

## MIXED MARRIAGES IN ISLAM: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON PAKISTAN

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### *Introduction*

WITH increasing multiculturalism it seems inevitable that there will be a corresponding increase in inter-cultural marriages—a topic fundamental to social anthropology. However, a review of the current literature shows a dearth of material on mixed marriages as a whole, and particularly as regards the social implications and consequences of marriage between non-Muslim women and Muslim men. Yet this type of relationship is not unknown; on the contrary, a substantial number of such marriages occur within the Islamic world. This article focuses on the dynamics of mixed marriages in Pakistan and their implications for current debates about personal and cultural identity.<sup>1</sup>

Observations of mixed couples known to me personally indicate that there is a marked variation in the way foreign wives adapt to life in Pakistan. This ranges from complete acceptance of the local norms and culture through to total rejection of everything Pakistani. Even the children have different perspectives on their mixed heritage, depending on the attitude of their mother. It appears to me that there must be some factor which determines to a large extent how and why a

1. The article is based on doctoral research carried out in Islamabad in 1992–3.

foreign wife makes the choices she does, and what the consequences of these choices are.

Current statistics show that mixed marriages are more likely to fail than non-mixed ones. This is especially true in situations where the husband and wife come from different religious backgrounds. New cultural and religious norms have to be assimilated, and new notions of identity must be juxtaposed with existing ones. I would argue that all mixed marriages raise questions of identity, and that this is especially true for the partner who is leaving his or her native culture and environment. Specifically, it seems that identity may be challenged and even threatened.

This article will accordingly address issues of self-identity raised by Laing, Bateson, and Ewing and apply them in this context. In particular, Laing's notions of ontological insecurity and Gregory Bateson's theory of the double-bind will be discussed as the basis for formulating a model which explains the identity crisis experienced by all foreign wives, and the subsequent behaviour patterns which follow on from this. Key notions of systemic power and investments will be introduced and used to argue that the double-bind is constitutive of relational systems other than those usually construed as pathological, and that ontological security is taken to be a condition that is continually re-achieved and defended. This theme is then expanded to produce a model which explains the behaviour of foreign wives in the context of both their social situation and their individual perceptions. This model is based on the premise that ontological insecurity is not merely a psychiatric affliction, but that it can be used to analyse other displacement contexts.

### *Identity Crisis and the Problem of Ontological Security*

The focus of this research is a group of foreign wives in Pakistan. However, the critical issue in any consideration of such a unique and dynamic social phenomenon is the question of what it means to be a 'foreign wife', indeed of what it means 'to be'. Psychoanalytic studies have been extremely valuable in explaining the link between culture and the individual's notions of self and identity. Although previously it was argued that identity was culturally specific, it would appear that this is not the case. Early theories which emphasized cultures as being unique historical creations have little relevance today. Instead, close attention must be paid to the socialisation of individuals, in relation both to one another, and to their environment.

Since the emergence of systems theory, a considerable body of theory and practice has evolved from the mid-fifties onwards in the field of family therapy, at the core of which lies what has become known as the 'systemic approach'. Although the family therapy movement developed through the practice of various groups, it is with the approach of Bateson and others that this discussion will most-

ly be concerned (Bateson 1973, Berger 1978, Hoffman 1981). Therapeutic techniques applying concepts derived from systems theory, with its emphasis on the circulation of information, were introduced by the Palo Alto team into what was initially a research context. In particular, work on schizophrenogenic families was predicated on the identification of the double-bind, a particular communication pattern which characteristically led to schizophrenic behaviour. The central theme of this work was that schizophrenia could be understood only systemically, not as an internal condition existing outside systemically determined behaviour patterns.

This approach to schizophrenia became well known in the 1960s in the work of R. D. Laing and his associates (see Laing 1990, Laing and Esterson 1964). Although this approach is largely discounted in psychiatry as a means of providing a causal account of such clinical conditions, the approach as it has developed up to the 1990s continues to provide a way of framing and thinking about relations between family members and people in general, rather than just cases involving a specific 'pathology'. Laing's notion of ontological security provides a powerful framework for construing the situated and contested domain of identity. With its emphasis on the effects of ontological *insecurity*, Laing's discussion provides insights into people's perceptions of themselves and the world. Their sense of displacement and lack of identity causes them to seek the preservation of self. However, although their coping strategies give them the illusion of being in control, the reality is that they cannot function in any other way. Their ontological insecurity ensures that they remain trapped in specific patterns of interaction. In other words, they are caught in a Batesonian double-bind. Such people are unable to discriminate between various communication signals. Their communication systems cannot identify the kind of message that is being conveyed to them, with the result that they have difficulty in making accurate judgements about what the other person meant. As a result, the patterns of negation continue, and a sense of ontological insecurity remains.

In this context the work of Ewing is also particularly relevant. Her focus on the psychological dimensions of family relationships among Pakistani women illustrates the importance of intrapsychic autonomy to the working of relationships within the extended family, especially between a new bride and her mother-in-law. Ewing's argument indicates that ontological security is a necessity for normal family relationships and that it influences the assimilation of newcomers, here the bride, into the family.

