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**Application of Seyla Benhabib's
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Introduction

The social construction of Baluchistan through narrativization and media representation of its tribulations is that of a province composed of barren and arid landscapes, a shrinking economy and radicalized individuals lynching each other in the name of religion, politics and contested ethnicities. Baluchistan is Pakistan's largest province by area and smallest by population. It is located in the South-West of the country bordering Iran and Afghanistan. "The ethnic composition of the province is mixed, with 45% Baloch, about 38% Pashtun, and 17% of the population composed of other ethnic groups."¹ The geographical borders separating it territorially from Iran and Afghanistan do not correspond to its ethnic borders and despite minimal cross-border interaction and mobility, the Baloch ethnicity, which is the dominant ethnic group in the region, encompasses certain geographical areas of Iran and Afghanistan. This invites political and economic claims from these two countries over the abundant resources in Baluchistan, making an ethnically complex and contested society, economically contested and thus, more unviable.

Baluchistan is rich in oil, natural gas, mineral and copper reserves and is home to Pakistan's largest seaport 'Gwadar', which is a work-in-progress- a project of the Pakistan government to be completed in collaboration with its Chinese counterpart. The province is also one of the central and most strategic sites expected to host the Pakistan's flagship infrastructure and ;and-based commerce project, the 'China-Pak Economic Corridor' that is expected to connect Kashgar in China to Gwadar in Baluchistan through a web of road and rail networks enabling China's access to the Arabia Sea, Middle East and Central Asia.

Despite its economic potential, Baluchistan is the most underdeveloped of Pakistan's five provinces with its current economic and health indicators presenting a worrisome state. The government of Pakistan relies heavily on Baluchistan for its energy and mineral requirements and peace in the province is central to its politico-economic interests in the region. But with ethno-nationalism and anti-federalist sentiments running high in the region, those interests are highly endangered.

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A multitude of interacting factors have contributed to the perpetuating ethnic conflict in Baluchistan that has ranged from being an ideological difference between the Baloch nationals and the Pakistan's federal government to an armed conflict that has the potential of transforming into a deadly civil war. "The presence of large amounts of mineral resources and the construction of a new deep sea port at Gwadar have led to the possibility of billions of dollars of economic rent that will largely accrue to the local rulers and the educated middle classes in the militant tribes if they are able to secede or at least acquire greater autonomy from Pakistan.

Even though mineral extraction requires huge investments by the multinational companies, the local perception is that an independent state will be able to benefit fully from the resource extraction. The greed element is therefore apparent and strong in this case and is playing an active role in shaping the politics of the era in the province. A detailed analysis of the grievance aspect of the conflict, however, indicates that there are serious flaws with the structure of governance in the area. An ongoing plunder of Baluchistan's natural resources and its economic and political marginalization and oppression through militarization are the major causes of mounting tension between the Baloch population and the government of Pakistan."²

The armed conflict, as is feared by the government, could also transform into the next separatist movement in Pakistan- a country that lost its eastern wing to a similar movement in 1971 that culminated into the formation of a sovereign and independent state of Bangladesh. While politico-economic interests occupy the central place in explaining Pakistan government's motivation to curb ethnic consciousness in Baluchistan, much of it could also be explained by fears that exist in relation to the historical context of postcolonial failures in Pakistan, especially the Bangladesh fiasco.

Aslam (2011) identifies the Baloch system of government as being dominated by tribal chiefs called Sardars locally. The Sardars have a continued antagonistic relationship with the Pakistan government operating from the country's capital Islamabad in the Centre-North. Much of the current state of relations between the feudalistic Sardars and the democratic regime in Pakistan is explained through studies that recognize Baluchistan as a province with abundant natural resources and immense politico-economic potential. Ownership of these resources is a major cause of rift between the Baloch and other ethnic constituents. The situation has exacerbated through exploitation and evocation of ethnic sentiments by Sardars who are demanding greater

ownership over local resources to sustain their political and economic sovereignty over the region.

