The Bihug's Construction of the Concept of Nation

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Abstract – This study explored the formation of the Bihug's concept of nation in Tuaca, Basud, Camarines Norte. It specifically inquired if the Bihug have a concept of nation and presented and discussed this concept. The design of this research was descriptive and exploratory. The research design was constructed with a multi-level approach using in-depth or focused interview, focused group discussion and narratology. Thematic analysis was used to process the data gathered. The Bihug of Tuaca, Basud, Camarines Norte have varied concepts of nation although at first, the term nation seemed vague to them. Five different concepts were formed from the responses of the informants to the question, "what is their concept of nation?". These were nation as people, places, benefactors and sense of belongingness. Three categories surfaced as to the Bihug's concept of nation as people. These were Filipino, Bicolano and Bihug. As to places, it was characterized as Pilipinas, cities and towns.

Keywords – Bihug, construction, concept of nation

INTRODUCTION

The Philippines is inhabited by indigenous peoples located in the different islands of the archipelago. According to the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) [1], majority (61%) of them are in Mindanao while a third (33%) resides in Luzon. The remainder (6%) are scattered among the Visayan islands. Their total population in 1998 was estimated to be between 12 and 15 million. These indigenous peoples display diverse social, cultural, political, and linguistic features and each has its own account of connection with the dominant Filipino society.

In Region V, composed of the provinces of Masbate, Catanduanes, Sorsogon, Albay, Camarines Sur and Camarines Norte, tribes of one indigenous group, the Agta, are found. They are particularly situated in Camarines Sur (Iriga City) and Camarines Norte (Sta. Elena, Capalonga, Basud, Panganiban, and Labo). From the interviews conducted by the researcher among the members of the indigenous group in the province of Camarines Norte, and from her observations and documents available in the office of the NCIP on their culture and traditions, a rich description of the 15 informants' heritage becomes possible.

These small groups of indigenous people in Camarines Norte are called "Kabihug" or "Bihug",

which means *friendly*. This is the name they prefer instead of "Abyan" which means *liar*, the term used before by *hiyem* or lowlander for the group. Physically, these people are distinguished by their dark skin, thick and kinky hair and short stature.

Between 1970 and 2005, studies on Agta's subsistence, their concept of self, work and leisure, customs and traditions, socio-economic profile, organization, language and their survival [2]-[11] were the researchers' focus on their investigation.

The studies mentioned show that a number of researches on Agta have been conducted specifically about their lives as indigenous people. Findings of these studies provided this research concrete background information on how distinct the Agta's lives are, which prove that they have their own concept of things like on self, work and leisure.

The Agta from Quezon province and Zambales were the core source of ideas and information of the above-mentioned studies. However, the researcher noticed that not one of the authors investigated the Agta of Camarines Norte, Philippines. Thus, this research is an attempt to determine and discuss whether the Bihug have concept of nation and what is their concept of nation.

Varied concepts of nation have been printed and circulated among professionals, students and the like. They were exposed to the concept of nation which is

defined based on politics, economy and media. This study may provide readers with a concept of nation among members of a tribal community through social constructionism which represents a main branch of Focused Group Discussion (FGD) sociological theorizing, in which human beings are treated as active, conscious agents engaged in the construction of a shared social reality [12]. The manner in which they act, individually and collectively, is held to depend ultimately upon the way in which they give meaning to their situation and behavior [13].

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The general purpose of this study was to explore the formation of the Bihug's concept of nation. Specifically, this study aimed to inquire whether the Bihug have a concept of nation and present and discuss their concept of nation.

METHODS

This study employed descriptive and explanatory methods of research. During the conduct of the study, four families were residing in Tuaca, who eventually became the informants of this study. They were the families of Noel and Lani Matenzo, Joan and Bodoy Matenzo, Haide and Joel de Leon and Luis Cardano who voluntarily participated as subjects of the study. Other informants were children and relatives of said families. Of the 15 informants, seven were males and eight were females whose ages range from ten to 73. The other members of the families were two to six years old, thus were excluded as informants.