The Batesonian approach is usually perceived as having been developed by the Milan Systemic Approach which arose in the work of Palazzoli, Boscolo, Cecchin, and Prata during the 1970s. This approach continued to be subject to continual reflection and criticism during the 'second-order' thinking which arose in the following decade. Running throughout this critical reflection has been the issue of power:

Saying that the behaviour of one individual is the cause of the behaviour of other individuals is an epistemological error. This error derives from the arbitrary punctuation which isolates such behaviour from the pragmatic context of preceding

behaviours which can be traced back to infinity. Even a behaviour which, in various ways, reduces its apparent victim to impotence is not a 'behaviour-power', but rather a 'behaviour-response'. And yet, whoever thinks of himself as being in the 'superior' position believes himself the one with power, just as the one with the 'inferior' position thinks of himself as the one without it. We know, however, these convictions to be wrong: the power belongs to neither the one nor the other. *The power is only in the rules of the game*, which cannot be changed by the people involved in it. (Palazzoli *et al.* 1978: 5–6, my emphasis).

This statement echoes the legendary assertions of Bateson concerning the 'pernicious epistemology of power' (cited in Palazzoli *et al.*: *ibid.*). Heated debates about the status of victims and perpetrators, and about gender and intergenerational relations, which often refer to the Bateson/Haley debate (Hoffman 1981) have sought to locate the individual's relations in wider political and social contexts.

It could be argued that an individual may have an investment in a particular representation of power which she or he may experience as both empowering and disempowering. By this I mean that the bind situation which appears paradoxical is precisely the nexus in which identity is established and preserved, and in which power is maintained or negotiated (see Anderson *et al.* 1986, Anderson and Goolishian 1988).

Individual development thus occurs in a matrix of culturally shaped situations which are often embedded in inconsistent, often incompatible, symbolic systems. This means that self-representations are highly contextual, and shift rapidly as the actors negotiate status and seek to specify specific goals, implicitly redefining themselves and each other during the course of the interaction. Where these existing self-representations become inadequate due to non-resolution of conflict, new strategies are followed, and identities renegotiated. These symbolic systems and associated self-images are therefore always experienced in the context of particular behaviour. Children learn not only this set of systems and images, but also how to shift from one to the other, when to juxtapose them, and when to keep them distinct (Palazzoli *et al.*: 273). It would thus appear that as long as an individual is able to maintain self-representations which are contextually appropriate, he or she may experience a sense of continuity despite several integrated (or non-integrated, as the case may be) self-representations.

I would argue that it is not only in situations of extreme neurosis that ontological insecurity comes into play, but rather that it is an integral part of many situations. The double-bind exists not only in cases of psychological disorder, but also in day-to-day interactions. Ontological insecurity exists whenever a person's sense of self is questioned. Thus it does not necessarily indicate a state of mental disorder; rather, it is an indicator of a questioning of notions of identity. This crisis can arise in many situations of stress or displacement, including the move from one country to another and, even more importantly, from one culture to another. For this reason I propose that theories of ontological insecurity and the double-bind can serve as useful tools in examining the dynamics of mixed-race marriage in Pakistan.

In this context, Holloway's discussion of 'investments' might also be useful. Investment is not just an economic term: it can also be used to describe the link between questions of power and identity. Holloway argues that people take up certain positions in order to gain power. The extent of this power is determined by the relationship each individual has with others. Consequently, interpersonal relationships are of great importance in maintaining or increasing one's prestige. Investment is thus not merely a matter of emotional satisfaction, but also provides material, economic, and social benefits.

I would argue that this notion of investment also manifests itself in the relationship of a foreign wife with her husband and his family. By marrying someone from a different culture, a foreign wife has moved away from her own cultural tradition. She has to integrate into, or at least partially accept, her husband's culture. This requires investments on her part. Often these take place long before the wife even comes to Pakistan. In fact such a process begins from the moment the couple gets together, but it is especially noticeable in cases where the foreign wife has had to move to Pakistan. She renegotiates her identity in order to gain a more favourable position within the in-law family structure. Her social standing and position within the family hierarchy can thus be altered, depending on what position she takes.

### *Foreign Wives*

The Foreign Wives Group of Islamabad, Pakistan, came into existence in 1985 with twenty-eight members. Since then it has grown considerably and at present has more than one hundred women listed as members, although they do not all attend meetings. Since 1989 the Group has also produced a monthly newsletter providing information about current members and their activities.

For this research attention was focused on individual members of the group. I introduced myself through the monthly newsletter and asked for volunteers willing to answer my questions and discuss their lives. This was followed by recorded interviews. The wives interviewed represent as diverse a range of nationalities and age groups as possible.

Having interviewed over forty women, it soon became apparent that there are several factors which influence the integration of a foreign wife into Pakistani society. In other words, how and why she acts is partially determined by certain key relationships and issues which repeatedly arise in the mixed-marriage setting. Before proceeding any further, therefore, I would like to examine these factors in more detail.

### Relationship with in-laws

The relationship between a foreign wife and her in-laws is a complex one: both parties need to evolve an understanding of each other's expectations and points of view. A harmonious relationship can greatly ease a wife's entry into Pakistani society. Although there are obvious exceptions, by and large foreign wives in Islamabad find that their relationship with their in-laws is a good one, providing them with much needed support. Mary, for example, was able to leave her children with her mother-in-law for three years while she and her husband were in the USA. The same is true for Marinette, whose children lived with their grandmother while their parents were in Paris.

