

# Roots and Manifestations of Marginalization: An Exploration of Socio-Economic and Political Facets of Minority Group in Woliatta Zone, Southern Ethiopia

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## Abstract

This paper is primarily concerned to explore widerange of socio-economic and political dimensions of marginalization that characterizes Ayille minority group in Woliatta zone, Southern Ethiopia. It investigates the overall living condition of Ayilles in terms of economic, social and political aspects within the socio-cultural endeavors of the host society. The study has been carried out in three purposely identified areas in Woliatta zone. Across sectional qualitative method was employed (in-depth interview and Focus Group Discussion) involving a total of 37 in-depth informants, 6 Focus group discussions comprising of 6 individuals in each group through purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Traditionally, this group lost the rights and privileges in the society at large and did not get equal treatment similar to other people. In the years before 1974 revolution, some of them did not own essential resources like land and livestock of any kind. They were restricted in social interaction and prohibited from participating in social activities collectively with the dominant groups. However, after 1974 revolution the living condition of Ayilles generally improved since they gained access to land. Accompanied with this, the social relationship they had with the host society enhanced. The recent conversion to Christianity in the areas, the economic improvement in their lives could be mentioned as some of the causes for their recognition. Even so, although they are better off economically in the course of share cropping and rearing arrangements, their social life is still subjected to restriction which is in plain sight mainly in production activities, social interaction and commensality, submissive greetings and stereotypic image about this group, and most stunningly in the issue of intermarriage.

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**Index terms**— marginalization, minority, stratification, social relationships.

## 1 Introduction

n application to the framework of majority-minority relationship, marginalization is a definite form of inter group relation between subordinate minorities and dominant majority. The notion of marginalization, thus understood as the social process of becoming or being made relegated or to confine to a lower social standing. In other words, it is a form of social distance which defines the boundaries between groups, locates the groups in the hierarchy and regulates their interaction. In Author : MA in sociology, lecturer at Woliatta Sodo university. e-mail: akemengesha@gmail.com its extreme form marginalization can exterminate groups (Mullaly 2007). Marginalization is well thought-out to be the feature of all human society and universal as regards to minority groups. It has been indicated that the relationship of minority and majority is mainly characterized by social distance and negative attitude. Thus, prejudice, discrimination, and relegation are important concepts in

understanding the pattern of group relationship (Schaefer 1993). Ethiopia was not an exception to this range, with its domestic slavery and engagement in slave trade (Ibid). Hence, there were groups of people (Ayilles) that held the bottom in the social arrangement and seen as commodities to be sold in the market. This is due to the mere fact that they lack power and wealth in particular community. Even though, such phenomena have been abolished legally, it has not yet affected the values and attitudes of the community at large, which is apparent in the different socio-economic endeavors of a given society.

The Wolaitta society appears as a uniform cultural group without ethnic minorities; all people sharing common language, cosmos, socio-political, organization, economy, technology and values (Altaye 1982). Nevertheless, it is one of the zones in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples National State where social inequality, violation of human rights and poverty of minorities are most prominent. The 'Ayilles', for instance in Damot Gale, are one of the underprivileged and detested in the area.

In relation to the socio-political structure of Wolaitta, the Ayilles were denied the rights and privileges shared by other Wolaitta members (such as Tigre, Wolitamala, Gudareta, Amhara and others) of the society and were not treated in the same way as other people.

Traditionally, they lived under very obnoxious conditions and their psychological burden was often heavier than the manual work, especially if they had not been born free individuals. They were deprived of possessions of land and property. The Ayilles are currently residing on the lands of their previous Goddas and hold small farming land provided by them originally, which in turn resulted in poor living conditions of the group. Thus, their economic and social life is still subjected to marginalization and relegation. This is manifested most starkly in restrictions on production activities, social interaction and commensality, submissive greetings and stereotypic image about this group. In other words, the marginalization of Ayille minority group could be revealed simply since they are economically disadvantaged, politically disempowered, and socially excluded. Therefore, this study is an attempt to offer comprehensive material on the current condition of Ayilles in line with a range of features of marginalization that characterizes them.

