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The following excerpt is from the paper, "Translation as a Political Experience," on translating Black feminist texts from English into Italian by Marie Moïse. In the previous section Moïse discusses her co-translation of Angela Davis's Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday (1998), *alongside Black feminist scholar Angelica Pesarini. Writing on Holiday's love songs, Davis notes that the blues idiom draws on the historical capacity of Black language "to speak the unspeakable, to convey meanings that differed from and sometimes contradicted the particular terms employed to express them." Here, Moïse envisions a Black feminist approach to translation within this legacy and discusses her translation choices for* Blue Legacies and *Davis's* Women, Race, and Class (1981).

WHY WHITE PEOPLE IN ITALY ARE NO LONGER TALKING ABOUT RACE

An example of this process is the Italian translation of the word "Race" in the title of Angela Davis's book *Women, Race, and Class*, first translated in 1985 by Margherita Caporaso for the Italian publishing house Editori Riuniti as *Bianche e nere* ("Whites and Blacks").[1] That translation choice cannot be dismissed as merely a product of its time. Especially in progressive Italian publishing, the word *razza* ("race") has long been censored, echoing a widespread discomfort among the white Italian population, linked to the use of the term "razza" during the Fascist regime.

This association, as is well known, is particularly rooted in the enactment of the 1938 anti-Semitic Racial Laws and the *Manifesto degli Scientisti Razziali*, which scientifically supported the existence of a "pure Italian race" on biological grounds.[2] Black Italian American scholar Camilla Hawthorne, like Black Italian scholar Angelica Pesarini, observes how these pivotal moments in Italian racial history constructed an idea of Italian supremacism as intrinsically connected to the construction of the racial inferiority of Jewish people. However, both scholars note that the construction of racial superiority in Italy was first produced in opposition to the construction of Black racial inferiority as a defining characteristic of colonized people in the Horn of Africa and North Africa (Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Libya). In fact, the creation of the Empire of Italian East Africa by the Fascist regime in May 1936 led to the promulgation of the Royal Decree-Law of April 19, 1937, no. 880, later converted into law on December 30, 1937, no. 2590, which prohibited marital unions between Italian citizens and colonized subjects. This was further reinforced in 1939 with Law 1004/1939, articles 17 and 18, which introduced criminal sanctions aimed at defending the "Racial Prestige Against the Natives of Italian Africa."

Hawthorne contextualizes contemporary censorship of the term *razza* with earlier arguments by mid-twentieth-century liberals rejecting Fascist-era racial theories of biological difference and their attendant legal codes:

> In this post–World War II retreat from "race," biological understandings of race have fallen out of official favor: center-left antiracists advocate postracialism and color blindness, while right-wing separatists couch their xenophobia in the "acceptable" language of cultural difference. But even when the legal architecture of explicit, biologically based racism has been dismantled, patterns of racialized disadvantage and exclusion persist, albeit under insidious new guises. Theorists have approached this "racial evaporation" using the analytics of "cultural racism," "cultural fundamentalism," "new racism," "racism without race," "differential racism," or "color-

> blind racism / racism without racists" to characterize the contours of these exclusionary discursive practices that order difference in cultural rather than purely biological terms.[3]

For decades and even today, there's been debate about removing the word *razza* from Article 3 of the Italian Constitution, promulgated after the fall of the Fascist regime, which states that all citizens are equal "without any distinction […] of race."[4] Thus, translating the title *"Women, Race, and Class"* as *"Bianche e nere"* seems to follow this political stance.

This debate, however, continues to influence the translation choices of more recent publications, particularly in publishing contexts characterized by the systematic exclusion of racialized professionals or those with a colonized background. A relevant and recent example is the Italian translation of Reni Eddo-Lodge's *Why I'm no longer talking to white people about race* (2017) by Silvia Montis for E/O publishing house. Here the word "race" was converted into "racism": *Perché non parlo più di* razzismo *con le persone bianche* (2021).

Yet, neither Davis's text nor Eddo-Lodge's proposes a biologistic use of the term "race." On the contrary, they draw on its reclamation by antiracist movements, which, from the 1960s onward, have employed the term critically to expose the persistence of racial ideology as a foundation of contemporary social, economic, and political structures. In other words, "race" emerges both in Davis's theoretical discourse and in the political discourse of the antiracist movements she is aligned with as a relation of production and a structural relation of domination.

