

PEOPLE OF THE PHILIPPINES, PLAINTIFF-APPELLEE, VS. LUDOVICO C. DOCTOLERO ALIAS “ECOY,” CONRADO C. DOCTOLERO ALIAS “CONDRING,” AND VIRGILIO C. DOCTOLERO ALIAS “VERGEL,” ACCUSED-A...

G.R. No. L-34386. February 07, 1991

Ponente: REGALADO, J.

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REGALADO, J.:

Accused-appellants Ludovico Doctolero and his brothers. Conrado and Virgilio Doctolero, charged with and convicted in the then Court of First Instance, Branch II, Pangasinan, of the crime of multiple murder and unspecified physical injuries, appealed from the decision of the court a quo the decretal portion of which reads:

"WHEREFORE, in view of the foregoing, the court finds the accused Ludovico Doctolero guilty as principal, and his co-accused Conrado Doctolero and Virgilio Doctolero guilty as accomplices, in committing the crime of Murder, which caused the death of Epifania Escosio, Lolita de Guzman Oviedo and Marcelo Doctolero, and in inflicting physical injury on the minor child, Jonathan Oviedo. Accordingly, in the absence of other circumstances to mitigate the penalty, the accused Ludovico Doctolero is sentenced to suffer the penalty of three (3) LIFE IMPRISONMENTS (CADENA PERPETUA) for the deaths of Epifania Escosio, Lolita de Guzman Oviedo and Marcelo Doctolero, and the additional penalty of 4 Months and 1 Day to 6 Months of arresto mayor, for inflicting slight physical injury to (sic) the minor child, Jonathan Oviedo. The accused Conrado Doctolero and Virgilio Doctolero, as accomplices are sentenced to suffer the penalty of 10 Years and 1 Day of prision mayor to 17 Years and 4 Months of reclusion temporal, for the death of Epifania Escosio; the penalty of 10 Years and 1 Day of prision mayor to 17 Years and 4 Months reclusion temporal, for the death of Lolita de Guzman Oviedo; the penalty of 10 Years and 1 Day of prision mayor to 17 Years and 4 Months of reclusion temporal, for the death of Marcelo Doctolero; and the additional penalty of 2 Months and 1 Day to 4 Months of arresto mayor for the slight physical injury suffered by the minor child, Jonathan Oviedo. All accused Ludovico, Conrado and Virgilio, all surnamed Doctolero, are ordered to indemnify the heirs of the deceased Epifania Escosio, in the sum of P12,000.00; the heirs of the deceased Lolita de Guzman Oviedo, in the sum of P12,000.00; and the heirs of the deceased Marcelo Doctolero, in the sum of P12,000.00; and to pay three-fourths (3/4) of the costs. The accused Antonio Doctolero is acquitted, with one-fourth (1/4) cost de oficio."[1]

The information filed against appellants alleges that the crime was committed as follows:

"That on or about the 8th day of November, 1970, in barrio Bindow, municipality of San Fabian, province of Pangasinan, Philippines, and within the jurisdiction of this Honorable Court, the above-named accused, armed with bolos, went up the house of Marcial Sagun and once thereat, conspiring together and mutually aiding one another, with intent to kill and with evident premeditation and treachery, with abuse of superior strength and with extreme cruelty, did then and there, wilfully, unlawfully and feloniously attack, assault, hack, stab and strike Lolita de Guzman Oviedo, Epifania Escosio and Jonathan Oviedo and immediately thereafter, the same accused while already on the road, conspiring together and mutually aiding one another, with intent to kill and with evident premeditation and treachery, attack, assault, hack and stab Marcelo Doctolero, thereby inflicting

upon him multiple mortal wounds which caused his death." [2]

Upon arraignment, all the appellants pleaded not guilty to the crimes charged. In its decision, the trial court made the following findings and a summary of the evidence for the prosecution thus:

"It is undisputed that on the evening of November 8, 1970, Epifania Escosio and Lolita de Guzman were killed in the house of Marcial Sagun in Sitio Bindow, municipality of San Fabian, province of Pangasinan, where they were living. Jonathan Oviedo, 1 1/2 year old child of Lolita de Guzman, was on the same occasion, slightly injured while being fed on the breast of his mother. On the road, a few meters from the house of Marcial Sagun, Marcelo Doctolero, 81 years old, was fatally injured. He was taken to the Pangasinan Provincial Hospital but he died on the way. x x x

"The evidence for the prosecution tend to show that the three (3) accused, Ludovico, Conrado and Virgilio, all surnamed Doctolero, were responsible for the death(s) of Epifania Escosio and Lolita de Guzman, and in inflicting physical injuries to (sic) Jonathan Oviedo. And immediately thereafter, with their father and co-accused, Antonio Doctolero, they hacked Marcelo Doctolero, with their bolos which caused the death of the latter.