The research design was constructed with a multilevel approach using the following methods:

In-depth or Focused Interview (FI)

Focused interviews, aside from the informal conversations the researcher had with the informants, were conducted among the Bihug of Tuaca, Basud, Camarines Norte, Philippines. Interviews were scheduled and arranged before going to the community. However, some were unplanned, which happened during the unannounced visits of the researcher with the informants. Usually, conversations took place in the Bihug's butukan, under a tree, beside a hole for the charcoal and in a kamalig or storehouse which is used for producing

Ouestions raised before the informants were a combination of open-ended and closed questions to elicit general and specific responses and clarify points to avoid ambiguous information.

The study also employed focused group discussions. Questions in the in-depth interview were used for the informants to brainstorm on the answers previously given during the focused interview. Moreover, follow-up questions were included in the FGD to enable the researcher to verify the responses provided. The FGDs were conducted after the series of interviews and those who were interviewed were invited to participate in the FGD.

Three FGDs were organized. The first two which were unplanned had four participants each and the last FGD which was arranged by the researcher among the Bihug before the scheduled date had seven participants.

Narratology

Data of this research were also gathered through the narrative story of the informants about their lives particularly stories which revealed their concepts on what a nation is.

The narration of the Bihug's lives simultaneously took place while the researcher was conducting the indepth interview and focused group discussion. Aside from asking closed questions which only provided short but exact answers, open-ended questions were given for the Bihug to further explain their answers thus, narrated events and experiences which reflected their views, beliefs, judgments and feelings.

Each informant had his own story which was different from other informants. Weaving all their stories together contributed to organized data which answered the problem of this study, whether the Bihug have concept of nation and what is their concept of nation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part presents the discussion and analysis of the Bihug's responses relative to whether they have concept of nation and what is their concept of nation.

Bihug's Concept of Nation

Ano po and konsepto mo kang nasyon o bansa? (What is your concept of nation or country?) is the question raised by the researcher when she started eliciting responses from the informants on their own concept of nation. The word nasyon o bansa (nation or country) may not have been clear to the Bihug, thus, they said:

Mayó. (None)

Ay, mayó. Iniisip ko ngani bansa, dai ko man naaabot kung sain to parte. Nadadangog ko man sa radyo pero iniisip ko kung sain. Dai ko man aram kung sain. (No. I was really thinking about a country but I couldn't reach its location. I just heard from the radio but I was thinking where it is. I really don't know its location.)

The above responses show that the Bihug had only a vague concept of nation. The term was unfamiliar among the informants. The elders and even the young ones had difficulty thinking of anything which can be associated with nation. Their blank faces and bewildered eyes made the researcher believe that nation was indeed an unfamiliar concept.

The elders thought that the young ones had knowledge about nation because three had attended school and another two were enrolled. They assumed that their children could explain and provide information on the question, but they were mistaken. Their exposure to formal education had not contributed to a clear awareness of nation. Nevertheless, as the conduct of interview with the elders and young ones progressed, their concept of nation emerged. The Bihug's responses revealed a limited concept of nation, yet, unlike Anderson (1983) who pointed out that "nation is imagined as limited because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living beings, has finite, if elastic boundaries, beyond which lie other nations...", the Bihug's concept of "limited" is even smaller than Anderson's for it only refers to those who provided them assistance and whom they socialized with, the places they have visited and what others have told them about and the incidents they witnessed or heard about. The Bihug's sense of nation therefore extends or covers only the people, places, and events that they had connected with or had knowledge of.

Nation as People

Nation is composed of people, people who may or may not interact with each other but who know about each other's existence. Such was evident in one of the concepts of nation of the Bihug where nation was associated with being Filipino, Bicolano and Bihug. Their views proved Anderson's [14] 'image of communion': their communion with the lowlanders despite their being indigenous people who tended to preserve some of their traditions and customs. Generally, the way they looked at themselves was not confined to being a Bihug but includes their connection with lowlanders.

Being Filipino

The Bihug generally regarded as Filipino those among themselves who had a connection or relationship with the lowlanders.

A lowlander, who was usually a husband of a Bihug in the family and a grandchild whose father was a lowlander, established their being Filipino. Being *kulot* (curly hair) which is one physical feature of a Bihug did not hinder them from saying that they were Filipinos. Besides, having a mother who was of mixed Bihug and lowlander parentage made one Filipino, too. Aside from blood relationship, the connection built by other members of the tribal community was a reason for calling themselves Filipinos, which was extended to everyone, thus making not only the child with a lowlander father, Filipino, but the entire clan of Bihug.