## 2 II.

### 3 Methodology of the Study a) Design of the study

The study has employed descriptive research design due to the fact that it is appropriate to come across the prevailing social, economic and political dimensions of marginalization that characterizes the Ayille minority group. Consequently, 84 study participants were selected based on their willingness and seniority in the community. The necessary materials were collected through in-depth interview and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) tools. The data collected through these tools were analyzed qualitatively.

### 4 b) Description of the research setting

Wolaytta is the name of both the people and area in Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State (SNNPRS) located between 6°51" and 7°35" North Longitude; and 37°46" and 38°1" East Latitude. It is located at about 328 km south west of Addis Ababa, and 160 km from Hawassa, the Southern regional capital. Wolaitta is one of the thirteen zones of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State (SNNPRS), which also has fourteen special Weredas. The main occupation of people is agriculture. About 92% population lives in rural areas engaged in subsistence farming. The agricultural activities are practiced using archaic and backward hand tools. Food consumption comes from 50% agriculture, 40% market purchase and 10% animal products and other means.

### 5 c) Subjects of the study

The primary study subjects of this study are the Ayille minority groups living various parts of Woliatta zone. Due to financial and other constraints, the study carried out in three villages involving 84 individuals as study participants.

### 6 d) Sampling Procedure

For this study, the researcher used purposive sampling technique in order to select 84 individuals from three villages. Hence, 37 individuals were selected for in-depth interview based their willingness and seniority, both from Ayille and dominant group, who can provide rich information on the existing socio-economic marginalization of Ayille minority group. The researcher also conducted 6 FGDs constituting 6 individuals in each group with the aim of obtaining information on their social network, the view of themselves, attitude towards the dominant groups and factors of their marginalization. A total of 36 participants, that were not included in interview, involved in 6 focus group discussion held at each of the research areas.

### 7 e) Tools of data collection

Considering the research objectives, the researcher used different qualitative data collection tools which enable to obtain rich data in this regard. These tools include: in-depth interview and Focus Group Discussion f) Data analysis

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The qualitative information collected from the field through qualitative data collection methods was analyzed manually through careful interpretation of meanings and contents, organizing and transcribing and summarizing in accordance with the issue under investigation.

## 8 III.

## 9 Results and Discussion

The marginalization and inequality of the Ayilles can be examined in terms of different dimensions that exemplify their low status. These are the economic, social and political exclusions which the marginalization and inequality of Ayilles are manifested. Thus, efforts were made to explore the marginalization of Ayilles by integrating such components.

### 10 a) Economic segregation

The Ayilles are barred from the broader economic system in various contexts and thus, exhibit poorest economic stipulations. In looking at the condition of Ayilles before the 1974 land reform, one can discover the fact that they lived in a terrible economic intricacy which resulted from their limited access to resources like land ownership and livestock production. In other words, the economic dimension of marginalization is most undoubtedly evidenced in restriction on land and livestock ownership. They tended to subsist on the lands of patrons and could be evicted at any moment, forcing them to seek new patrons. They were also subjected to labor exploitation by their Goddas (lords) in which they were compelled to carry out any kind of activities in the Goqqas' family. However, the revolution gave them a light of hope and brought relative step up at least by securing land possession rights and shifting long lasted patron-client relationship in which patrons exercised absolute power. As a result, the Ayilles had the opening to own land in different ways to the ownership system before the reform and begun to enjoy the privilege of ownership rights. Conversely, land holdings of the Ayilles remained smaller than average and also of shoddier in quality.

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Their economic convulsion deemed to be more intimidating than other minority groups in the locality in that they only depend on the small plot of land formerly given by their Goddas for their subsistence. There are no well known alternative economic endeavors that Ayilles are betrothed to generate income and support their family rather than subsistence agriculture at narrow farm land. This made them economically more vulnerable than other despised groups in the area.

In addition to restricted access to land, the Ayilles generally have few or no livestock ownership which is even more worrisome than their fear of cultivating land. However, they are beginning to rear livestock though their ownership remains generally small. Some of them sought to get hold of more livestock through share-rearing arrangements with the Goqqa groups. One in-depth interview informant at Buge area describes his experience as:

"It is hardly possible for people like me to own livestock of any kind given that we have been ruled out from using indispensable resources in the community mainly land. I did not own any till last year but now I have 1 ox and 2 sheep that I managed to obtain from share-rearing accord with my neighbor from the Guderata clan. With the help of the almighty God I am planning to own more through this technique so as to enhance family living status."