However, in order for this relationship to work, a wife's in-laws must have been willing to welcome her into their family, and this proves to be the case among most foreign wives in Islamabad. Andrea has a very good relationship with her in-laws. Her husband's family was happy to welcome her, and nowadays, despite owning a house of their own, the couple prefer to share a house with his elder brother and wife. The family is close (but not suffocating) and supportive.

In families where such acceptance does not occur, the relationship between a wife and her in-laws is difficult and often unpleasant. Selma has been particularly unfortunate in this respect. When she arrived in Islamabad to marry, her in-laws wanted to send her back home, claiming that her husband's sister had to be married off first. The fact that Selma refused to convert to Islam did not help either. The couple got married despite the opposition, living first in a hotel, then with friends. Only after seven months did her husband admit to his parents that they were married, and the family had another quiet wedding at home. Thereafter they moved in with his parents.

Although this is an extreme case, it serves to highlight the importance of the wife/in-law relationship and its contribution to the success of a marriage. Of the women I interviewed the number who live with their in-laws and say that they are happy in Pakistan was much higher than those women who purport to be happy and are living independently. In fact, just 25% of wives who live independently say that they are happy, as compared to 37.5% who live in an extended family set-up.

This statistic is hardly surprising. I would argue that the support of in-laws is crucial for a foreign wife. She is ontologically insecure when she arrives in Pakistan, having given up both family and friends. Her identity is lost, and she has to re-establish some sense of self. Until a network of friends has been established, the only people a wife can legitimately and easily turn to are her in-laws. They act as a buffer, protecting her from society until she is ready to stand on her own. The relationship between a wife and her in-laws is therefore of great importance, one which can determine, to a certain degree, how well a wife adapts to Pakistan.

## Return to the fold

When children are sent abroad for higher education the family link is sometimes temporarily weakened. This is especially true for men since they have a lot more freedom when they go abroad than women do. Women are usually sent abroad only if they have relatives there who can watch over them. Men, on the other hand, reside in hostels. They are free to go out and meet whom they want, and no one questions what they do. This behaviour ties in with the idea of *izzat* or family honour, whose essential message is that women need to be protected and that men are their only protectors (Engineer 1992: 5). Because a man cannot compromise the family's *izzat* he is free to act as he chooses. A woman, however, can shame her entire family by her behaviour, so she must be strictly controlled. As a result, very few women study overseas, compared to the large number of men.

The men who go abroad soon find that they can easily meet women. Although a man would have difficulty in taking a woman out in Pakistan, abroad everything is much simpler. He does not have to worry about family pressure or the scandal he might cause. As a result men are much freer to have relationships, some of which ultimately result in marriage. However, although many Pakistani men seem quite liberal and broad-minded abroad, this often changes when they return to Pakistan. While living abroad they know that they are entirely independent. The same is not true at home. Once again they rejoin the family and all its pressures. Now the reputation of the entire family must be considered.

The result is a return to the conservative ideas of Pakistani society. Faced with the choice between conforming or being ostracized by the community, the husband almost always returns to the fold. What was previously considered acceptable behaviour for his wife and children now becomes a cause for disagreement. This has happened to many foreign wives. One wife described how she manages to get around her husband's conservative ideas by initiating plans, then telling him about them—at which stage he can no longer refuse to go along. For example, when her daughter wanted to study medicine in a co-educational college away from home, she organized everything first and then told him.

Sometimes the wife does not know what she has let herself in for until she arrives in Pakistan. Several women who met their husbands abroad and then moved to Pakistan discovered that their husbands had previously been married and had a wife and children living there already. They were expected to accept this situation without question.

When it comes to raising daughters abroad, Pakistani fathers are very quick to revert to conservative ideas. While it is accepted for a man to marry a foreigner and live abroad, it would be unthinkable for his daughter to do the same. Pakistani families settled in England often send their daughters back to Pakistan once they are fifteen or sixteen years old in order to have them married off. In doing so they hope to avoid later conflicts when the daughters start seeing unsuitable boys and begin to want more freedom. Exactly the same is true for mixed couples. Many have moved back to Pakistan specifically for the purpose of raising their

daughters in an environment which they can control. At times this move has been made when the children have already reached their early teens, and such an upheaval can be very traumatic for them.

So why do these men choose to marry foreign women in the first place? The answer seems to be that they too did not realize what they were getting into. In the first enthusiasm of 'love', such a union seems ideal. Both husband and wife share idealistic expectations that they can overcome any problems which they might encounter, and while living abroad that is often the case.

However, the situation is different in Pakistan. By returning to his home environment, the husband automatically places himself under the influence of his family and society, and is under pressure to conform to what is expected of him. Part of that expectation relates to the kind of wife he brings home, and therein lies the contradiction. Although Pakistanis like to have fair wives, they are also expected to bring home a woman from a similar background with the same system of values and beliefs. Pakistani wives know how to access the existing social network in a way that foreigners can never hope to achieve: they have the same cultural traditions behind them. When a foreign wife comes into this situation she disrupts the entire family structure. Her presence calls into question the fundamental relationship between men and women. Because of her upbringing she inserts a totally different set of expectations into the marriage equation. If the couple lives in Pakistan, the husband has to reconcile her ideas with those of his family—and the family usually wins out.