As *Nasreen Akhtar (2011)* points out that “ever since when an elected government sent armed forces to curb ethno-nationalism, Baluchistan has become an area of conflict and remains one today.”³The ethnic groups have not been integrated into the national power structure nor been granted any measure of cultural and political autonomy have now turned against the Pakistani state. She believes that if the genuinely felt demands of the Baloch people for local autonomy and control over resources not met, there is danger of a civil war. ‘The history of ethno-nationalism in post-colonial Baluchistan, with its proliferating fractionalism and tensions between ethnic particularism and coalition politics, is not unlike the politics in other Pakistani provinces during this period. But they are distinctively inflected by Baluchistan long history as a tribal borderland, internally differentiated by unstable alliances based on personal rule rather than boundaries set and defended by a state.’⁴

Ethno-nationalism, as it exists in the province manifests itself in ethnic violence and demonstrations against the state which is differentiated from meta-nationalistic narratives used by the government of Pakistan to create a socially cohesive, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society.

Theoretical Framework

The argument that I defend in this paper pertains to the validity and applicability of Benhabib’s model in Baluchistan. Ethnic violence and impermeability of Baloch culture is narrativized through media representations which reinforce the notions of identity loss in peoples that situate themselves as ethnic Balochis. These media representations sometimes interlock with sporadic occurrences of voices that emanate from the province on how injustice and unfair democratic regimes have created indignations against the national government. However, female and local perspectives in general have been absent from media representations and discourses that involve public reason and are of mutual interest to people in a democratic system.

The under-representation of Baloch is in media which is seen as being a representative of the unofficial public sphere is used as reason to necessitate the application of a dual-track deliberative model that prescribes inclusion of all those in public deliberation affected by decisions of such a deliberation. The absence of narratives and local perspectives being gendered, how Baloch ethnicity manifests itself in forming predominantly patriarchal and male-

dominated societies and how non-state justice in the province creates and reinforces male domination and supports a patriarchal culture at the expense of women liberation are reasons that have inspired writing of this paper. While the paper recognizes these injustices as happening, I don't endeavor to commit to any form of fact finding that validates the absence of these narratives nor I would indulge into possibility theoretical underpinnings of what possibly might have caused what rather I would use media underrepresentation as a confirmation that legal pluralist structures and other forms dominant forms of politics and government in the country underscores Baloch inclusion and within the Baloch culture, the non-inclusion of women in discourses presents the region as an ideal site for application of models that promote inclusion of all concerned in public discourses that are of mutual interest.

While narratives are contested and advanced by groups sharing ethnic and cultural particularities and those narratives are used in understanding the self and otherness as integral theoretical constituents of the social constructivist theory of Seyla Benhabib, narratives that pertain to peace, coexistence, equitability of economic policies and the concept of peace within gendered socio-political frameworks in Baluchistan are completely missing from the literature.

The quantitative aspect of the missing links in the literature leads to an evidence of conjectural data pertaining to gender discriminations and how they relate to the overall maintenance of peace in the region as some of that interacts with thematic inquires of peace and how it is epistemologically defined and how it can be attained or maintained through multiculturalism or Benhabib's legal pluralism in general- Or can legal pluralism that advocates, as in Baluchistan's case, presence of non-state justice also ensure eradication of gender discriminations that are inherently antithetical to other premises of Benhabib's model like voluntary self-ascription, freedom of association and exit and egalitarian reciprocity?

I will be exploring them in more detail as I get to her model in later parts of this paper but for now, one can analyze by working just the meaning derived from the self-explanatory terms by analyzing how they interact with non-state justice which stands on legal precedents that are rooted in gender biases, conservatism and regressive legal and economic infrastructures.

Benhabib's Universalist Model of Deliberative Democracy

In a world fraught with struggles over culture where culture is taken as a ubiquitous term for identity, Benhabib's model of universalist deliberative democracy builds a philosophically adequate concept of culture by assessing its fluidity, permeability, and international

applicability.⁵ Her theory promotes “complex cultural dialogues’ through which claims of divergent cultures can be facilitated. This she achieves through a dual-track deliberative democracy approach: a spatial solution to cultural contestation where the space of dialogues and discourses that pertain to claims of culture is not only the official public sphere that constitutes the legislature, the judiciary and the political parties hut also the unofficial public sphere that hosts social movements and civil, cultural, religious, artistic and political associations of the unofficial public sphere. The official public sphere, as Benhabib proposes, should not be the only site for political contestation and of opinion and will formation rather the unofficial public sphere should also be incorporated in the model as a space for interlocking conversation and contestation amongst groups of varying cultures.⁶