"The principal witnesses for the prosecution are: Marcial Sagun, his wife Maria Sagun, and Paciencia Sagun-Diamoy. According to Marcial Sagun, at about 6:30 in the evening on November 8, 1970, he and his wife, Maria Oviedo-Sagun and Lolita de Guzman-Oviedo (sister-in-law of Maria Oviedo-Sagun) were on their way home to Barrio Bindow. They came from the field where they bundled their harvests. Upon reaching a crossing of the road in Bo. Bindow they met the accused Ludovico Doctolero who, without warning and without cause or reason, held the left shoulder of Marcial Sagun with his left hand and struck Marcial Sagun with a bolo. The latter evaded that blow and wrestled with Ludovico Doctolero for possession of the bolo of the latter. Lolita de Guzman-Oviedo became frightened when Ludovico Doctolero and Marcial Sagun were wrestling for the possession of the bolo of the former, so she ran away in the direction of the house in Sitio Bindow.

"Paciencia Sagun-Diamoy (sister of Marcial Sagun) testified that while she was cleaning palay in the yard of her uncle, the deceased Marcelo Doctolero, she saw the accused Ludovico, Conrado and Virgilio (all surnamed Doctolero) throw stones at the house of Marcial Sagun. While throwing stones, Ludovico allegedly shouted for the man in the house to come out. Paciencia Sagun-Diamoy went towards the house of Marcial Sagun and saw the three accused. Ludovico, Conrado and Virgilio, coming down from the house going towards her. She told them: 'Why can't you be patient and forget?' But she was asked not to interfere. At about that time, Marcelo Doctolero, half-brother of Antonio Doctolero, and uncle of the three accused was going towards the house of Marcial Sagun, when he met the three accused, Ludovico, Conrado and Virgilio. Marcelo Doctolero told them why they can't be patient and forget, but the three accused replied 'Vulva of your mother, we will also kill you.' Then they struck Marcelo Doctolero several times with their bolos. And when their father Antonio Doctolero, arrived he also struck Marcelo Doctolero with a bolo on the head. Marcelo Doctolero fell and then all the accused ran away.

"The testimony of Paciencia Sagun-Diamoy is sought to be corroborated by the testimony of Maria Oviedo-Sagun (wife of Marcial Sagun) who declared that while she was in the house of Marcelo Doctolero, to whom she reported the incident between Ludovico Doctolero and Marcial Sagun, she saw the three accused Ludovico, Conrado and Virgilio throwing stones at their house' and called to all the men in the house to come out. She was about to go to their house to get her children but she saw the three accused Ludovico, Conrado and Virgilio going up. So she hid behind the palm tree, a few meters away from their house. While there, she heard Epifania Escosio (her adopted mother) shouting at her, saying 'Enieng, your children.' Then she saw the three accused coming down from the house, going towards the road where they met Marcelo Doctolero whom they also bologed several times until he fell. When Antonio Doctolero arrived, he also struck Marcelo Doctolero with a bolo. Then they all left." [3]

On the other hand, appellants present the following version:

"On November 8, 1970, at about 6:00 o'clock in the evening, Ludovico Doctolero met at the crossing of Bo. Banaba and Bindow road, San Fabian, Pangasinan, Marcial Sagun, who was with his wife, Maria Oviedo, Antonio Oviedo and the latter's wife, Lolita de Guzman. Antonio Oviedo is the brother-in-law of Marcial Sagun, he being the brother of Maria Oviedo. (tsn, p. 7, hearing, February 17, 1971-Somera). Marcial Sagun and company were on their way home. (p. 8, *ibid*).