### The children

This decision has repercussions for the children. Every foreign wife has to decide how she will raise her children. Does she want them to grow up learning about both cultures, or is it better for them to grow up feeling a strong identity with one culture alone? Which religion will they follow? Will they be sent abroad for higher education? Will she let them choose their own spouses or will she prefer to arrange their marriages in more typical Pakistani fashion?

The prevailing view of the children of mixed marriages is that they have identity problems because of their ambiguous social position; they are regarded as a psychologically disadvantaged group. This is not the case in Pakistan. Although the children have foreign mothers, by and large this does not present them with an identity crisis. This can be attributed to the fact that women who marry Pakistani men make a conscious decision to raise their children as Pakistanis. Many of the women I interviewed stressed the fact that they felt their children were better off having strong roots in one country and culture, rather than being torn between two. As a result they are very much a part of Pakistani society. They attend local schools, and consequently have local friends with whom they share similar interests and follow the same codes of behaviour. For example, one mother discussed how her daughter refuses to swim when there are boys in the pool and prays five



times a day. Her mother has never instructed her about these things, but she has picked up the attitudes of her local friends, and wants to behave as they do.

Most literature on the children of mixed marriages mentions the problems they have with their skin colour. Because they are not 'white', they automatically become classified as 'coloured', even though they share characteristics of both cultures. The opposite holds true in Pakistan. Since Pakistanis are extremely colour-conscious, they prefer their children to appear fair. As mentioned previously, fair is considered beautiful, so mixed-race children are sought after. This is especially true of girls, whose fairness is an asset in the marriage market. However, sometimes their colour can work against them. Such children are sometimes the target of jealousy, and they are teased or picked on at school. One girl who has to walk past a boy's college on her way to the bus stop is continuously harassed by boys calling her *angrez* (foreigner). Such cases are unusual, though, and this type of attitude is uncommon. For the most part these children have no problems being accepted into Pakistani society.

In fact, many of these children go through life having the same experiences as any Pakistani child of similar economic standing with the same kind of education and, eventually, similar marriages. Several foreign wives have agreed to some form of arranged marriage for their children. In some cases this consists in allowing their daughter to meet family friends and make her choice, but in other cases she is simply told whom to marry. The main reason behind this decision is that Islam passes on religion through the father. Consequently, if a Muslim girl marries a non-Muslim, her children will be non-Muslim too. Such a disgrace is to be avoided at all costs.

Often family pressure also plays a big role in this decision. The wife's in-laws want to ensure that the children are not removed from their Pakistani heritage, so they look for good Pakistani families to marry into. Like it or not, the wives have to comply.

### *Individual Case-studies*

An examination of the data shows that there appear to be certain behavioural patterns which can be used to divide the group into four distinct categories, each demonstrating the dynamics of the relationship between family and society. All the wives interviewed could be placed in one of these groups, although some were easier to place than others. Since the women within each group all demonstrate the same behaviour to various degrees, it is possible to select one person who typifies the behaviour associated with that group. These four respondents thus provide a good representation of the different strategies employed and the dynamics of the family-society relationship at work.

Aliya Habib is English by birth. She met her husband when they were both studying in the UK and moved to Pakistan a few years later. She has three children, a son and two daughters. All three were born in the UK but have never lived there (for reasons of nationality, Aliya wanted the children born in the UK). The family lives in a lower-middle-class neighbourhood and share a house with the husband's parents. Aliya and her family live upstairs, while her parents-in-law live downstairs. Since the relationship between Aliya and her mother-in-law is quite hostile, they maintain separate entrances for each part of the house. In fact, this relationship was so bad at one point that Aliya had a nervous breakdown. However, she insists that with the help of psychiatric counselling and medication she has now recovered.

Jane Hashmi lives in an affluent sector of Islamabad, in her own house. Even though her sisters-in-law live right next door, the family is able to maintain its privacy and independence. Jane has two children, a boy and a girl, who attend one of the private English schools which abound in Islamabad. Her husband is a doctor twenty years older than herself, who came back to Pakistan with the purpose of establishing a private clinic. Business is not going well, and Jane has misgivings about what will happen to them in the future. Prior to moving to Islamabad, the family lived in Canada. Although Jane was wearing Western clothes when I met her, the overall impression she gives is of being quite conservative. Her husband is extremely religious, and this has had a definite effect on her. He dislikes her having any friends, and as a couple they seldom socialize. As a result, Jane projects the image of a woman living under strain, and even though she attempted to dispel this idea, her feelings came through clearly in the way she kept refuting statements she had made earlier about her relationship with her husband and her life in Pakistan.

Karin is Danish. She and her husband met in Denmark and married there, then moved to Pakistan after three or four years. She lives in an affluent neighbourhood and runs a hairdressing business from her home. Karin has two children who attend a private school. They live independently, but Karin's mother-in-law comes to visit them quite often. Although Karin told me that she got on quite well with her mother-in-law, she admitted that they sometimes disagreed.

Jean is a doctor. She met her husband, also a doctor, in the UK. After a five-year courtship they decided to marry. Although Jean had visited Pakistan before the marriage to get an idea of what it was like, living there proved to be quite different. The family first lived in Multan, a conservative town in southern Punjab, before moving north to Rawalpindi and then Islamabad. Her in-laws were originally quite upset at the thought of their son marrying a foreigner, but later accepted the idea. The family has an extended living arrangement, sharing the house with her husband's two sisters and his mother. Jean keeps herself busy through contacts with the foreign community. She has deliberately refrained from learning Urdu well, in the belief that this maintains a distance between herself and her in-laws. The family has two children, a boy and a girl, who attend the International School in Islamabad. Despite the fact that they are half-Pakistani, the

children consider themselves English. The son especially is vehemently opposed to anything Pakistani and refuses to learn Urdu. Jean has maintained a lifestyle similar to that which she would have had in the UK, and her marriage to a Pakistani has had little impact on her behaviour.