In this framework, precisely because Davis's work traces the historical genealogy of antiracist resistance—demonstrating how this resistance has involved a conceptual inversion of the term "race"—the term in her text is not conceptually confined either to a biological or an ethno-cultural dimension. More specifically, "Black race" in Davis's work does not refer to a "natural" community but rather to a political one—a historical product of a system of exploitation. At the moment this community resists the system itself, it asserts its own subjectivity and develops a corresponding vocabulary for self-representation and for interpreting the world.

Thus, the political and psychological translation of oppression cannot be reduced to the white power's interpretation of it, nor can it correspond solely to the *white* voices that have contested it. On the contrary, the use of the word "razza" in Italian by contemporary Italian racialized generations is a

politically transformative use of the term, reclaiming the existence of an oppressive political system still based on the ideology of race, which reproduces itself by denying the existence of race but legitimizing and naturalizing its new signifiers, such as ethnicity, skin color differences, cultural differences, nationality.

The necessity of the word *razza* is a politically situated need of those who, bearing the wounds of that system of domination on their own bodies, contest its pervasiveness, even in the ethical and sensory realm of its own challengers.

So, translating the title of Angela Davis's 1981 work as *Donne, razza e classe* doesn't reduce the term "race" to that of "razza" as it was defined in the Fascist *Manifesto della Razza* or in the Racial Laws of 1938 in Italy. On the contrary, it imbues itself with the translinguistic and transnational political movement that has reinstated the political-ideological nature of the term and its persistence in a so-called post-racial world.

What's more, the translation of the word conveys a profound process of elaborating on a historical impotent rage. In the word "razza," which stands out today in the title of the current Italian translation of Davis's text, collective psychological process resonates, that process through which racialized subjects in Italy have achieved a new inner solidity and stability compared to a long experience of silencing.

Concrete and notable examples include the series of publications in Italy inspired by and echoing the translation of Angela Davis's groundbreaking text. Among these is the work of Wissal Houbabi, an artist of Moroccan descent in Italy, who in 2020 staged the multimedia poetic performance *"Che razza di Rap"* ("What Kind of Rap") created in collaboration with Giuseppe Pipitone, aka U.Net, a U.S.-based scholar of rap and antiracism. Also when in 2020, Angelica Pesarini and Mackda Ghebremariam Tesfau' published their educational tools to challenge the Eurocentric whiteness of school curricula, "Materiali per una didattica decoloniale" ("Materials for a Decolonial Pedagogy"), they explicitly dedicated a section of these materials to the concepts of "'Razza' e riparazioni" ("'Race' and reparations") aimed at fostering philosophical classroom debates around the relationship between these concepts. Here, they define the term *race* as the material outcome of "practices of hierarchical differentiation between superior (human) and inferior (subhuman) beings."[5]

Activists have acknowledged the role of translation in these abolitionist struggles. Indeed, in 2021, the podcast *"Sulla Razza"* (*About Race*) was launched by three Italian women—two of whom have migratory and colonized backgrounds: Nadeesha Uyangoda, Natasha Fernando, along with activist Maria Catena Mancuso with the explicit purpose of "translating into Italian concepts and expressions from Anglo-American culture" arising "from the need to initiate a conversation about racial issues in Italy."

Through its use by Black Italian activists in the realm of cultural production, *razza* becomes a signifier whose sound expresses a new inner solidity even in the face of discomfort, anxiety, and defense mechanisms that cross the white audience as they hear or read that word. White discomfort, thus, can become a new element of the transformative antiracist process, by indicating to the white audience the way out of a comfort zone, the comfort zone of white privilege, which has long been the privilege of translating the others' experience of oppression.

THE (UPPER) CASE OF BLACKNESS IN TRANSLATION

In 2019, one year after my Italian co-translation of *Women, Race, and Class*, a group of Black women wrote a letter in Italian to the Mayor of Milan after he was photographed for a major Italian newspaper, *Il Corriere della Sera*. In the photograph, the mayor is seated in a chair, while a Black girl hugs his legs from below, sitting at his feet ("Lettera aperta di un gruppo di donne nere italiane al sindaco Giuseppe Sala e al team editoriale per la rivista Corriere della sera," 2019). In contestation of this racist representation, the authors of the letter signed it with their own names, surnames, and self-definition as Black women, using the term "Donne Nere" with a capital "N."