The Ayille houses, in most cases, are ramshackle; ill constructed and ragged as compared to the Goqqas houses. The parapet of their houses are completed from stalk of crops like sorghum and other reed types that have no sturdiness in that it upholds for short period of time. Such coarsely built houses of Ayilles are the reflection of their low status and the combined effect of poverty of them in general though few Ayilles are managed to construct corrugated iron roofed houses. One informant indicated his situation as follows:

Tunga Araro, an Ayille man aged 45, is living in Mokonisa village. He has affianced in share cropping arrangement with four individuals from the dominant groups. Though he did not gain what he actually deserves he indicated that he benefited a lot. Tunga told me that he earned 1000 birr last year and 1250 birr this year from potato production. He has seven children helping him, three of them attending school, three milk cows and one pair of oxen. In the interview, he also pointed out that he has changed his grass roofed house into ribbed iron covered house three months ago.

Tunga's aptitude to work with the neighboring Goqqa people and his vigorous involvement in income generating tricks made him as one of awe-inspiring farmers in the community.

Additionally, the Ayille children are often considered as malnourished and physically fragile. In most instances, they are stereotyped as emaciated and weary in that it is familiar to heed expressions like shufurona'ye, ayilliya na'aadane guxxa-appears as Ayille's children in situations where they meet whitish children.

The income of Ayille households is generated from share cropping, charcoal production along with farming. Share cropping and rearing is done by both men and women but rearing activity predominantly accomplished by wives of an Ayille family. However, charcoal production is usually well thought-out to be a specialization of

men in addition to farming and providing fire wood. Apart from these, some Ayilles produce honey and practice trade in the local market. They usually trade tambuwa-baked tobacco and some other items.

In general, the economic condition of Ayilles in each of the research sites is of the same breed and there is no momentous difference in this regard. Moreover, as indicated by interviewees, the local government did not made any attempts in order to enhance the economic status of Ayilles in the mentioned research areas.

### 12 b) The social aspect of exclusion

The social marginalization of minorities could be examined in terms of the features of segregation and non-reciprocal relations. The life and status of Ayilles in Wolaitta society is at lower level and often distinguished by exclusions which articulated in the occasions of the social life of Ayille and the Goqqas such as at greetings, at meal time (commensality), joint labor, membership of associations, burial practices and most sturdily in choice of spouses. In most instances, the Ayilles are considered as sub-human and people who are hamfisted of having social and spiritual traits to conform the norms and values of the host society of Wolaitta.

In the early periods in history, principally during imperial regime, the minority groups in general and the Ayille in particular were not permitted to be involved in widespread social institutions like idirya-local entombment associations and shufuwaa( equbiya)local money saving association. It has to be renowned here that Ayilles were not allowed to take part in such associations but they still compelled to work for them when the need arises.

In other words, their involvement was only limited to hand round the association rather than benefiting from it. Moreover, they were also barred from village level work groups like daguwa-communal work groups of differing members as beneficiaries.

Yet they every so often come into Kotta (share) arrangement with the dominant groups where they find a prospect to own sheep, goat, cow and share broods with the owners. Some of them also enter in to share cropping agreement in which the Ayilles collect their fraction, more often than not, given by the Goqqa. Some "In my village I have witnessed such a stern prohibition that undermined the status of me as if I am not a human, more than ever in the past. It was barely allowed to take part in the local associations like idiriya and shufuwa [local entombment and money saving associations respectively].I even remember the day that the organizer of the association of idiriya slighted me in front of my neighbor by aphorism 'kana uraye'-little dog when I asked to become a member. Though few individuals from our group become part of their associations as waiters in time of their gathering [attributable to reasons like poor living conditions] still many of us have formed our own idiriya and shufuwa institutions on account of their forestalling."

