, to decide the real line of descent, and consequently the distribution of property by inheritance.

“In other words, the identity of a new-born's mother is always certain, but that of the father is only expected. In the modern world the observance of the patrilineal system is merely a tranquiliser for the male's vanity. In the natural world the only reliably traceable ancestry is matrilineal. It is either through mutual consent or sheer coercion that the male may decide the fatherhood; and not always successfully.”

(Sucha 1985/61)

Woman's natural gift to reproduce the human race seems to have had a double negative effect – physical handicap and dependency on men on one hand, and on the other the exertion of a compulsion upon men to create things outside their bodies to give them also the status of 'birth-givers'; if not human beings then at least human ideas and their visible manifestation in the form of material creations accomplished by male hands.

This ability to produce from 'within' the body and 'outside' the body is evaluated differently by opposing schools of thought. According to Ortner:

“In other words, woman's body seems to doom her to mere reproduction of life; the male, in contrast, lacking natural creative function, must (or has the opportunity to) assert his creativity externally, "artificially" through the medium of symbols and technology. In so doing, he creates

relatively lasting, eternal, transcendent objects, while the woman creates only perishables – human beings."

(Ortner 1974/75)

While Weiner says:

"In the Trobriands, recognition is given to the perishability of human beings, but, rather than diminish the inherent value of human beings as a means of achieving immortality, this recognition, especially enacted in death rituals, stresses the value placed on the continuity of life. In this way, the perpetuation of life or human survival is given far more transcendental significance than is the kind of immortality found in objects or in "cultural" survival. Therefore women, innately tied to the continuity of life, remain the locus of the means by which human survival transcends itself".

(Weiner 1976/234)

She adds:

Thus, in the Trobriands, male power over others is limited and the male search for immortality can only be fully achieved through women's control of dala identity. Men's attempt to achieve individual immortality must always remain an imitation of women's control over the re-gensis of human life. Men seek to imitate regeneration through control over property, which allows them to construct power hierarchies composed of women and men."

(Weiner 1976/233)

Personally, I support Weiner. One need to ask Ortner one simple question: If it is men who construct 'lasting, eternal and transcendent objects, then for whom these objects are constructed? For men only? For other human beings'? As long as women construct men and other 'human beings' then the primary honours must go to women because without their 'construction' there would be no one to appreciate these 'lasting, eternal and transcendent objects'.

Women's natural ability to reproduce ought not to have any negative connotations to it, and it is only through envy and fear that men have succeeded in producing such an inverse construction of reality.

Enormously fastidious explanations, throughout documented human history, by men in power have been put forward to show that it is the male who is the injector, the seed planter, the initiator of human life and the social creator, while women were merely a receptor of the male grace. Mary Warner adduces:

"In the Hellenistic world, the Stoics maintained that men's seed, divided into body and soul, joined with a part of the woman's pneuma, or soul,

to form the embryo. In their view, the whole child entered the woman's womb, and she provided none of the matter, only a little bit of the soul." (Warner.M 1976/40)

And not only did this view of the male as the active and woman being the passive has influenced their relationship in the sexual field but it is argued that its extension in the long run also determined woman's secondary status as a social being:

"The physiological fact of women being the sexual receptor became confounded with the social or psychological qualities of passivity and submissiveness. Similarly, the physiological fact of the male being the injector, became associated with activity and aggressiveness. It is not a very big step from passivity to dependence, and from dependence to inferiority. Thus, women became to be seen as inferior, or at least secondary, while men, in contrast, were seen as primarily in their sexual and social role."

(Steinmann & Fox 1974/18)

There are many other examples which signify male's discriminations and fears directed against the female, and the attempted desecration of her on grounds of menstruation (MacCormack 1980/9), aesthetically repulsive associations of smell and form with her genitals (Gillison 1980/149) or legal proclamations describing her as legally only half reliable as the male (Quran). Through these channels men have availed themselves with outlets which allow them escape in the nature (Gillison 1980/146), practice sodomy, under a multitude of symbolic and/or explicit excuses for their own sexual release (Rubin 1975) or else have degraded her to a level of sub-cultural, almost sub-human, servile being whose main function in life is to attend when service is demanded (Paul.L 1974/ 290).