Indeed, marriage of their family member to a lowlander conferred on them a Filipino identity, in addition to the Bihug identity. Everywhere they went they met and saw Filipinos who had become part of their family unit. Such broadened the range of their ancestry that though they saw themselves as indigenous people living together as one tribe and are located in the mountain and forest, they were related to those with fair complexion and straight hair whom they consider Filipinos.

Moreover, the Bihug anchor their idea of being a Filipino on the belief that their tribe members were the original settlers from whom the lowlanders have descended, thus, establishing their relationship with the lowlanders. The Bihug were the forefathers who should be respected by everyone. Such belief creates among the Bihug an 'image of communion', a communion involving their forefathers, themselves and the lowlanders.

Spiritually speaking, the Bihug believed that they were Filipinos for half of their being was Bihug and the other half was Filipino. Such concept was based on their faith in one God as the creator of all mankind, even if they continued their age-old practices and beliefs which were based on the worship of nature. However, although they said that they were Filipinos,

they were first Bihug who had become Filipinos through time.

Also, the Bihug defined Filipinoness by occupations and skills. Through time, they had become Filipinos due to their capability to socialize and perform tasks that enabled them to earn income like being a car cleaner, security guard, pineapple growers and pig raisers. These were their bases for calling themselves Filipinos, having observed how lowlanders whom they labelled Filipinos were engaged in such activities and work.

Being Bicolano

Apart from being Filipino, the Bihug's concept of nation as people included being Bicolano. This concept of nation as Bicolano narrowed their viewpoint in relation to who occupies a nation.

Di simula kang pag-aki sako, nagdadakula ako, sabi kang ina ko. Bicolano ako ta dyan ako inaki sa Taisan. (From birth, while growing, according to my mother. I am a Bicolano because I was born in Taisan.)

Bicolano din kami ta yaon kami igdi tapos nagtataram kami ning Bicol. (We are Bicolanos too because we are here and we speak Bicol.)

Aside from being Bicolano, the Bihug believed that they could also be Tagalog once they were in the Tagalog region. This grounded their identity on location.

Researcher: Aram mo po ang salitang Bicolano?

Iyo saka tagalog. Naning:

Ano po yang Bicolano, ano po ang Researcher:

ibig sabihon?

Naning:Pagnasa Tagalog kami, tagalog

man ang taram mi, pagnasa Bicol, bicol din. ang Bicolano saka Tagalog magkaiba.

Garo ang isip ko kung sain ako magduman, parehas lang. Kung magduman ako sa Katagalugan, Tagalog ako, pagdigdi sa Bicol, Bicolano ako.

R: Do you know Bicol language?

Yes including Tagalog. N:

What is Bicolano, what does it mean? R:

If we are in the Katagalugan, we also speak N: tagalog and if we are in Bicol, we speak bicol also.

Bicolano and Tagalog are different.

Wherever I go, I thought that they are the same. If I go to the Katagalugan, I am a Tagalog and if I am here in Bicol, I am a Bicolano.)

This analogous thought of Bihug as Katagalugan and Bicolandia further explains the concept of boundary which shows that people whom they were with comprised the nation. Wherever they were, people surrounding them constituted the nation and going to another place meant meeting a new group of individuals who formed part of their nation.

Being Bihug

The Bihug's sense of identity narrowed when they considered themselves as Bihug alone who held distinct characteristics and attitude.

One of their distinctive features is their dark skin color, which they regarded as the most obvious. Their color became noticeable when compared to lowlanders, who had fair skin color. Aside from kinky hair, their color and short stature indicated their being Bihug. In addition, the place where they lived, the mountain or forested area, made them Bihug, too.

Some of the Bihug called themselves minorities: 'Minority. Aram mo ang minority ay Bihug.' (Minority. You know what, Bihug are minorities.) The term minority was mentioned by one of the oldest Bihug in Tuaca. However, the informant could not explain why he linked Bihug to minority. Confusion was shown on his face for he just heard the term from the personnel of NCIP Daet who had been assisting them financially, socially and culturally. However, it was clear that when the informant uttered the statement, he understood that being minority meant they were inferior to the lowlanders.