"It was on the age of 19 that I have experienced abhorrence and prohibition from the dominant groups when I naively tried to take part in daguwa[communal work groups]. Some of them showed a sort of contempt and compelling me to work for them while others doughtily insisted to stay away from them thinking that their status would be lowered to mine. Immediately from that incident I instigated to develop such a feeling to never partake with them in the locality at any events."

In a similar fashion, one FGD participant narrates his experience by pointing out the instances where they allow them to partake and times they show disregard. In particular conditions when one wants the help of others at the individual level in terms of share cropping and rearing, the Goqqas willingly engage and work with them. Otherwise, they completely pin down such affiliation. The FGD participant presents his experience in his own words as: "I am living in a small plot of land with my seven children at Gacheno village. I always look for supplementary means of survival since I could not assure the needs of my family with that narrow farm production. However, everything around our neighborhood is tricky. The Goqqas do not want to work with us. They only appeal to us if and only if they sought to do so. For instances, those Goqqas with lack of man power to work on their huge farm land are urged to take up in share cropping arrangement with us and also those who want to show their domination. Evidently, though we are strictly restricted in our interaction with them, many of us have been engaged in such share cropping and rearing arrangements with them."

Before the Derg period, the Goqqas discrimination against the Ayilles was far more barefaced. According to both the Goqqas and Ayille informants who lived at the time, when an Ayille happened to come across a Goqqa it was unusual for the Ayille to be trodden by the Goqqa.

In some instances where the Ayille happened to wear the same clothes and shoes that the Goqqa wore, the Ayille was, frequently, beaten and forced to take them off. Moreover, when an Ayille encountered the Goqqa on the road side, the Ayille was expected to humiliate himself, stepping aside, bowing and greeting the Goqqa with the phrase 'ta goddawu,or goddatu na'awu' literally meaning, 'you my lord for ever'. Even today, as portrayed by informants, the Ayilles use such phrases when they meet the Goqqas and it seems to be inevitable. As the Ayille man states, "Sometimes I watch people working for Gaqqas and even bowing under their knees; welcoming them in awfully reverent manner in order to show the fact that they still admit their position as servants".

The denial of commensality is one of the most pervasive forms of marginalization of the Ayille. According to the informants, it was common for an Ayille man to be served separately at different social events in the community mainly in the past. They are often being expected to take a seat on the back corner of the house and eat poor quality foods from broken earthenware or from their own bare hands.

The Goqqa people try not to have meals with the Ayilles or to utilize the same tableware. This is due to stereotyped image of Ayilles as being unclean and the assumption that their status would be subordinated to the status of Ayilles. Complaining about this kind of behavior, one of the informants said 'why the Ayilles considered

in such way since they are not different from them except living condition?' Social exclusions experienced by the Ayilles are also evident in some service giving centers like schools and medical institutions. For instance, the Ayille children seldom attend schools due to family's low economic condition and in some instances, because of continuous abuses, a feeling of contempt which keeps them abandoned. Every so often, they are gravely flattened and subjected to agonizing physical injuries in a few schools they attend. As to the informants, the neglect and foul language they experience at school setting considered more throbbing than the physical injuries in other social contexts. Wudenesh Loha, 17 year old Ayille girl, described her experiences in this regard as follows:

"I am 8th grade student at Buge primary school. I have been witnessing various kinds of prohibiting like whipping, refusal to hang out together, repeated insults and slur in the school. Moreover, I also elucidated that the Goqqa children often show their hatred and disapproval by using foul languages and laughing at our act and dialogue."

For the most part, the Ayilles do not have common burial places shared with the Goqqas.

This was also another mechanism through which the social status of the Ayilles had been characterized. In view of that, the corpse of Ayilles usually never obscured in common place with the dominant Goqqas in the past. It was expected to bury on the separate places though such exclusions come up to an end. Conversely, it has to be noted that even at this time the bodies of Ayille in the research areas are entombed in one compound but still in detached plot of land within the compound. In other words, the Ayilles have the same burial places with the Goqqas other than they are allowed to use separate graveyard within the common burial compound. The grave yard allocated for Ayilles in the burial compound is positioned at the back of the Goqqa's in such a way that it signifies the lower social status of the Ayilles in their real life.