But why impose all this degradation, domination, subordination and misuse of a being which constitutes one half of Homo sapiens?

To some it is a genetic code which makes us behave the way we do (Tiger & Fox 1974), to others it is the exchange of women in marriage alliances which propagated men to subdue and utilize women (Levi-Strauss 1969), other structuralists say that it is woman's closeness to nature and that of men's to culture which resulted in that those who developed culture could control those who were non- or semi-participants in the development of culture, societal rules and jural regulations (Ortner 1974), while the Marxists or neo-Marxists contend that although the most primitive societies were sexually egalitarians, it was the growth of class society which, along with the concept of private

property, gave rise to the subjugation of women for the purpose of domestic and reproductive labour, while men were used for the productive (economic and cultural) work (Engels 1891, Sacks 1975). While discussing 'The Origin of the Family' Kathleen Gough depends basically upon the Marxist theory and the new evidence which has become handy by the detailed study of the primates – our closest relatives in the animal kingdom. According to her, when the human societies changed from gathering and hunting bands, to semi-permanent agrarian groups, on to settled agriculturists with the appearance of villages and small towns, leading to the rise of state, and now through the industry the concentration of huge masses in crowded residential areas, there has been a gradual alteration in the male/female relations at all levels.

The band societies involved periodic intensive co-operative ventures, which were followed by the dispersal of the band into smaller units. This involved sexual intimacy at two levels concurrently: husband/ wife pairing as separate units, as well as male/female group relations if and when the occasion called for such mating. Probably no rigid code of behaviour existed between the two modes, and the members of the band societies could change from one mode to the other without much fuss (Gough 1975/68). The semi-permanent agrarian groups required more stable relations between particular males and females, both in the societal discharge of rights and obligations and that of sexual availability. The appearance of the settled agriculturists was followed by primarily with the personal rights to the use of the land and secondarily with the private ownership of the specific pieces of land; along with the establishment of the patriarchy and the formulation of the rules of inheritance, in most societies.

She concludes:

"A distinct change occurred with the growth of individual and family property in herds, in durable craft objects and trade objects, and in stable, irrigated farm sites or other forms of heritable wealth. This crystallized in the rise of the state, about 4000 B.O with the growth of class society and of male dominance in the ruling class of the state, women's subordination increased, and eventually reached its depth in the patriarchal families of the great agrarian states."

(Gough 1974/75)

Suddenly the men needed the women not only as the co-workers and the reproducers of the future co-workers, but also as the reproducers of the

children of particular genitors to enable the children to qualify as the inheritors of those particular property owners.

In different cultures the rules of inheritance vary but the biological bond within the family between the members of the same gender is often a strong one, even in those societies where the sons do not inherit the biological fathers (Weiner 1976/ 141).

These above-given argumentations, if correct, give a reasonably consistent chain of events which depict that how and why men subordinated women; but there is one important link missing – Why men subordinated and subjugated women as individuals in almost all cultures, rather than as groups? Women could have been used for the performance of all services - sexual, reproductive and domestic - as a class in groups of moderate sizes, as she is used in some isolated cases. Why men confined women into separate homes and restricted their physical and mental movement when, in fact, had they utilised them collectively it would have been easier to use them; just the same way dominant men have used other men as slaves and labourers for the productive work?

One explanation is the sound proposition forwarded by the Marxist analysts that it was the concept of private property inheritable to particular children fathered by certain individuals only.

But I believe that there is another reason too, which is little discussed in this context: it is the sexual inadequacy of the most men in giving sexual and sensual satisfaction to his female (Hite1976), which causes deep anxiety among most men, every-where and In every culture, and which resulted in the restrictions imposed upon the female availability to other men.