"Ludovico greeted Marcial Sagun: 'Where have you been cousin.' (p. 8, *ibid*) He noticed, however, Antonio Oviedo holding his bolo on his waist. So, he asked his cousin Marcial Sagun why Antonio Oviedo was like that. The latter, unsheathed his bolo and boloed Ludovico with a downward swing. He parried the bolo with his left hand (p. 9, *ibid*), but he was hurt in the process (p. 10, *ibid*).

"At that juncture, Marcial Sagun unsheathed his bolo and Ludovico Doctolero also unsheathed his bolo. They watched each other's step (p. 10, *ibid*) with the two women, Lolita de Guzman and Maria Oviedo, hitting the back of Ludovico with a wood (sic). The latter ignored them, as his eyes were towards Marcial Sagun and his brother-in-law, Antonio Oviedo (p. 11, *ibid*).

"Realizing that he could not afford to fight both Marcial Sagun and Antonio Oviedo, Ludovico tried to escape by boloing Maria Oviedo, whom he hit at the back. He retreated and then run (sic) away, with Marcial Sagun and Antonio Oviedo throwing stones at him. (p. 12, *ibid*).

"Ludovico went to the house of his father, Antonio Doctolero. The latter was eating his meal, together with his small children upstairs, while accused-appellant, Conrado Doctolero was in the kitchen downstairs also eating his meal, when Ludovico arrived (p. 13, *ibid*; p. 4, hearing June 8, 1971 - Salazar).

"He told his father that he was wounded and asked him to look after his children as he might meet something bad that night. He did not enter the house anymore; he was only until the door. Then he ran away. His father asked him what happened, but he did not answer anymore. (p. 14, *ibid*, p. 4, Salazar).

"He ran towards his house, taking a short cut by passing through the house of his cousins, Juanito and Cresencia Doctolero. As he came near his house, he saw the house of Marcial Sagun, who was also his immediate neighbor. His blood boiled. He went to Marcial's house calling him to get down. When Marcial did not get down, he peeped and noticed that Marcial Sagun was not there. So he went upstairs to ask Epifania Escosio, who told him that Marcial Sagun went towards the South. He was about to leave when the old woman hit him at the back of his neck, causing him to see darkness and (he) boloed her several times (p.13-19, tsn, hearing, February 17, 1971).

"Ludovico went downstairs to look for Marcial Sagun. He stayed a while at the trunk of the buri tree, thinking that he might be ambushed. Here, he did not notice anyone coming from the south or the east. So he tried to move, but as he did so, he noticed someone approaching him coming from the yard of Marcelo Doctolero. As it was dark he did not recognize the man and thinking that it was Marcial Sagun, he met him. It turned out, however, that the man was Marcelo Doctolero. So he returned the bolo he was holding in its scabbard. He asked Marcelo Doctolero where Marcial Sagun was, but Marcelo Doctolero answered him, 'because of foolishness' and hit him on the shoulder, but in the process of evading the blow, Ludovico Doctolero was hit at the back. As Marcelo Doctolero tried to hit him for a second time he took a side step and took hold of the stick and pulled it away, causing Marcelo Doctolero to fall on his knees. He was able to get the club, but Marcelo Doctolero unsheathed his bolo. When the latter insisted on unsheathing his bolo, Ludovico Doctolero boloed him many times. (pp. 19-26, *ibid*).[4]

The police were then informed of the brutal murders as well as the injury caused to the child. A doctor, and a photographer went to the scene of the crime and pictures were then taken.[5]

Quoting from the findings of the Rural Health Officer of San Fabian, the court below established that -

"x x x nine (9) wounds were inflicted on the body of Marcelo Doctolero, namely:

x x x

‘(1)

Incised wound, 5 inches from the upper border of the left ear to the side of the fore-head. There is fracture of the underlying skull.

‘(2)

Incised wound 6 inches in length 1 1/2 inches above the 1st wound with fracture of the underlying skull.

‘(3)

Incised wound 4 inches in length 1/2 inch above the 2nd wound with fracture of the underlying skull.

‘(4)

Incised wound 6 inches in length from the upper border of the left eyebrow to the right eyebrow. There is also fracture of the underlying skull.

‘(5)

Incised wound - 3 ½ inches in length 1 ½ from the angle of the mouth towards the lower border of the right ear. The lower lobe of the ear is detached.

‘(6)

The lower third of the left small finger is almost cut off.