The Ayille family is repeatedly exemplified by off-putting stereotype including the physical appearances as well. As to the informants, the Goqqas viewed them as different from them in terms of physical characteristics. The Ayilles are considered to be short and have stoutly curled hair. Their noses are low and wide. It has also been indicated by some informants from the Goqqa groups that the Ayilles do not care about their cleanliness in that they do not wash their bodies and clothes, and so, give off unpleasing smell, in cases rooted by a skin infection.

Moreover, the Ayilles are viewed to be shameless, wicked, and full of complaints, extravagant and a family which has no respect to others. They are not fascinated in education and are ill-mannered and sluggish. For instance, the following saying of Wolaitta usually articulated to designate one of these characteristics:

### **13 Ayilliya duliyaane shiyaye xayide erena An Ayille man has never been hygienic of grimy physique**

In such aphorism the Goqqas commonly stereotype the Ayilles as people who always convey disgruntlement, indolent, full of grievances and quick to complaints.

The most insidious and enduring form of marginalization is, however, is the rule not in favor of intermarriage. Individuals from the Goqqas and Ayille are not allowed to engage in marital attachment and such involvement would result in a severe condemnations and disapproval by the host society.

In recent times, there are some Ayilles who attempt to refuse to give in to all the cited sort of discrimination, predominantly regarding forced endogamy. As indicated by the informants, mostly the young and educated men try to persuade the Goqqas to treat the Ayilles in human way but it is more daunting principally when it comes to martial affiliation. In some cases, the Ayilles with recovered economic condition retort more violently to the nuisance and forestalling by the Goqqas. 45 year old man at Mokonisa area recounted his observation of such relentless dispute as follows:

"It was happened few months ago in our adjacent village. A woman from the local Guderata clan married an Ayille man and her family knew nothing about her relation till she left home. When her family heeded about it, they brought her back and terrified her husband not to try it all over again. She stayed only for one week with her husband. However, her husband came viciously and took her back; then her family and some individuals from her lineage group open a raid on his family and killed three of them. In the mean time, they made an effort to appeal for the court but it seems that they did not succeed."

In connection to this, some individuals from the Goqqa groups denoted the underlying cause for such conflict as it lies on the fact that the Ayilles are organizing themselves in terms of alliances where they assemble and confer about their stipulations. In such gatherings, for instance, they initiate their members to go for marital attachments so as to get rid of all other forms of discrimination, which the Goqqas will never accept even the educated and religious ones'.

In summing up, the degree of social exclusion and marginalization differs from place to place in that it is altogether contingent on the size of the Ayille residents living in the locality. In other words, the extent of marginalization seems to be less significant in areas where there is comparatively larger population of the Ayilles. On the contrary, social exclusion is more recurrent and unsympathetic in places where the Ayilles are numerically less and sparsely inhabited. As one Goqqa informant sates: "In our neighborhood they are numerically hardly any as compared to other places and this in turn uncovered them by far to assail and exclusion by dominant groups. As to me, this might not be the case in other places like Achura [area located at Gacheno research site] where one can find huge residents of Ayilles."

## 14 c) The political dimension of marginalization

As to the in-depth informants, the kuaka Ayilles had prominent places of duty in the traditional political offices of Wolaitta. For instance, as avowed by one of the Ayille elders, the kuaka Ayilles had worked as an agent of kawo (kings) and counselor in the traditional kingdom of Wolaitta. Among such personalities well known in the area, a kauka Ayille Fitaurari Bakaloo is the most stupendous and famous in all three research sites. Man like Bakaloo and other kuaka Ayilles had good political reputation in the years before the imperial regime.

As the Goqqa officials of indistinguishable designation, the kauka Ayilles in the office were in charge for the customary compilation of royal taxes and then in turn given a fief for their quick collection of taxes. Consequently, those who have good quality in organizing and coordinating the public under their authority were endorsed to more significant place of duty and cherished with resources like cattle. This did not mean that all Ayilles had improved place in that period since the majority of them (Goqqatu Ayille) experienced grave domination and could not aspire the positions of leadership.