The female body, because of its anatomy and physiology, requires a completely different handling, to put it mildly, than that of the male. Male's physical satisfaction is the moment of orgasm (Masters & Johnson 1966). An easily observable empirical event, which is followed by immediate obvious changes in male's body and mood! A woman knows when a man is relieved. For most men the female orgasm is a mystery, and not an easily achievable end by straight forward copulatory intercourse (Hite 1976). In most cases it requires the stimulation of the clitoris and other erogenous parts of the female before and during the sexual intercourse. Very few men know the technique to bring forth the apex of sexual satisfaction for most women. And this inadequacy causes an anxiety which runs deep in the psyche of the human male.

Discussing the sexual relationships among American men and women in 'The Male Dilemma' Steinmann & Fox write:

"But today women consider themselves as something more than sexual objects, and rightly so. They have learnt that their bodies are more sensitive to a variety of erogenous stimulations than a man's, and that they are capable of profound and prolonged orgasms the same and even different from men's. Thus, the meaning of femininity has taken a different dimension, and a woman feels she is less than women if she is unable or is denied the opportunity to experience her total sexuality." (Steinmann & Fox 1971/129)

Also:

"Thus, the male finds himself in a double bind. He is not a man' in his own eyes if he does not assume the dominant sexual role and gratify his own desires, but in his wife's eyes he is not a man if he cannot satisfy her as well."

(Steinmann & Fox 1971/128)

This book is written in 1974 and considers human relationships in the late sixties in the USA. To me it appears that the same conclusion and understanding was reached by men and women elsewhere in the world thousands, if not millions, of years ago. They ought to have released Kama Sutra, The Perfumed Garden, Japanese Bridal Roll and Art of Love in USA much earlier.

It is only in the Western World (where most 'dominant' social anthropologists happen to be), just breaking out of the bondage set by the Christian view of sexuality and those Muslim countries where she is considered only semi-human, the female sensuality is considered as a new discovery.

One, of course, must differentiate between that which is naturally true of males and females from that which has become a part of the men and women's contemporary existent nature, or that which is assumed to be their nature but in reality is a behavioural pattern after years of coercive compliance. The practical possibilities for the physical and mental activities believed to be true within a specific society for its male and female members may not be true at all in their unadulterated form; yet, the members of that specific society may behave and practise their beliefs as if they were universally true – women in many Muslim countries may almost behave and function like half-intelligent beings because they have been conditioned to behave so, or women in many cultures may, initially, act sexually passive because they have been taught to appear so,

and this passivity may consequently become a part of their external attitude.

It is difficult to pinpoint that at what level of social evolution the incest taboo was introduced upon most of the human society; because initially all small groups must have been incestuous and, or, consanguineal. The non-availability of the sexually mature females to a certain kind and number of males because of the incest taboo was counterbalanced with the rules of exogamy, which ascertained a formal mode of peaceful exchange of nubile women between different groups, and which was, when needed, supplemented with the coercive recruitment of the females from other sources by abduction.

Whereas exogamy facilitated various societal groups to secure women, and men, for the purpose of biological intimacy it has one big drawback – it ensures no emotional intimacy between the intended husbands and wives. People put together by the common needs of the society may, as individuals, turn out to have quite uncommon likes and dislikes in their day to day intercourse; which also applies to the sexual satisfaction extended, and expected, by each gender to the other.

It is generally accepted that the incest taboo was imposed by the males for the protection and isolation of the female, so that she could be used for exchange during kinship alliances.

While discussing incest in 'Male Dominance and Femal Autonomy' Alice Schlegel puts forward two alternatives, and interesting, hypothesis about male/female relations, proposing that it was not the female but the male who was the principal object of protection. The two hypotheses are:

"1) A man who dominates a woman in other spheres of her domestic life is likely to dominate her sexually as well.

2) The 'subordinated female is not only more accessible to the dominant male but is more attracted to him as well. Besides she finds him the attractive object and is potentially seductive towards him.

“Thus, the relative strength of the incest taboo serves to protect the susceptible man, not the helpless woman.”

(Schlegel 1972/128,129)

The female sexuality – generally referred to as 'wild; 'natural', 'unrestrained' but according to my judgement ought to be called as 'unsatisfied' or rather 'dissatisfied' – makes the male feel insecure, not only in psychological terms but also in physical context. Although the subordinating male has the sexual power over the subjugated female, the subjugated female has the sensual power over the dominant male –
Sexuality: Sensuality :: Body : Mind.