One Bihug clarified that those who had not assimilated themselves with the lowlanders, were still minorities:

'Ang ibig kong sabihin ang minority ay Bihug. Si dai pa nakikihalo ay inaapod na kung sa Ingles ay minority. ' (What I mean is that, minorities are the Bihug. Those who have not socialized yet are called in English as minorities.)

Sa pagtataram, tapos sa isip. Iba man ang isip mi saindo ta kuyan, ang iba baga arog na ngani kaito, matanda na ito na nadulag saindo

kaito, sa isip na ito garo pinapalitan mi ito ta ang gusto mi mang sabihon makiiba man saindo ta nganing dai mag-arog kaitong mga matatanda na nadurulag pagnakakahiling arog saindo. Ang iba baga, pagnakahiling, natago baga. Iyan nganing mga aki ni Joan pagmarayo kami digding matatanda, pagnakahiling itong naglalakaw dyan, natarago ito, nadaralagan, ulay kaito mangbabansok. (In words and in thought, our perception is different from yours. Just like before, the elders ran away every time they see lowlanders. Now we are trying to change it because we want to socialize with lowlanders unlike our ancestors. If they see someone, they hide. Just like the children of Joan, if we, adult are not around and they see people walking, they hide and run because they were told that they are the 'mangbabansok' [looks like a wicked man who kidnaps children for their vital organs].)

They blamed the ancestors of lowlanders who took hold of their vast land and God who created them as Bihug leaving them with nothing, not even a piece of land. Despite their being the first inhabitants ('Kita ang inot na nilalang sa mundo. Naaraman ko yan sa ano ay sa mga matatanda na inabot ko. Sa bibliya, naaano baga sa bibliya.' [We were first created here on earth. I learned that from the elderly whom I have related with. It is also in the Bible.]), they did not have a land of their own. However, they continued to reaffirm their right to own land as the first group of inhabitants of the country, as they were told by the Seventh Day Adventist: 'Kita daa pig-aapi ning mga Bicolano. Pero kita ang may sadiri kaining dagang ini. Sinda lang daa sabi kaining mga Saksi, sinda daa nakiano kang dagang ini. Pero kita daa ang may sadiri kang dagang ini.' (Bicolanos treated us unfairly. However, we own this land. According to the Seventh Day Adventist, they have just taken hold of the land which we owned.)

Nation/Country as Places

When asked of their knowledge or idea about bansa, they said that bansa is a place with a community of people in it. The Bihug called the places they know about as nation/country. These places were either directly visited or related by a family member or friend. Even if a Bihug had not been to a place, she/he remembered it from the stories

conveyed by their tribal member, valuing the connection built between the Bihug who went to the place and the reason for travelling.

As Pilipinas

"Pilipinas" is an unidentified place for the Bihug though it sounds familiar to some. The term had been recognized in varied ways.

Researcher: Saan mo nalaman ang salitang Pilipinas?

Joan: Dyan sa ano, sa binabasa ni Nelly.(R: Where did you learn the word Pilipinas?

J: There, in Nelly's readings.)

Oo, Pilipinas. Sa Pilipinas nagkakagulo duman sa Pilipinas, nag-aano ako sa radyo. Sa Pilipinas arog kaini, naglalabanan. Dai ko ngani aram kung sain yan. (Yes, Philippines. In the Philippines, conflicts are there in the Philippines. I listened over the radio. It's like this in the Philippines, fighting. I don't even know where Philippines is.)

Straightforwardly, others said 'Dai ko aram yang Pilipinas nayan. Dai ko yan aram' (I don't know Philippines. I really don't know.) and almost all did not have an idea of the Philippine nation/country. They said, 'Dai ko yan aram bansang ya.', (I don't know such country.) although the word bansa was heard over the radio and read from the History book of one informant.

Regardless of the unidentified location of the Philippines and the idea that the informants were also part of the Philippines, their idea of how big nations/countries are, was proven by the presence of the Seventh Day Adventist missionaries in their community.