‘(7)

Incised wound at the median portion of the left hand. There is a severance from the level of the middle finger.

‘(8)

Incised wound - 1 ½ inches long at the median portion and distal 3rd of the forearm, left.

‘(9)

Incised wound, 1 ½ inches long above the 8th wound.

x x x

"One wound was inflicted on the body of Lolita de Guzman, namely, 'stab wound around 3 cms. long and 4 inches in depth at the 2nd intercostal space just at the left border of the sternal bone,' (Exh. C). And nine (9) wounds were inflicted on the body of Epifania namely:

x x x

'(1)

Stab wound around 4 cms. in length and around 5 inches deep penetrating the sternal bone at the level of the 2nd intercostal space.

'(2)

Incised wound 3 inches in length just skin deep at the level of the right clavicular region.

'(3)

Incised wound 2 inches in length also skin deep one inch below the second wound.

'(4)

Chopping wound 3 inches in circumference with fracture of the underlying skull at the right frontal portion of the head.

'(5)

Incised wound around one inch length at the left frontal portion of the head.

'(6)

Incised wound 3 inches long just at the level of the shoulder joint, exposing the bony portion, left.

'(7)

Incised wound one inch long $\frac{1}{2}$ inch below the sixth wound.

'(8)

Incised wound one inch long 4 inches below the seventh wound.

'(9)

Incised wound around 3 inches in length at the base and lateral portion of the hand right. There was fracture of

some of the underlying bones.”[6]

Regarding the wounds inflicted upon Jonathan Oviedo, the resident physician at the Pangasinan Provincial Hospital, Dr. Rodolfo Ramirez explained the same as follows: "Stab wound, thru and thru, about 1 1/2 inches on the lateral aspect of the dischartered forearm, right. Then, there was another about 1 inch of the middle aspect of the right forearm. There was also an incised wound, about 1/2 inch, temporal right." He further testified that the child was admitted to the hospital on November 8, 1970 and was discharged completely healed fifteen (15) days later.[7]

During the pendency of the present petition and on motion of appellant Ludovico Doctolero, on May 17, 1976 the Court resolved to grant the withdrawal of his appeal[8] and entry of judgment with regard to said accused was made on the same day.[9] In a resolution dated June 28, 1988, the Court noted the manifestation of counsel for accused-appellants, dated May 9, 1988, stating that Virgilio Doctolero died on October 22, 1983 as per death certificate attached thereto as Annex "A".[10] Hence, this review is only with respect to the liability of appellant Conrado Doctolero.

The trial court correctly found that appellant Conrado Doctolero participated as an accomplice in the commission of the crimes charged. In his defense, appellant denies having participated in the commission thereof and raises the effete defense of alibi, contending that he was not at the place where the crimes were committed. Appellant's pretension, however, was not corroborated by any evidence other than the testimony of the other erstwhile appellants. While the testimony of a co-conspirator or an accomplice is admissible, such testimony comes from a polluted source and must be scrutinized with great caution as it is subject to grave suspicion.[11] This uncorroborated denial of his participation cannot overthrow the positive and categorical testimony of the principal witnesses of the prosecution, and between the positive declarations of the prosecution witness and the negative statements of the accused, the former deserves more credence.[12]

There is no showing that the witnesses had any motive to testify falsely against appellants. The only imputed grudge that Paciencia Sagun Diamoy may have had against appellants occurred years ago and she was at the time she testified, on good terms with appellants as shown by the following testimony of Ludovico Doctolero himself:

"Q

And even before Paciencia Sagun Diamoy testified as one of the prosecution witness (sic) your relationship with her was harmonious and rather very closed (sic) being your cousin?

A

Yes, sir.

Q

As a matter of fact, whenever she goes to San Fabian to visit her relatives she did not fail to see you in your house?