The term *Nera/o* with a capital "N" has been used by various antiracist and feminist movements throughout history as a means of substantiating and subjectivizing their political agency. To borrow from W.E.B. Du Bois ([1899] 2007), the capital N becomes a substantiation of their dignity as human beings.[6]

In our Italian translation of *Women, Race, and Class*, the term *Black* with a capital "B" has been translated as *Nero/Nera*, maintaining the capital letter.[7] This choice has raised eyebrows among adherents of Italian grammatical rules, given that, unlike English, adjectives indicating nationality or ethnic belonging do not typically require capitalization. However, the choice takes on deeper political significance, disassociating the term *Nero/Nera* from its assumed status as an ethnic-national

descriptor and repositioning it as a product of political struggle within the material and symbolic terrain of racialization.

Thanks to the globalization of the Black Lives Matter movement, especially after the suprematist murder of the African American George Floyd in Minneapolis in 2020, the term *Nero/Nera*, even in its adjectival form with a lowercase letter (*nero/nera)*, has become a key term for self-definition among a new generation of antiracist Italians. Dozens of public demonstrations organized by racialized Italians echoed in Italy the demands and key concepts of the movement that arose to seek justice for George Floyd and to call for the abolition of all forms of institutionalized and informal power structures—from law enforcement to workplace segregation, and even the daily microaggressions that ultimately led to his death. Social media, national and international press, and television widely represented the slogans that resonated from the leading banners of marches to the signs held aloft by protesters – "Basta uccidere persone nere" ("Stop killing black people"), "Essere nero non significa valere zero" ("Being black doesn't mean being worth nothing"), "Nero è bello" ("Black is beautiful") – amplified through speeches delivered over microphones and megaphones and carried forward in public statements during political assemblies and interviews with the press: "We are here for this," replied activist Abdel Khadir Monaco to the microphones of the online newspaper *Fanpage* during the Naples demonstration: "to demand that light be shed not only on the racial discrimination we Black Italian men and Black Italian women experience, but above all because this state still creates slaves. And we are here for this, to ensure that this struggle is not in vain but becomes a fight for true social justice."[8]

This trend is reflected in specific literary and media productions in the Italian language, such as the political autobiographical text *Manifesto di una donna nera italiana* by Esperance H. Ripanti (2019), the independent podcast *Black Coffee -Il podcast italiano senza filtri sulle identità nere* by Ariam Tekle and Emmanuelle Maréchal (2020), the essay collections, *L'unica persona nera nella stanza* by Nadeesha Uyangoda (2021), *Fortunatamente nera. Il risveglio di una mente colonizzata* by Nogaye Ndiaye (2023), *Nera con forme. Storia di un corpo grasso* by "Marianna the influenza," and the autobiographical fiction, *Il corpo nero,* by Anna Maria Gehnyei.

TRANSLATING "WOMEN OF COLOR"

The authors who claim the term *Nera/o* have subverted its hegemonic meaning in Italian, which has long been criticized from a white, politically correct perspective as inappropriate. The supposed correct term would be *persona di colore* (person of color). However, this expression carries a specific

racial implication in Italian (as in English): people with "a color" deviate from the white norm, which requires no term for distinction. Only non-white individuals are considered to have a color.

In English, as used by Angela Davis, the term "people of color" is a reclaimed word, detached from its colonial origins, traced by critical race scholars.[9] As a matter of fact, the distinction between free people and slaves, as noted by Eric Williams in *Capitalism & Slavery* (1944), one of the first texts to explore the cause-and-effect relationship between slavery and racism, was marked by the presence of an intermediate body between the two foundational classes of plantation society, that is those who achieved freedom in their lifetime or were born free through the union of a free person and a non-free person: the *free people of color*. The introduction of this legal category, as observed by Martinican militant psychiatrist Frantz Fanon in his foundational work on critical race thought in Europe, *Black Skin, White Masks* ([1952] 1967), must be understood in a dialectical relationship with a racialized and colonial conceptualization of freedom. What is assumed to be absolute freedom, Fanon argues, conceals its implicit racial character, which is elevated to a universal and neutral standard.[10]

Nowadays, the anglophone term *people of color* not only serves as a reappropriated term, but it currently contributes to acknowledge the limits of *blackness* as a category when addressing experiences of racism not tied to the African diaspora.