Ito nganing kuyan, itong Sabadista, nadirigdi ito, Amerikano baya ito. Nagtukdo sinda. Naisip ko na dakula ta hali sinda sa ibang lugar, Australia daa ito. Sabi kaitong lalaki na tatao magtagalog, ito man ang nagpapaliwanag ta dai mi man maintindihan si taram kaitong mga Amerikano. (The Seventh Day Adventist came here. They are Americans. They taught us. I thought it's big [the country] because they were from other place, in Australia [for the Bihug, those from Australia

are Americans because of their resemblance in physical appearance] according to that man who knows Tagalog. He also explained for we didn't understand the language of the Americans.)

Through the Seventh Day Adventist, information on the concept of nation/country as places was known by the Bihug of Tuaca. The place where the missionaries came from and how far it was contributed to the Bihug's understanding of how enormous the size of the places in which people live. 'Iyo ta kung sain-sain naduman si natabang samo. Kung saing-saing lugar nasiring.' (Certainly because those who have been helping us go to different places. They go anywhere.)

As Cities and Towns

Some had been forced to leave their families and go to other places for work because the assistance received by them was insufficient. The places they had been to where a portion of their life was spent had become important not only to those who left but to other members of the tribe as well who had considered these places as nations/countries. Each place visited by a Bihug and what others had told them about was a nation/country. When the word nation/country was presented to them, they immediately thought of cities and towns.

Cities and towns were nations/countries to the Bihug. Similarly, places where people flock to find Manila Batangas work like and nations/countries. The places where their loved ones had resided and worked were nations/countries. However, even to those who were just listeners of stories told by a family member, the places mentioned had become nations/countries, too. Although some did not go beyond Tuaca and nearby towns, specifically the wives, through their husband's stories they imagined other places, thus broadening their concept of nation/country as places. Aside from work, a nation/country was also associated with places where they found their needs. They easily remembered a place that provided them with what they needed and appreciated its beautiful and attractive sceneries like those in Lucena. They were amazed at how other places looked, comparing them with Tuaca and other towns in Camarines Norte. This curiosity aided a quick recall of places which they described as nations/countries.

Activities of the Bihug sponsored by the NCIP Daet like 'lakbay-aral' had brought them to other places as far as Davao, Bukidnon and Cagayan de Oro. They called these places nations/countries, too. Through the NCIP Daet, the Bihug had been exposed to different locations, which broadened their concept of nation/country.

Listening to radio news in between songs on the FM stations where some pieces of information about places were plugged in, they came to know about places like Baguio, Palawan, Manila, Albay and Jolo, Sulu.

Nation as Benefactors

The Bihug of Tuaca as indigenous people had been receiving assistance from different sectors and organizations. Aside from the NCIP Daet which catered to their basic needs, the Socio-Pastoral Action Center Foundation Incorporated (SPACFI), a nongovernment organization, had also been helping them in various ways. They considered these organizations their nations.

Bansang ining satuya na ining bansa. Itong nagtatabang satuya ang pigtuturing naming ning bansa. Daet saka Naga, yaon dyan ang nagtatabang samo. (This place is a nation. Those who are helping us are considered nations and they are in Daet and Naga.)

People who had been assisting the Bihug became influential in determining their concept of nation. They boost the informants' spirits. The Bihug believed their benefactors were empowered to protect them from any menace. The places where their benefactors came from were equally important. During hard times, they were considered as Bihug's nation. Even for minor illnesses, they sought help from benefactors like the Barangay Captain, who immediately responded to their medical needs by sending the barangay nurse to provide first aid to the patient.

Nation as Sense of Belongingness

The Bihug had felt a sense of belongingness with lowlanders. This sense of belongingness may be inferred in the statements, 'Ang kalahi mi Filipino. Magkalahi kita. Yaon dyan sa Tuaca ang mga kalahi mi. Ika kalahi mi ika.' (We are of the same race with Filipino. We are of the same breed. Those who are of

the same race with us live in Tuaca. You are of the same race with us.) The Bihug's assimilation with lowlanders was linked to being part of one race. The researcher, members of NGOs and residents of Tuaca were even referred to as,

Ugang. Parte din kami kang mga ugang. Iyo ta pag-aabot mi dyan, pagluluwas mi, naapod dyan, 'ano ngaya ugang, pasain ka?'. Parte, kasi ang apod tugang, parang magtugang na din. (Sibling. We are part of the lowlanders because every time we meet them, they ask, 'hey brother, where are you going? We belong because they call us brother. It's like we are brothers.)