Although, as Benhabib prescribes, the agenda for such discourses in the public sphere is unrestricted as it encourages inclusion of diverse issues that can be of interest to all cultural, religious, political and social groups, Benhabib’s primary emphasis for having social movements in the unofficial sphere as basis for her deliberative democracy model is because they can be instrumental in upholding equality and justice- two rights that she frequents in her model as basis for maintenance of a peacefully coexisting, multicultural society. “Democratic theorists should support movements for equality and justice and for increasing the space for narrative self-determination in cultural terms.”⁷

“As globalization and the cultural pluralization of societies proceed apace, arguments are advanced for a legal pluralism that would countenance a coexistence of jurisdictional systems for different cultural and religious traditions and accept varieties of institutional design for societies with strong ethnic, cultural and linguistic cleavages.”⁸With Baloch Jirga the prevalent form of judicial system in Baluchistan, the status-quo system is based on Seyla Benhabib’s rational justification for legal pluralism. The presence of state justice which is engendered by the precedents set by the decisions of the Supreme Court of Pakistan and local courts in the province, non-state justice as in other mainstream provinces of Pakistan becomes undesirable. However, as Benhabib’s model proposes that to resolve cultural conflicts where different cultures have different religious traditions and varying ethnic and cultural cleavages, a homogenous legal and jurisdictional system is theoretically inappropriate.

Hence, one way in which Baluchistan’s current socio-political infrastructure qualifies Benhabib’s essential preconditions is that non-state justice (Jirga) is present to countenance state justice. Baluchistan’s legal pluralistic structure can provide for the more federalist members of the

society that align their socio-political interests with the government of Pakistan while some non-state elements that are the source of current ethnic contestation in Baluchistan raising ethno-nationalist slogans against the government to achieve greater control over local resources, are seen to observe legal principles that abide by the precedents upheld by the non-state justice institutions like the tribal Jirga itself.

In defining culture, Benhabib's focus is on culture being fluid and permeable rather than a closed, delineable whole. Her analysis that participants within a culture view it through traditions and rituals which are perpetuated through contested narrativization of events is contrasted with her conceptualization of a social observer who is an outsider viewing the culture as a unified whole. The Baloch culture, which is perhaps one of the most authentic cultures in Pakistan, reaches the policy makers, whose participation is to the extent of being social observers in Baluchistan's case since Baloch leadership has minimal participation in national discourses that involve public reason and opinion formation does not allow them to view Baloch traditions and cultures that Balochis themselves, as insiders, would view. This dichotomy presents a case for the conflict and non-cooperation of the Balochis who see imposition of non-Baloch leadership and assimilationist policies of the federal government as unfair and undemocratic.

"Domain of public reason must not be restricted to constitutional essentials, and that the 'background culture' which surrounds and infuses the task of reason with particular content, must be considered essential to consensus formation in liberal democracies."⁹ One concern with regards to formation of a democratic polity in Baluchistan is whether policies that combat ethno-nationalism in the province, circumscribe separatist sentiments and aid the establishment of a harmonizing democratic regime must accept varying ethnic belongings of individuals. Those belongings cannot be understood without understanding public reasons advanced in discourses by groups as independent of their background culture. Policies that place ethnic and cultural groups as independent of their background culture are destined to invite backlash and resentment from people affected by such policies since they are exclusive and prioritize particular cultures over others.

Is a multi-ethnic society necessarily multicultural?

How can Benhabib's multiculturalist aspirations be fulfilled in a political site that is multi-ethnic but not explicitly identified as multi-cultural? In Baluchistan's context, the terms are often used interchangeably and the Baloch culture is assumed to correspond spatially and ideologically to Baloch ethnicity. The notion of ethnicities and cultures being dissimilar ethnographic concepts

necessitates defining ethnicities in a manner that also signifies how remotely the conceptualization of an ethnic group is different from that of a distinct and identifiable cultural group.