But unlike the politically reclamatory use of the term proposed by Davis, a racial "unthought" is embedded in the Italian expression *persona di colore*. As such the term has been rejected by my translation partner Angelica Peesarini[11] and Black Italian activists like Tareke Brhane, president of the nonprofit organization "Comitato 3 Ottobre," who has said: "I don't use the expression *'of color'* because it seems inappropriate to me…I use the word *Black* or *Blacks*…and as we see today with the Black Lives Matter movement, it is certainly the most natural choice when it is necessary to describe a social reality."[12]

From this perspective, rooted in Italian Blackness and in the antiracist struggles over language led by those who embody that Blackness, the translation of the English phrase *"of color"* becomes particularly problematic. Accordingly, that makes translating the English term *women of color/people of color* into Italian particularly challenging. But precisely because it is impossible to use the English expression through a literal translation with the same politically reclaimed meaning, segments of the antiracist movement have advocated for an umbrella term that captures diverse racialized

experiences. For instance, Uyangoda, critiques the invisibilization, within the antiracist Italian panorama, of non-Black African experiences of racism such as hers. Indeed, hers is precisely the experience of a racialized person, inscribed into the Italian category of Blackness through linguistic and verbal violence, but who, due to the nature of their Sri-Lankian migratory background, does not belong to the African diaspora (Uyangoda 2021).

Her critique reflects the ongoing search for "missing words" – that is "Le parole che ci mancano," a concept central to antiracist activism in Italy, as demonstrated by the multimedia public awareness campaign of the same name by Razzismo Brutta Storia.

On this basis, grassroots political efforts to create transformative language have led to the diffusion of the concept of "razzializzazione" (*racialization*)[13] and its corresponding subject—racialized persons–under the expression "persone razzializzate." Through their process of *political subjectivation*–the progressive articulation of political and politically aware action, coagulating a political subject–it is precisely racialized individuals who, in these terms, promote the use of this past participle—"racialized"—as a key attribute of their process of self-definition and self-representation. In other words, the term *persone razzializzate* (racialized persons) has emerged to define a political subject aware that racism in Italy affects various ethnicized groups that cannot all be subsumed under *Black people* as an umbrella term.

This is the argument collectively put forth in 2022 by four activists from the *Coordinamento Antirazzista Italiano* (Italian Antiracist Coordination), a network of activists with both migratory and Italian backgrounds, established in 2022 following the murder of a Black street vendor in Civitanova Marche by a white Italian man. The four activists (myself included) shared some of the linguistic and conceptual reflections in the pages of the weekly magazine *Internazionale*. These reflections resonated with a national linguistic process, which caught the attention of the magazine's editorial team. As a result, the publication dedicated a special issue to the most significant words of the year in the public and media landscape, highlighting "Razzializzazione":

It is not true that neologisms are intimidating. If society has been able to integrate expressions like "pandemic," "rapid antigen test," or "sanitization" into everyday language—terms necessary to collectively address a global problem—then it can do the same to tackle a phenomenon of equally global proportions, such as structural racism, starting with those who endure its effects. In 2022,

racialized people spoke out in various spaces to denounce the racist structures of Italian society, beginning with language and its many terms capable of both perpetuating racial violence and concealing it.

Talking about racialization and racialized people allows us to shed light on the processes that make race a material and daily experience. It is not a fixed attribute but the result of a process—historical, social, and cultural—or, more accurately, an interconnected plurality of processes.

The artificial hierarchy of human beings has a stratified and non-linear history in Italy as well, impacting a wide range of populations both then and now: people of Romani, Sinti, Maghrebi, Chinese, Sri Lankan, and Balkan origins; individuals who immigrated as adults or as young children, whether with their families or through international adoption; and even people born on Italian soil who have never seen another country. From the colonial plantation to contemporary imperialism, history manifests itself in a multiplicity of everyday forms of violence and dehumanization.[14]

Consequently, translating *women of color* and *people of color* in historical Black feminist texts into Italian cannot ignore the evolving lexicon of contemporary Italian Black feminism.