The four wives discussed here represent a cross-section of those interviewed. Their life-styles and observations are not unique. On the contrary, their experiences reflect the issues which foreign wives in Pakistan have to come to terms with in one way or another. The difference lies in how they cope and the strategy they follow.

## Religion

One of the main factors affecting mixed marriages in Pakistan is religion. Whether or not the wife converts to Islam, and whether, if so, it is a true conversion, has an enormous impact on the dynamics of her relationship with her husband and his family. In some instances where the wife had already embraced another religion before marriage, the effect on the marriage is even more pronounced. A wife must choose either to retain her own religion or to become a Muslim. The attitude of her partner is vital to this decision, as his acceptance or rejection of her religious identity plays a key role in determining how well she will be received by his family. Among the foreign wives of Islamabad, both situations exist. Some wives chose to convert to Islam of their own free will, while others have retained their own religion. Quite a number are registered as Muslims on their marriage documents but do not practise it.

Aliya converted to Islam when she and her husband decided to get married. She argues that conversion is necessary in order to avoid trouble in the marriage:

I'm glad that I changed from the beginning. I've seen some girls here, they are still Christians, and it's caused a lot of trouble with their husbands. I mean, they don't care when they are abroad, but when they come back here with the parents and all, they start saying "don't do this any more, don't do that any more". They are under pressure themselves, so they pressure their wives.

Aliya sees her conversion as a logical move guaranteed to remove a possible source of friction from the marriage.

Although Jane is also a Muslim, her conversion was not made out of conviction but rather as a concession to her husband and for the sake of the children.

Jean had initially converted to Catholicism, so did not want to convert again.

I have had a great deal of difficulty along the years practising my religion because, unfortunately, I discovered that whereas Javed was very happy for me to practise before we got married, without telling me that this would be so, he was much less happy after we got married.

Jean's decision to remain a Catholic forms a part of the choices she has made about her life in Pakistan. In retaining her own religion, she has taken a step which influences other decisions, most importantly, her notions about her own sense of self. She has rejected the idea of gaining social acceptability by embracing Islam, thus reinforcing her identity as a foreigner and outsider.

Karin never converted and says that she was never pressurized to do so.

The choice of whether or not to convert has other implications. To a certain degree, accepting Islam is an indication that a wife has decided to make some sort of adjustment and/or compromise with the values and norms of Pakistani society. The extent of this step varies between individuals, but the mere fact of consciously accepting a new religion already shows a predisposition for, and recognition of, a new life-style more compatible with Pakistani norms.

It is interesting to note that, without exception, the children of all the foreign wives I interviewed are Muslim. Social and family pressures appear to have a great influence in this area, with fathers insisting that their children are raised in the religion appropriate to their (local) culture and beliefs. However, this raises the question of identity. Which cultural values do the children identify with? Are they raised as Pakistanis, or do they grow up learning about both cultures? Whatever the decision, it has far-reaching consequences. If a couple agrees to raise their children in the local (Pakistani) culture, then the wife has to behave accordingly. Therefore, the decision made will affect not only the children but their parents too, and thus the marriage.

### Cultural identity of children

The notion of raising children in a religion which will guarantee their acceptance by society prevails in the foreign wives' community. However, even though these wives have all agreed to raise their children as Muslims, they differ in the importance which they have attached to imparting aspects of their own culture to their offspring. Aliya, for example, firmly believes that her children should be taught only about Pakistani culture, since that is the society they are growing up in. She says:

I think it puts confusion in their heads. They know nothing about Christianity or anything, and they are definitely true Pakistanis in every way—religion, even their thought, because they have never known anything except Pakistan. When we got to England they didn't like it.

Jean's children, on the other hand, have had limited contact with Pakistani culture. They attend an American school and have little in common with their father's family. In fact Jean encourages this barrier:

I'm certainly the kind of parent who would take my children to softball or soccer or plays, or whatever activities they're involved in. And these are a range of

activities absolutely beyond their [the family's] understanding, so it's a part of keeping my children with me, separately with me.

Karin's children have a similar mixed heritage. Although at present they are studying at a local school, they are more Western than Pakistani and consider themselves to be Danish. Even Jane's children have had problems adjusting to Pakistan because their initial schooling took place in Canada.

Although all these children are Muslims, they do not all consider themselves to be Pakistanis. Their outlook is very much dependent on the attitude of their mothers. When a foreign wife decides that she is better off adopting a Pakistani way of life, her children do so as well. If, on the other hand, she is not able or willing to do so, then her children find themselves in a conflict, caught between identities. Their notions of self are interlinked with, and influenced by, their mothers. Therefore, whatever choice a foreign wife makes with regard to her life in Pakistan will have a knock-on effect on her children.