Fredrik Barth's definition of an ethnic group and his referential usage of culture to understand ethnic groups justifies application of Benhabib's model that is universalist and multiculturalist in nature and thus can commensurate a society marred with ethnic wars and competing claims of culture. Barth uses the term "Ethnic group to designate a population which: is largely biologically self-perpetuating, shares fundamental cultural values realized in overt unity in cultural forms, makes up a field of communication and interaction has a membership which identifies itself, and is identified by others, as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order."¹⁰ Validating the surmised interchangeability of the terms, Barth observes that "Ethnic distinctions do not depend on absence of social interaction. Cultural differences persist despite inter-ethnic contact and interdependence."¹¹

In conjunction with Benhabib, Barth's definition of ethnicities depend on formalistic and individualistic interactions within groups that are not bounded and are forming and reforming through interaction and enrollment of individuals. The dismissal of the over-arching delineable group structure and allowance for social interaction between groups that could validate or invalidate norms and customs within groups are ethnographic processes that facilitate the interchangeability of the terms and also provide for intersection of Barth's ethnic groups with Benhabib's multiculturalist prescriptions. Like Benhabib prescribes migration between cultural groups as an individual choice in democratic societies, Barth believes that "Ethnic boundaries persist despite a flow of personnel across them. Categorical ethnic distinctions do not depend on the absence of mobility, contact and information, but do not entail social processes of exclusion and incorporation whereby discrete categories are maintained despite changing participation and membership in course of individual life histories."¹²

Loss of identity due to Baloch population being only a small fraction of Pakistan's total population is hindering the choice of individuals willing to enroll into other distinct ethnic categories and fears of losing the Baloch culture is impeding formation of a multi-ethnic society where categories are maintained despite inter-ethnic social interaction and changing participation. Ideally, for application of Benhabib's model, "Pakistan is comprised of heterogeneous ethnic orders; in fact, the people of Pakistan form a complex "polygot" as Tahir Amin puts it, with migration from Central Asia, and Iran, plus the indigenous residents."¹³ By

1971, "there were six major ethnic groups: Baluch, Bengalis, Mohajirs, (Urdu speakers in Sindh who migrated from Northern India), Punjabis, Pashtuns, and Sindhis. The relationship between democracy and the multi-ethnic polarized society is interactive."¹⁴ since "the ethnic character of society influences the political ordering of the community, determines the rules of politics and shapes the general patterns of political behavior; democratic maturity mitigates ethnic tensions."¹⁵

Model Similarities between Benhabib's Prescriptions and Current Polity in Baluchistan

Ethnic tensions that entail serious implications for peace and coexistence in the province yield economic, political and social platforms that can facilitate the interaction of the current state of polity in Baluchistan with Seyla Benhabib's Universalist model of deliberative democracy. The model hinges on legal pluralism as a pre-requisite for forming a democratic society that upholds the three grounding principles of equality, freedom and justice. These three are necessary to operationalize her model as she considers the premises of egalitarian reciprocity, freedom of exit and association and voluntary ascription as being central to, and basis of any form of deliberative democracy and any public deliberation must precede the pre-conditions of freedom, justice and equality.

Baluchistan's tribal Jirga which is a non-state and unregulated legal system put in place to provide impartial, localized and instant legal relief to the inhabitants of the province exists as a complementary legal system to the state justice rendered through local courts working under the supervision, direction and precedents set by the supreme court of Pakistan and the central legislature. Presence of legal pluralism in Baluchistan qualifies it as a test case for Seyla Benhabib's universalist model of deliberative democracy as legal pluralist structures continue to function despite existence and prevalence of narratives on how they are failing to provide the forms of relief deemed appropriate by modernist and post-modernist scholars in Pakistan and how the other premises of the model that are based on the universal human rights that are essential to a democratic regime are compromised by presence of such a legal pluralist structure.

While the government is trying to bind the society through narratives of nationalism that are reified through anti-colonialism and historical warfare with neighboring rivals India, the Baloch nationalists are evoking ethno-nationalistic sentiments to propagate anti-federalism which is giving rise to ethnic tensions within the province. *Lipset and Jalali* writing on ethnic conflicts in a global perspective state post-colonial ethnic tensions as occurring out of a colonial baggage of

history. They use the term 'ethnic mobilization' to answer queries that address modernization as an era of philosophical and sociological inquiry to analyze if it has given rise to ethnic fragmentation and ethnic consciousness. Post-colonial power and politico-economic relationships they believe have engulfed regions of the world that presumed they had solved the nationality problem. The problems that ethnic diversity poses for nation-building, they believe have largely been ignored by ex-communist and ex-colonial states of the world. ¹⁶