The issue arose in the translation of Angela Davis's *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, where the Italian rendering of the phrase "women of color" grappled with the challenge of conveying the language of self-definition from the source language to the target language during an ongoing process of self-representation. Thus, while Davis employs the umbrella term "women of color," the Italian translation of her work in 2022 employs *donne razzializzate* (literally, "racialized women"), aligning with this emergent vocabulary.

Similarly, where the original text employed the term *Negro* in its historical reclaimed sense from an antiracist standpoint, the translation opted for a partial lexical and conceptual shift, choosing to translate the word with the Italian antiracist term "Nero/a" instead. In instances where the English *Negro* was clearly associated with the act of speaking of white subjects of power to define Black people, the translation chose to disambiguate the term from its presumed neutral value, instead highlighting its implicit racialized and dehumanizing nature. From this perspective, the translation of Negro, when inscribed in white acts of speaking, introduced the partially obscured form of the Italian equivalent of the N-word. This resulted in the experimental term "ne*ro", with the explicit aim of

interrupting the linguistic violence carried by the full word while preserving the authorial choices and maintaining the text's comprehensibility.[15]

NOTES

1. Davis, Angela Y. *Bianche e nere*, Editori Riuniti 1985 (tr. it. Margherita Caporaso) ↑
2. Hawthorne, Camilla. *Contesting race and citizenship: youth politics in the Black Mediterranean*. Cornell University Press, 2022, p.110-13. ↑
3. Hawthorne, Camilla. *Contesting race and citizenship: youth politics in the Black Mediterranean*. Cornell University Press, 2022, p.57 ↑
4. "All citizens have equal social dignity and are equal before the law, without distinction of sex, race, language, religion, political opinion, personal and social conditions.", Constitution of the Italian Republic, Fundamental Principles, Art. 3, p.5. See also: Deplano, Valeria. "Senza distinzione di razza. Razzismo in controluce nel discorso pubblico italiano tra gli anni Cinquanta e Settanta". *From the European South* 1.1 (2016): 95-102. ↑
5. In the Italian original: "pratiche di differenziazione gerarchica tra esseri superiori (umani) e inferiori (subumani)" (Ghebremariam Tesfau', Pesarini, p. 93). ↑
6. In 1899, in The Philadelphia Negro, W.E.B. Du Bois introduces his essay by justifying in an opening note the choice of a capital N for the term Negro: "I shall throughout this study use the term "Negro," to designate all people of Negro descent […] I shall, moreover, capitalize the word, because I believe that eight million Americans are entitled to a capital letter." Du Bois, W. E. B. ([1899] 2007). *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*. New York: Oxford University Press, p.2, n.1. ↑
7. "Tale pratica ha contraddistinto buona parte della produzione letteraria e militante afrodiscendente, dalle opere di Frantz Fanon a quelle di Audre Lorde, dai comunicati politici del Black Panthers Party fino a quelli del contemporaneo movimento di Black Lives Matter. Innalzando di fatto l'aggettivo a nome proprio l'iniziale maiuscola simboleggia un gesto di riappropriazione e risignificazione soggettiva della categoria razziale, segnalando così un processo di soggettivazione politica in atto" in "Nota di traduzione," Angela Davis, *Donne, razza e classe*, 2018, p.19. ↑
8. "siamo qui per questo, per chiedere che sia fatta luce non soltanto sulle discriminazioni razziali che viviamo noi uomini italiani neri, donne italiane nere, ma soprattutto perché questo stato fa ancora degli schiavi e noi siamo qui per questo, affinchè questa battaglia non sia sterile ma sia una battaglia per averte giustizia sociale" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GpUfLpoWVag, min.2:53 ↑
9. In *Women, Race and Class*, Davis uses the term with the meaning accorded to it through its

reappropriation, in order to define the target of the structural domination, at the intersection of multiple interlocking systems of oppression: “Racism and sexism frequently converge—and the condition of white women workers is often tied to the oppressive predicament of women of color” (Davis 1981, p. 94). In the same text, moreover, Davis uses the phrase ‘of color’ even more explicitly as an umbrella term politically claimed by oppressed subjects. She employs the term to analyze the impact of economic racism on what she calls ‘workers of color’ and the effect of institutional racism on people from various backgrounds. Specifically, she refers to “the rising influence of racism in the judicial system, educational institutions, and the government’s posture of studied neglect towards Black people and other people of color.” The subject of such oppressive action is soon afterward unpacked, highlighting its connection to the multiple targets of racial violence, whose racialized backgrounds are explicitly identified through the terms “Blacks, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, and Native Americans.” ↑