A

Yes, sir sometimes she slept in my house." [13]

As to Maria Sagun, we agree with the court a quo when it held that "Maria Sagun (wife of Marcial Sagun) pointed to the three accused, Ludovico Conrado and Virgilio, all surnamed Doctolero, as the persons who went up her house that night of November 8, 1970. While Maria Sagun may have a grudge against the accused Ludovico Doctolero by reason of that previous incident at the crossing yet, no reason or motive is shown why Maria Sagun should also implicate Conrado and Virgilio Doctolero in the commission of the crime." [14]

When there is nothing in the records which would show a motive or reason on the part of the witnesses to falsely implicate the accused, identification should be given full credit. [15] And when there is no evidence and nothing to indicate that the principal witness for the prosecution was moved by improper motives, the presumption is that he was not so moved, and his testimony is entitled to full faith and credit. [16]

In an attempt to disprove the findings of the trial court, appellant points to certain inconsistencies that allegedly render the testimonies of the prosecution witnesses incredible. These inconsistencies, however, are not so substantial as to destroy their credibility. As correctly explained by the People, the seeming contradictions and minor inconsistencies in the testimonies of the prosecution witness pointed out by the appellants in their brief are mere inconsequential variations on the part of each observer in relating his own observation of the same incident. Contradictions and inconsistencies of witnesses in regard to the details of an incident far from demonstrating falsehood constitute evidence of good faith. Not all persons who witness an incident are impressed by it in the same manner and it is but natural that said eyewitnesses should disagree on minor details. [17]

In fact, inconsistencies and contradictions in the testimony of the prosecution witnesses which refer to minor details cannot destroy the credibility of the prosecution witnesses. [18] And where the prosecution witnesses were able to positively identify the appellants as the authors of the crime and the testimonies were, on the whole, consistent on material points, the contradictions become insignificant. [19]

Nor can appellant successfully assail the testimony of Sgt. Delfin Ronquillo who conducted the investigation himself and personally examined the scenes of the multiple killings. Credence is accorded to the testimonies of prosecution witnesses who are law enforcers for it is presumed that they have regularly performed their duties in the absence of convincing proof to the contrary. Appellants have not shown that this prosecution witness was motivated by an improper motive other than that of accomplishing his mission. [20]

Sgt. Ronquillo established that the reports which were received at the police department of San Fabian, Pangasinan shortly after the crimes were committed were to the effect that the Doctoleros were involved. He further testified that when he immediately proceeded to the scene of the crime and investigated Paciencia Sagun-Diamoy she told him that the accused Doctoleros came with bolos from the house of Marcial Sagun. [21] In fine, Sgt. Ronquillo merely testified objectively on the results of his investigation and the weight to be accorded to his findings was properly addressed to the trial court.

The lower court held that Conrado Doctolero and his brother, Virgilio, participated as accomplices in the slaying of the women and the infliction of injuries on the child. We agree with its findings and the ratiocination of the Solicitor General with its evidentiary substantiation:

"Now, there is no question that while the three appellants were still stoning and hurling challenges at the house of Marcial Sagun, they must have already heard the two women thereat protesting what they were doing and shouting back at them (pp. 39-41, 97, 119, tsn., Jan. 13, 1971; pp. 144-146, tsn., Jan. 14, 1971), after which all the three appellants went up the house. Under these facts, it is impossible that both appellants Virgilio Doctolero and Conrado Doctolero did not know or were not aware when their brother Ludovico was brutally killing the two women Lolita de Guzman-Oviedo and Epifania Escosio and wounding the child Jonathan Oviedo inside the room of said house. Furthermore, from the nature, number, and locations of the many wounds sustained by the two women and child (Exhs. A, C, D, and D-1), it could not have been possible for

Ludovico's two brothers Virgilio and Conrado (assuming that they did not go inside the house) not to hear either the screams of pain of their brother's victims or the contact between the blade of his bolo and their bodies when their brother Ludovico was ruthlessly hacking them several times. x x x Under these circumstances, it is obvious that appellants Conrado Doctolero and Virgilio themselves knew what was going on inside the room of the house at the time, but they just stood by and did nothing to stop their brother Ludovico Doctolero from brutally hacking his women victims to death. It is, therefore, reasonable to believe that the two appellants, Conrado and Virgilio, merely stood by as their brother Ludovico Doctolero was murdering the two deceased women, ready to lend assistance. Indeed, there is no question that the presence of these two appellants upstairs in the house of Marcial Sagun gave their brother Ludovico Doctolero the encouragement and reliance to proceed, as he did proceed, in committing the heinous crimes against two defenseless women and a child." [22]

We have held that where one goes with the principals, and in staying outside of the house while the others went inside to rob and kill the victim, the former effectively supplied the criminals with material and moral aid, making him guilty as an accomplice. [23]

Appellants contend that the murders occurred as a consequence of a sudden thought or impulse, thus negating a common criminal design in their minds. This pretension must be rejected since one can be an accomplice even if he did not know of the actual crime intended by the principal provided he was aware that it was an illicit act. [24] This is a doctrine that dates back to the ruling in *U.S. vs. De Jesus* [25] that where the accomplices therein consented to help in the commission of forcible abduction, they were responsible for the resulting homicide even if the purpose of the principal to commit homicide was unknown to the accomplices.