The assimilation of Bihug was limited and did not apply to everyone. Although they imagined Filipinos as lowlanders, their membership belonged only to selected individuals whom they had contact with and had been socializing with as *amo*, friend, sari-sari store owner, barangay officials, staff of a foundation and the NCIP Daet, and extension service providers like the researcher whom they considered *ugang* or *tugang* (sibling).

A distinct connection had been felt by the Bihug with the NCIP Daet staff who had taken the responsibility of looking after them as members of a minority group. This sense of belongingness had been felt and learned in meetings conducted by the Commission informing them of their rights and affiliation in the organization, the NCIP Daet.

Iyo ta ano ni sakop na ngani talaga kami kang Daet, kaming Kabihug. Yan nganing mga taga opisina nayan na nasa Daet. Haling Iriga si nagtatabang samo. Parte din kami ning Iriga. (Yes for we are covered by Daet, the Kabihug. Those in the office who are in Daet. Probably yes because some who have been helping us are from Iriga. We are also part of Iriga.)

Although the Bihug were Roman Catholics, they also congregated with other religious groups like the Seventh Day Adventist (SDA), including foreign missionaries. Their encounter with the SDA introduced them to a different race, distinct from Filipinos with their white skin and English language. Such distinctive features of the missionaries who were Americans amazed the Bihug specially the young ones

who gazed at and admired their looks. However, they did not easily open up to the missionaries whom they considered lowlanders, too. After a series of encounters with these lowlanders, the Bihug began to feel a connection with them.

Nonetheless, despite their socialization with lowlanders like the SDA missionaries, their sense of belongingness was oftentimes confined to their tribal members. 'Aram ko lang kaming grupo lang ang naguusap usapan. Ang isip ko kami lang.' (What I know is that we, our group, are conversing. I think of the Bihug alone.)

Others limited their outside interaction, staying close to their community. 'Parang naaano ako sa kanila dyan. Parang hindi ko kursunada ang ugali nila. Nalabas ako dyan lang kay Erick, yung may tindahan dyan.' (It seems like I don't like their behaviour. I only go to Erick, the owner of a sari-sari store.) Such controlled relations were attributed to unpleasant behavior of some lowlanders. Even if the Bihug were willing to offer friendship, hostile actions of some lowlanders held them back from socializing with the latter.

Another way by which their sense of belongingness was reinforced among themselves was through listening to the religious program of Pastor Ronnie Abriol, a Bihug from Labo, Camarines Norte, who preached about the teachings of Born Again Christians. His radio program on DWLB every Sunday at 9:00am entitled *Balaraw* had been on the air for three years.

Nadadangog ko din itong tiyuon kong Born Again, nabati. Binabati kami digdi, kinukumusta kami. Nagtataram sya sa radyo. Napaniwala kami sa Panginoon. Ginagaya namin yong taram nya, itong pagpanalangin, ito lang. Nasabay kami sa panalangin. (I also hear my uncle who is a Born Again; he greets. He greets us here. He talks over the radio. We believe in the Lord. We also pray as he prays. That's all. We do pray as the prayers are aired.

The Bihug looked forward to being greeted by another member of the family over the radio every Sunday. It strengthened their bond despite the distance. They were elated as their names are mentioned by their uncle who regularly extended his greetings as a preliminary opening to his radio program, Jesus Christ Our Lord Fellowship.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The Bihug of Tuaca, Basud, Camarines Norte have varied concepts of nation although at first, the term nation seemed vague to them. Five different concepts were formed from the responses of the informants to the question, 'what is their concept of nation?'. These are nation as people, places, benefactors and sense of belongingness. People are categorized as Filipino, Bicolano and Bihug. The concept of nation was directly imparted to the Bihug through stories told by loved ones, parents, and ancestors. Some aspects of which were reinforced by radio listening like the radio program *Balaraw*.

With the presence of four tribal communities in Camarines Norte, namely, Gisican, Labo; Osmena, Panganiban; San Pascual, Basud; and the small group from Tuaca, Basud, further studies could work on comparing the concept of nation of the indigenous peoples from different tribes as influenced by radio or media` in general. The presence and use of varied forms of media may shape the consciousness of nation differently, thus, creating descriptions of nation with distinct perspectives, scope and meanings.

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