The Government of Pakistan is a recent entrant into the group of countries recognizing and solving the nation-building problem, its ethnic diversity is deep-rooted and has created unbreachable, artificial barriers to entry in Baluchistan as Punjabis are considered symbols of state power, inequality and economic exploitation and these power dynamics coupled with anti-federalist sentiments are instrumental in Balochis hindering the migration of people from other provinces to Baluchistan. Benhabib's stance on more open borders and ethnic assimilationist strategies that facilitate coexistence of people with varying backgrounds, ethnic, cultural, religious and political identities is not an opinion shared by majority of the Balochis.

Separatist Movements

Since the loss of its Bengal province in 1971, Pakistan government is cautious of the likely happening of anything similar in the future. This merged with investigative reports that neighboring rival India is funding ethnic groups to mobilize Balochis against the Pakistan federal government in demands for a separate state has made a case for the application of Benhabib's Universalist model deliberative democracy. Benhabib's multiculturalist society where the principles of egalitarian reciprocity, voluntary self-ascription and freedom of exit and association are upheld and respected upon by all citizens cannot be realized until people belonging to varying ethnic and cultural groups resolve to coexist and stay under one over-arching regulatory structure. That structure however can be based on pluralist legal and social regulatory regimes as is currently the case in Baluchistan where a pluralist legal structure is in place.

Although Benhabib doesn't dismiss the likely happening and justifiability of separatist movements on the pretext of ethnic and cultural contestation and breach of legal and social rights from a central government, and her observation on the matter allows for separatist movements but under the most distressed and undesirable circumstances since for her, they can't guarantee instant and effective solutions to demands of varying ethnic and cultural groups that don't consent to coexist. Her semi-definitive dismissal of separatist tendencies is reflected in her following statement:

“From a political perspective, I don’t see the separatist movements offer a magical solution to the dilemmas of coexistence among different ethnic and cultural groups”¹⁷

State and Non-State Justice

The discussion on state and non-state justice needs to be begin by an estimation of the utility of a legal pluralist structure when non-state justice, which is unregulated and predominantly unofficial, violates basic tenets of human rights and a democratic political system? If the pluralist legal structure is inherently contradictory and the resulting dichotomization presents an internal downfall of the structure as different legal structures contest for power and patronization, then competition between legal structures, although assumed to be enabling for a just and fair society is questioned for its feasibility. "In rural spaces of many developing societies, there is an ideology of a shift from traditional non-state justice to a justice of state prosecutors and courts. In practice, this often delivers a rule of law vacuum, or slow, corrupt justice that leads rural citizens to long for a return of traditional justice." However, "one response is for the state to not only to compete with insurgent justice by providing better access to less corrupt justice of its courts, but also by creating state-non-state hybridity that offers state protection to customary justice." This can be achieved if "hybridity between state and non-state justice can be designed to cover the human rights weaknesses of one with the strengths of the other."¹⁸

State-non-state justice hybridity is identified as an imperative in Benhabib’s model of Universalist deliberative democracy. The presence of traditional non-state justice qualifies the province to be a potential site for such a Universalist model of deliberative democracy if administrative issues identified by *Gohar and Braithwaite* are recognized and resolved. As cultural pluralization of societies is moving apace with globalization, Benhabib argues for legal pluralism that would support coexistence of different cultural and religious traditions and accept varieties of institutional designs for societies with strong ethnic, cultural and linguistic cleavages.

Migration

Linguistic differences and unacceptability of other ethnic groups in Baluchistan has created artificial barriers to entry in the province. Barriers to entry have serious implications for probabilities of creation of a multi-ethnic and multicultural polity that provides for practice of multiple political, religious and ethnic traditions in ways that form a complex maybe, but practically viable society. Language is an inseparable part of the Baloch ethnic formulation and is an essential constituent of the Baloch ethnicity. One of the most frequently used tests of identifying a non-Baloch in the region is a linguistic test that isolates non-native speakers of the

Balochi language as outsiders, 'ethnic others' and socially unacceptable in the province. Although unstated in the official migratory regulations in the province, this supposed barrier for people wishing to migrate to the province has created a one-dimensional, uni-ethnic society in Baluchistan that is constantly at odds with Benhabib's model that views migration as a choice for individuals and any barriers constraining such a choice as undemocratic, subjectivist and non-universalist.