### Living arrangements

The living arrangements of a couple also contribute to their relationship. The type of living arrangement a foreign wife finds herself in often influences other aspects of her life. Living with in-laws, for example, can have a major impact on the marriage, even making or breaking the relationship. Karin, Jean, Jane, and Aliya have all had to cope with this situation, but they have tackled it in different ways, and with differing outcomes. When Jean first arrived in Pakistan she moved in with her in-laws. At first she found the situation quite acceptable, but it has now become a problem:

I find that in a family as large as this in terms of numbers, in a house as small as this, we're all passing up the duties and generally speaking the jobs fall between us somewhere. You can't make decisions because they will get reversed—things like that.

Jane's in-laws live next door to her now, but initially they all shared a house:

Generally adjusting and living with relatives in a small house in Pindi is not easy. At least it's not too bad here, they're next door. He swore to me we would never go and live with his relatives and then we get here. All of a sudden we end up in his house with his relatives. I get on with them all right but I wouldn't go out and choose them as friends.

When Karin's family first arrived in Pakistan, they shared a house with her mother-in-law. This relationship was uneasy at best, and when they moved to Islamabad, Karin insisted that they live on their own.

Aliya has lived with her in-laws since she arrived in Pakistan, and she too has had a difficult relationship with her mother-in-law:

I never got on with his mum, never, from the beginning. I mean, even small things. You used to wash the clothes—it wasn't right. She used to go and get her maid to get it off the line and wash it all over again. She just wants to have her own way, which is common here for mothers-in-law.

Despite all their problems, Aliya and her mother-in-law are forced to remain in close proximity due to financial constraints. However, Aliya has succeeded in gaining some independence by dividing their house into two separate sections, one occupied by her and the other by her mother-in-law. This set-up is not ideal, but it gives her some much needed freedom and the opportunity to remove herself from her mother-in-law's sphere of influence.

Although individual circumstances differ, it would appear that residence arrangements have some part to play in the role a foreign wife adopts when she comes to Pakistan. Those wives who share an extended family set-up seem to be more predisposed to accepting a Pakistani way of life—i.e., they conform to the norms of Pakistani society and culture. On the other hand, women who live independently appear to have more freedom to maintain their own way of life, and consequently their identity as a foreigner remains stronger. Of course, relationships within individual families have an important influence too. The bond between a husband and his parents to a certain extent determines how much leeway a wife has in her behaviour. The more constrained she is, the more likely it is that she will adopt a Pakistani identity to facilitate her acceptance.

### Children's marriages

A dilemma which frequently causes problems for mixed-marriage couples in Pakistan is the issue of children's marriages. Do they get to choose their own spouse, or will they have a traditional arranged marriage instead? The answer varies from family to family and is largely dependent on the outlook of the father. If he is conservative, then the chances are that he will prefer to select a partner for his children. In most cases religion plays an important role, as Muslims do not like to see their members marry outside the community. Jane, Karin, and Aliya all agree that it is important for their children to marry Muslims. They hope that the children will have a semi-arranged marriage—that is, that they will be introduced to suitable candidates and be allowed to make a choice from there.

However, Jean sees things differently. Since her children are being educated at an international school, and their father has little input where religion is concerned, she feels that the choice is up to them:

I would not expect anybody going through a Western education to accept an arranged marriage. What about experience? You know, I read the figures, and

just from reading sociology books I know that the success rate for arranged marriages is quite low, as seen in this family, and therefore I'm not going to think about it for my own children.

It would thus appear that the type of marriage undertaken by the children of mixed marriages is at least in part a reflection of their mother's attitude towards Pakistan and her new life. If she accepts the Pakistani life-style, then the chances of her children having an arranged marriage are far greater. If, on the other hand, she chooses to retain her own identity, then her children are more likely to have 'love' marriages.

### The 'happiness' factor

Although on the face of it the problems confronting foreign wives might not be insurmountable, they can have serious consequences. If a wife is made to feel alien in her environment, she cannot be happy with the choices she has made, and it is these choices which ultimately shape her life. Jean says:

I've learnt a lot here and I've made some very good friends here. I've got a very good job [that] I've practically been able to tailor to my own interests. To me, I've grown up here. It's not what I expected though, and it wasn't a normal happiness. It wasn't, for instance, a normal family happiness. I didn't find that, but I found so many other things instead.

Despite her problems with her mother-in-law, Aliya also agrees that she has found happiness and regards Pakistan as her home. She says:

Actually, every time we go back there [to the UK], I feel stranger and stranger, I mean, not always comfortable. Every time you go you know that you'll be coming back here, and this is more like home. I don't think I'd like to live in England now that I've got settled and everything. I still say that I'm English, but I like Pakistan.

Jane has also made efforts to adapt to her new life, although it does not appear to have made her much happier.

However, other wives have found it impossible to come to terms with their life, and given a choice, many would leave the country as soon as they could. Karin is a prime example. She was always adamant that she could never live in Pakistan permanently and would return to Denmark should anything happen to her husband. Ultimately she did so. Having found it impossible to reconcile herself to the increasing interference of her mother-in-law, she packed her bags and left.

Jane's father is dead, and her mother is living with a sister. Even if she wanted to move back to the UK, she has no place to go. The same is true for

many foreign wives. Only a few know that they can leave Pakistan whenever they choose: the rest must make the best of an unsatisfactory situation.