10. “But the Negro knows nothing of the cost of freedom, for he has not fought for it. From time to time he has fought for Liberty and Justice, but these were always *white liberty* and *white justice*; that is, values secreted by his masters. The former slave […] can find in his memory no trace of the struggle for liberty or of that anguish of liberty of which Kierkegaard speaks” (Fanon 1967, p.172). ↑
11. Se le persone bianche sono semplicemente “persone” e non hanno un colore, tutte le altre invece vengono definite e categorizzate proprio in base a quello. Ciò si riflette anche nel linguaggio. Un esempio, a tal proposito, riguarda l’odiosa espressione in italiano “persona di colore”[6] che in molti, erroneamente, credono sia politically correct senza notarne le implicite connotazioni discriminatorie (c’è chi ha, o meglio è un colore e chi no). (Angelica Pesarini, Siamo tutti scimmie, 2020, http://www.razzismobruttastoria.net/blog_post/tutti-scimmie-antirazzismo-made-italy/) ↑
12. “Non uso l’espressione “di colore” che mi sembra impropria (…) Uso la parola nero/neri (…) e come si vede oggi con il movimento Black Lives Matter, è di sicuro la scelta più naturale quando è necessario caratterizzare una realtà sociale.” ↑
13. “Racialization is the process through which a dominant group assigns racial, dehumanizing, and inferiorizing characteristics to a subordinated group, using forms of direct and/or institutional violence that result in a condition of material and symbolic exploitation and exclusion. The term *racialized* allows us to see how race, which does not exist biologically, serves to uphold power relations.” (“La razzializzazione è il processo attraverso cui un gruppo dominante attribuisce caratteristiche razziali, disumanizzanti e inferiorizzanti, a un gruppo dominato, attraverso forme di violenza diretta e/o istituzionale che producono una condizione di sfruttamento ed esclusione materiale e simbolica. La parola razzializzata/o ci consente di vedere come la razza, che non

esiste biologicamente, serva a mantenere rapporti di potere." Angelica Pesarini, *Le parole che ci mancano,* 2020. ↑

14. Non è vero che i neologismi spaventano. Se è stato possibile assimilare nel linguaggio corrente espressioni come "pandemia", "tampone antigenico rapido" o "sanificazione" – parole necessarie per responsabilizzarci collettivamente di fronte a un problema globale – si può fare lo stesso per sradicare un fenomeno di portata altrettanto planetaria come il razzismo strutturale, partendo da chi ne subisce gli effetti. Nel 2022 le persone razzializzate hanno preso parola in diversi ambiti per denunciare le strutture razziste della società italiana, a cominciare dalla lingua e dai suoi numerosi termini capaci di veicolare violenza razziale come di dissimularla. (…) Parlare di razzializzazione e persone razzializzate consente di illuminare il processo che porta la razza a diventare un'esperienza materiale e quotidiana. Non un dato fisso, ma l'esito di un processo – storico, sociale e culturale – o ancora meglio di un'eterogeneità di processi interconnessi tra loro. (…) [L]a gerarchia artificiale dell'essere umano ha una storia stratificata e non lineare anche in Italia e ricade, oggi come un tempo, su una molteplicità di popolazioni: persone di origini rom, sinti, magrebine, cinesi, srilankesi, balcaniche; persone immigrate in età adulta, come a pochi anni di età, arrivate insieme alla propria famiglia, o per effetto di adozioni internazionali, ma anche persone venute al mondo sul suolo italiano, senza aver mai visto altro paese. Dalla piantagione coloniale all'imperialismo contemporaneo, la storia si stratifica in una molteplicità di forme quotidiane di violenza e disumanizzazione. ↑
15. Moïse, Pesarini, Nota di Traduzione, in Angela Davis, Blues e femminismo nero, 2022, p.19 ↑

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