"The closure of Baluch language newspapers and websites, lack of Baluch-language education and the opening of Islamic schools in a hitherto largely secular society have all added to the Baluch perception that they have been 'colonized' by Islamabad. This has had deadly consequences for innocent civilians caught in the middle. Although the main target of the insurgency has been the army, against whom resentment runs deep, Baluch nationalists have sought to force out Punjabi farmers and have killed scores of Punjabi teachers and students, viewing them as symbols of the Pakistani state, and hence Pakistani repression"¹⁹

Media as the Unofficial Public Sphere

When Aarushi Prakash discusses the state of journalism in Baluchistan with its post-congressional resolution and right to self-determination in place, she draws empirical evidence from the Pakistan media to support her thesis on the under-representation of the Balochis. While social movements and political, religious, artistic and cultural associations are defined by Benhabib as components of the unofficial public sphere, one can also include forms of media to underpin whether discourses that involve public reason and opinion formation are inclusive and democratic.

Pakistan's media is burgeoning with an increasing tally of television channels and media houses. As this transition happens, any under-representation in media translates into a significant disadvantage for the province giving reason to anti-Pakistan voices and separatist movements. She writes that the "media is where brinkmanship in the divisive Baluchistan politics is played out between political parties competing for advantage and relevance. Baluchistan lacks access to factual and balanced news due to the huge geographical distances. A large part of the population is concentrated in cities such as Quetta, but is also spread out in remote areas with little access to electricity or information technology. In general, the media in Baluchistan is victimized in a complex 'center versus periphery' and 'state versus ethnic group' conflict."²⁰

Conclusion

The case of Baluchistan has unjustifiably been used as a testament to failure of democracy or downfall of democratic institutions in Pakistan. One of the purposes this paper serves is to clarify some of those misgivings that situate Baluchistan amongst ungovernable regions of the world. The thesis that I developed at the beginning of the paper about the viability of the province given its natural resource endowments and a strategically important geo-political position is strengthened through application of democratic principles in the province but ones with an increasing focus on public deliberation and the three principles of *egalitarian reciprocity, voluntary self-ascription and freedom of exit and association*. The presence/absence of these three principles in the democratic context of Baluchistan makes a case for whether status quo democracy in Baluchistan is recipe for disaster where the four pathways to attainment of Benhabib's model in Legal pluralist structure, open-migration in and out of the province are missing from policy objectives of the government as it strives to create a rather peaceful and harmonized coexisting society.

The existence of legal pluralist structures also distinguishes Baluchistan as a transitional democratic site since it already hosts one imperative of Benhabib's model considered vital to her prescribed transition from a commonly understood definition of an exclusive model of democracy to one with a stronger emphasis on public deliberation and inclusion of all concerned and interested.

While pluralist legal structures exist, valid concerns remain on how those structures are maintained and if at all they end up substituting other tenets of egalitarian reciprocity, voluntary self-ascription and freedom of exit and association? These questions create new dimensions to the debate in the province that occurs over whether legal pluralist structures, specifically the traditional Baloch Jirga system should be preserved as a symbolic representation of impartial justice in the province and if the endgame of the Jirga system could be an endgame to multiculturalism in the province?

Benhabib's model thus provides lessons to the government on how multiculturalism and traditional tribal Jirga system, if regulated under guidance of three principles and pathways to her model of deliberative democracy, can provide basis for a transition toward a universalist model of deliberative democracy that shall guarantee peace and coexistence in the province without adding to local resentments and ethno-nationalistic sentiments. Acknowledgement of varying ethnic and cultural cleavages and acceptability of migrant cultures can recede fears of a

separatist movement on the part of government of Pakistan while the same would lessen loss of identity fears running high in the ethnic Baloch population-Any withdrawal of demands of a separate state from the Balochis would culminate into more equitable distribution of economic resources that can end resentment in the Baloch population which can then draw them into national discourses and deliberations that enhance acceptability of 'other' perspectives resulting in a more peaceful, multiculturalist democratic society.

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