Whatever doubt the court a quo entertained on the criminal responsibility of appellants Conrado and Virgilio Doctolero did not refer to whether or not they were liable but only with regard to the extent of their participation. There being ample evidence of their criminal participation, but a doubt exists on the nature of their liability, the courts should favor the milder form of liability or responsibility which is that of being mere accomplices, [26] no evidence of conspiracy among the appellants having been shown.

The court below, however, erred in the penalty imposed for the physical injuries inflicted on Jonathan Oviedo. The child required medical attention, for fifteen (15) days, hence the liability of appellants therefor is for less serious physical injuries punished with *arresto mayor* under Article 265 of the Revised Penal Code. There being no modifying circumstances, a penalty of twenty (20) days of *arresto menor* should be imposed for said offense on appellant Conrado Doctolero as an accomplice.

The death of appellant Virgilio Doctolero during the pendency of this appeal terminated only his criminal liability but not his civil liability. [27] Also, while the death indemnity has been increased to P50,000.00 under current case law, the same should not apply to Ludovico Doctolero, he having heretofore withdrawn his appeal and the judgment rendered by the trial court having long since become final and executory with respect to him.

WHEREFORE, the decision of the trial court is MODIFIED and judgment is hereby rendered IMPOSING on appellant Conrado Doctolero three (3) indeterminate sentences of ten (10) years of *prision mayor* to seventeen (17) years and four (4) months of *reclusion temporal* each for the death of Epifania Escosio, Lolita de Guzman Oviedo and Marcelo Doctolero, and a penalty of twenty (20) days of *arresto menor* for the less serious physical injuries inflicted on Jonathan Oviedo. Appellant Conrado Doctolero and the estate of Virgilio Doctolero are ORDERED to indemnify in the sum of P50,000.00 for each set or group of heirs, the respective heirs of Epifania Escosio, Lolita de Guzman Oviedo and Marcelo Doctolero; and to pay one-half (1/2) of the costs.

SO ORDERED.

Melencio-Herrera, (Chairman), Paras, Padilla, and Sarmiento, JJ., concur.

- [1] Original Record, 239-240.
- [2] Ibid., 50.
- [3] Ibid., 215-218.
- [4] Brief for the Accused-Appellants, 3-6; Rollo, 110.
- [5] Original Record, 79-80.
- [6] Original Record, 218-220.
- [7] TSN, January 12, 1971, 5-7.
- [8] Rollo, 149.
- [9] Ibid., 150.
- [10] Ibid., 171.
- [11] People vs. Aquino, 57 SCRA 43 (1974).
- [12] People vs. Macabenta, 170 SCRA 203 (1989).
- [13] TSN, February 18, 1971, 58.
- [14] Original Record, 228.
- [15] People vs. Samson, 176 SCRA 710 (1989).
- [16] People vs. Perez, 175 SCRA 203 (1989).
- [17] Brief for the Appellee, 39; Rollo, 135.
- [18] People vs. Lamosa, 173 SCRA 518 (1989).
- [19] People vs. Baysa, et al., 172 SCRA 706 (1989).
- [20] People vs. Mahumanding, 174 SCRA 237 (1989).
- [21] Original Record, 228-229.
- [22] Brief for the Appellee, 42-44; Rollo, 135.
- [23] People vs. Balili, et al., 17 SCRA 892 (1966).
- [24] People vs. Largo, et al., 99 Phil. 1061 (1956).
- [25] 2 Phil. 514 (1903).
- [26] People vs. Torejar, 43 SCRA 158 (1972); People vs. Irene, 164 SCRA 481 (1988).
- [27] People vs. Garachico, et al., 113 SCRA 131 (1982) People vs. Pamintuan, et al., 126 SCRA 5 (1983); People vs. Salig, et al., 133 SCRA 59 (1984).

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