For most part, in a political sense, the marginalization and discrimination of minorities in Wolaitta in general and the Ayilles in particular, is manifested vividly at the peasant/ kebele association level more than ever in the past. They had very limited political and judicial rights. In most recent times the Ayille minorities have been excluded from village level political institutions, such as the peasant association or service cooperative, and even when they were permitted to take part, they never obtained leadership position. As indicated by the informants, even today, in most instances, the Goqqas do not entertain the idea of giving the minorities the leadership place and representing them. Even if they acquire such opportunity in kebele offices, they would stay only for limited time due to the opposition and disapproval of the host community. The man from the local Hizia clan narrated such phenomenon as follows:

"It was two years ago that a man from an Ayille group attained a position as kebele administrator at Gacheno village. He was elected by the village representatives and the first man from Ayille minority group to achieve such position. However, he stayed in the position for only two and half months due to severe condemnation by the Goqqas and refusal to attend the gathering organized by the office. Even in few meeting they took part they strappingly showed their resentment and some of them terrorized the man as they would take his life if he repudiates. Hence, the man vehemently left his office and expelled from such political activities."

As mentioned by the informants, the Ayilles are not considered to have the quality like Goqqas to play such leading roles and habitually deemed to be dominated. Such image of Ayilles regarding their part in political activities of the community has been uttered in the following saying:

Ayese byana sagayoy na'ese kushiya mentase A Mother has hardly any ring but it shatters her daughter's finger

The essential connotation put across by means of the above saying witnesses to a sort of rigidly stereotyped image of Ayille social groups by the dominant groups in the face of changing socio-cultural endeavors of the community.

It is also discovered in the field that marginalized groups like Ayille have been ruled out from the existing political organizations established along clan ties and other features of different social groups. In some cases they have endured from discrimination, for instances, by being embattled for conscription. Almost all individuals occupying the leading position in the villages are from the Goqqa who are in most instances biased against the marginalized groups. They are deprived from political offices and not treated equally with the Goqqas. As to the information obtained from the informants, no Ayille is acquiring government authority either as a chair man at peasant association level or other high ranking positions in the village.

Conversely, few Ayilles are serving as militias at village levels in the areas. Conceivably, it seems that this is the widely entertained political status by the young Ayilles in wolaitta.

In relation to their legal shield and human rights, the Ayilles are at the rim in that they are subjected to various sorts of abuses and afflicts. The Ayille social group usually faces grave breed of physical and mental nuisances that extends from severe distress to injury upon their body that ends in death.

## 15 IV. Conclusions and Recommendations a) Conclusion

Based on the analysis and discussion as regards the socio-economic and political aspects of marginalization that characterizes the Ayille minority group, the following conclusions have been made; ? The socio-cultural aspects have been the most persuasive means of ensuring exclusion by the Goqqas in confining the minorities not to take part in various social contexts. It is found that some of the restrictions are still as definitely established as they were in the couple of decades ago. Martial relationship with other social groups is usually prohibited and unthinkable given that they are firmly restricted to marry from their own Ayille groups. The instances like submissive greetings, commensality and intricacy of participating in various associations are the channel in the course of which social inequality of Ayilles are articulated. ? In terms of the economy, the 1974 land reform established justifiable equality regarding access to land and thus, the Ayilles have had land. Accordingly, the Ayilles have become ever more concerned in agricultural production albeit the narrow size of the cultivating land. Conversely, accompanied with lack of other important possessions like oxen and necessary agricultural tools, restricted the Ayilles' greater involvement in production activities. ? The Ayilles have also been prohibited from the village level political associations such as the peasant/ kebele associations or service cooperatives and

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338 in instances when they are allowed to take part, they never acquired leadership positions. They have very  
339 constrained political and judicial rights.

## 340 **16 b) Recommendations**

341 Based on the research findings, the following recommendations have been made; ? There should be comprehensive  
342 ways of dealing with the problems faced by the Ayille minority group



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by challenging societal attitude and taken for granted belief systems in host society ? The Ayilles themselves should also work to evade such discriminating and stereotypic tendencies rather accepting and conforming to it ? There should be away to help the Ayille social groups to be economically enhanced by developing different technique of owning rural land and looking closely the political participation of them ? The media outlets and centers should work to challenge the peoples believes and values which are conventional and, above all an impediment for the socio economic advancement of the minorities in particular and the entire Wolaitta society in broader-spectrum

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