In order to fight off this strong attraction between the few dominant males and the many dominated females in all societies the other men were forced to erect barriers, both material and legal, between the two attracted parties if they were also to get their own women and children. After a man has copulated with his woman couple of times, she can feel calm because her man is discharged; at least for the same occasion; often longer, the duration of this discharged state growing longer with the advancement of her man's age. After converting her man's stiffness to softness she knows that no further constrain is called for to curtail his movements. The reverse is not true. The professional, and some historical, ladies (Messalina, wife of Claudius), have been documented to accommodate 20+ men the same evening, in a succession of evenings, quite regularly.

And the professional and non-professional sisters of those professional ladies all over the world are gifted by nature that whenever instead of a clash between body and will there is a wish for the union of body and mind then they have a greater capacity for it than their contending men. According to natural system almost every healthy male can be sexually satisfied by a healthy female. But its reverse, as I have said earlier, often results in female's sexual dissatisfaction. Thus, if men and women lived in groups then only a few men would have been popular among women, whereas most men would have been deprived of female sexuality.

We see the same system among other animals which live in groups, where only a few attractive males impregnate all the females; while most of the males spend their time quarrelling and fighting with each other. Among human beings we have evolved systems according to which most men's personal needs are satisfied, but these men cannot get rid of the feeling of female sexual dissatisfaction from their minds!

In various societies men have tried to find a remedy for their complex by curtailing the female sexuality by different means - in certain parts of Africa her clitoris is surgically removed; for a long time Christianity considered the sexual act as dirty, and women were told that their function was to procreate only; and according to the Muslim tradition the recommended position of sexual union is such that not only women get the minimum of clitoral stimulation during intercourse but the men also avoid looking into her eyes; lest!

A solid proof of men's fear of the female heat is the jokes and advertisements that we find all over the world in books, magazines and TV, where men are continuously reminded that they are victim of some sexual deficiency and the cure for their deficiency is available.

Unfortunately, the punishment for the so-called sexual deficiency of men is inflicted upon those poor animals whose horns, tusks and other bones are said to be the cure of these ailments, and as its result these animals are becoming almost extinct.

Thus, if good moral societal rule, as defined, prescribed and enforced by men, are to be practised then unnatural, often called as cultural, boundaries must be drawn to restrain the dissatisfied women; the men are restrained by nature.

And women were and are, thus, not only subjugated by the dominant men for utility as a class, but that class was further broken into individuals by the less-dominant, and generally insecure, men to ascertain the availability of the women for their sexual and domestic needs, as well as for the reproduction of the future helping hands and inheritors.

There is much to be explored in the field of 'sex role', but I restrict this paper to the projection of three thoughts:

1) Not only elements of superiority but acute feelings of inferiority can also produce conditions of dominance, through desperation, with extremely adverse results for the dominated.

2) The male's obsession with the control of the female, both as a class and as an individual, is partly a product of male's superiority in strength and weaponry, coupled with laws associated with patriarchy and division of property, and partly the outcome of a deep anxiety which has its seat in the emotional insecurity of the male.

3) So long as women all over the world do not break the social chains that men have entangled them into, using devious concepts like feminine honour, shame and disgrace, and struggle to achieve the human equality and liberation from such stigmas they would remain subjugated.

An honourable and dignified human being must be able to look eyes to eye at another person, say candidly whatever is there on his or her mind and listen to the other party just as attentively. A creature coerced to follow all kind of right or wrong commands with averted eyes and a bowed head is not a liberated person.

The basic identity of a conscientious human being is that as a person he, free from all prejudices associated with race, nationality, complexion, sex and gender, should be able to reflect and decide individually and collectively upon the steps for the progress of current and coming generations at various societal levels. Such person feels responsible for the suggestions and decisions that he has participated into and justly claims the benefits and fruit of his labour; and also, according to the

rules of the society that he lives in participates actively in the life of other members of that society.

Every human being who is wholly dependent upon the decision of another person for his own development is a subjugated person!

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