These comments illustrate just how difficult it can be to adjust to a new society and way of life, particularly if a different religion is involved. Foreign wives, who are already in an insecure position due to their lack of contacts and knowledge of the local culture, find that their problems are heightened by the apparent need to be accepted by society. If a wife decides to integrate herself, then she follows the Pakistani life-style as far as she can, wearing the local clothes, converting to Islam, and raising her children to be 'good' Pakistanis. Yet despite all her efforts, ultimately she remains a foreigner. She might be accepted to a certain degree, but she can never be Pakistani, and people will always be quick to point out any deficiencies in her, or, more importantly, in the upbringing of her children. However, it would appear that the majority of foreign wives choose the middle ground, searching for a compromise between their own culture and that of Pakistan, and hoping to achieve a balance which will not only please their husbands and those around him, but bring them happiness at the same time.

It must be emphasized that the factors discussed here do not in themselves give rise to an identity: rather, they form a framework of reference for foreign wives. Whatever action they follow is a reflection of the decision they have made regarding how best to cope with a new life in Pakistan. We can thus make certain assumptions about how a wife will behave based on what strategy she follows, and use this information to create a model which explains the dynamics of mixed relationships.

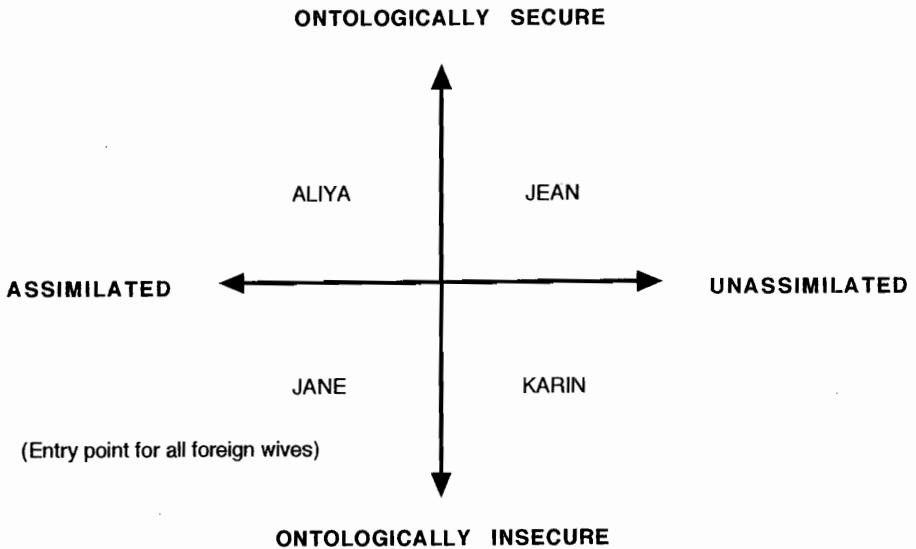
### *Preserving Identity: The Ontological Security Model*

The assimilation/ontological security model is based on a continuum of behaviour which follows Durkheim's assertion that 'madness is merely an exaggeration of normal behaviour'. Bateson pursued a similar vein in his consideration of people labelled 'schizophrenics'. He perceived them to be normal people who, through circumstance, are placed in a double-bind resulting in their denial of the world around them. Their environment has put them in a position of ontological insecurity; they lack a sense of identity, a sense of self.

However, this loss of identity does not occur only among schizophrenics. It could be argued that any relocation to a new environment by definition entails a considerable degree of ontological insecurity and indeed a lack of assimilation which, in extreme cases, either becomes exaggerated to the point of severe ontological insecurity and dislocation, or, through a process of assertion or alienation, leads to the re-establishment of ontological security, with or without assimilation. In other words, some people reject their new culture while others embrace it, albeit under coercion or by submission. By creating a matrix which portrays four loose



but fundamental categories of greater or lesser assimilation and ontological security, one is able to consider these varying continua in a manner which allows certain correlations to be made between a foreign wife's ontological security and her behaviour. Below is a basic diagram of the model divided into the four quadrants of assimilation and security.



It is important to note that all foreign wives will experience a greater or lesser degree of ontological insecurity and are thus, by definition, unassimilated. This is true for anybody entering into an alien environment with a view to staying there long-term. Although in time they will make a decision as to what degree of assimilation they find appropriate and acceptable, at the initial stage it seems reasonable to assert that their identity and sense of self is threatened.

Every foreign wife undergoes an identity crisis when she first arrives in Pakistan. She is confronted with a culture alien to her, and a society with values and beliefs often different to her own. At this point she is 'ontologically insecure'. Laing says that such individuals feel 'precariously differentiated from the rest of the world, so that their identity and autonomy is always in question' (1990: 42). They are occupied with 'preserving rather than gratifying' themselves, and struggle to find something familiar to hold on to (ibid.). This is very much the case for women coming to Pakistan. Since this initial period of non-adjustment is experienced by all foreign wives, it seems appropriate to consider this the first stage of an assimilation/ontological security model. Of the four wives described earlier,

Jane Hashmi represents this category. Although she has lived in Pakistan for some time, she has not yet come to terms with her situation. At first sight she appears quite well settled, if somewhat conservative and conventional, but in fact she is in a predicament. Members of this group are unsure about their identity and sense of self. They question the values and behaviour of the indigenous population, and despite occasional statements to the contrary are unhappy with their situation. Throughout her interview Jane made comments about her dissatisfaction with her present life. Similarly, an American wife commented on the pressures of being a foreign wife. She gets blamed for any mistakes her children make and wishes that she had brought her children to Pakistan at an earlier age so that they could have fitted in more easily. Although these wives might very well prefer to leave Pakistan, they are often halted by financial constraints. Many women are dependent on their husbands for money, and in certain cases even their passports are kept from them. As a result they are forced to remain, whether they like it or not.

Wives in this category find themselves torn between the need to fit into a new life and a fear of giving up the old one. Their identity and sense of security are threatened. And yet, no matter what they do, they are in a no-win situation. They are caught in a double-bind. No matter how they choose to cope with life in Pakistan, they have to compromise, either in their marriage or with their identity. Bateson theorized that the double-bind arises in *all* relationships, and it is how a person resolves this conflict which determines her consequent behaviour. Although all foreign wives initially find themselves in the first category, they can either choose to remain there (in which case they remain ontologically insecure) or pursue one of the following options: (1) assimilate entirely; (2) compromise; or (3) reject Pakistan outright.

When confronted with an overwhelming array of new experiences, some people find it simpler to become immersed in the new culture, rather than struggle to find a niche for themselves. Certainly this is true for some foreign wives. Whereas previously they followed the customs and traditions of their own countries, on coming to Pakistan they make a conscious decision to adapt to local ways. They argue that since they have chosen to marry a Pakistani and live in Pakistan, they should behave accordingly. Aliya is a prime example of this type of foreign wife. Her actions could be those of any middle-class Pakistani woman. The key aspect to this category of foreign wives is their acceptance of Pakistani culture and *all* it entails. This includes language, clothes, and religious beliefs, as well as other traditions and customs. It is not unusual to find that, among this group, the wives, despite being foreign, profess themselves willing to arrange the marriages of their children themselves. They raise the point that in Pakistani society it is difficult for boys and girls to meet and get to know each other, and that parents often know better who will be suitable marriage material.

These adaptations by foreign wives are attempts to ensure acceptance by both their husbands' family and local society as a whole. Ayesha says, 'Changing my religion made me more acceptable to his family.' That is the crux of the matter. It is not individual identity which is important here, but rather the sense of belong-

ing to a community. The philosophy underlying the actions of these women is that since they have consciously chosen to marry into a different culture, it is now up to them to make the necessary adjustments. Their happiness lies in assimilation.

At the opposite end of the scale are the foreign wives who reject anything and everything to do with Pakistan. They are determined to remain true to themselves and resent any efforts to integrate them into local society. Karin is one of them. Although at first she was able to tolerate the atmosphere around her, after undergoing some surgery the problems became too much for her to bear, and she left—walking out on her husband and children and going back to Denmark. This solution might seem rather extreme, but it is not that unusual. There are several other foreign wives living in Pakistan who would leave if they were financially independent and did not risk losing their children. Not only are they unable to get money for the fare out of Pakistan, but often their passports are kept by their husbands, so they cannot travel. The legal status of these wives is often questionable at best. Alice, for example, has been living in Pakistan for years and has raised her children there, yet she holds a tourist visa which has never been changed. As a result she does not officially exist as a local person, and should the need ever arise, will have no legal protection whatsoever.

These foreign wives have chosen to regain their ontological security by holding on to the identity which they had previously. Their answer to the problem posed by moving to Pakistan is to remain steadfast to their former identity. No matter where they go their actions will not change, because their sense of self remains the same. By maintaining their identity as foreigners they have resolved their double-bind; they are unassimilated but ontologically secure.

However, there are many foreign wives who choose a middle way. These are the individuals who retain key aspects of their own culture, but add certain Pakistani values and traditions. The women in this category vary quite substantially in the degree to which they have maintained a separate identity. Some have blended the ideas of East and West to produce a new identity for themselves which incorporates both worlds, while others are far more militant in their outlook and refuse to give up much of their culture of origin. Jean is a prime example of this type of foreign wife. Despite being married to a Pakistani, she has not let this fact influence her behaviour. She continues to do what she wants.

Women in this category frequently do not convert to Islam, even though their children are raised as Muslims. In fact, maintaining their own religion is one of the factors most noticeable in this group. They are keen to retain that part of their upbringing which defines who they are. Since religion is a major component of a person's sense of self, it remains an integral aspect of their identity. Katerina, for example, is a born-again Christian, who discovered her religion after getting married. Despite this, her children are Muslims. She says that she found life in Pakistan very difficult in the beginning, but that life became much better after she rediscovered Jesus. She no longer suffers from depression and has found peace in her heart.

Women in this group are much more willing for their children to choose their own marriage partners, even though in a way this contradicts other aspects of their upbringing. In most cases the offspring of these foreign wives, girls especially, are raised in a protective environment, attending local all-girl schools and having Pakistani friends, thus developing a very strong sense of Pakistani identity. Although a small minority of the children see themselves as the product of two cultures, by and large they consider themselves to be wholly Pakistani.

These foreign wives are relatively assimilated and have accepted their new lives. They have found that the best way of adapting to Pakistan is by reaching a compromise. Their happiness lies in being able to meld certain characteristics of their own culture and their adopted one. This strategy enables them to retain the greater portion of the identity already assigned to them by the environment in which they were raised, and by their family.

On the other hand, their adoption of certain aspects of Pakistani culture provides a means of ensuring acceptance by their in-laws and local society. Such acceptance is a definite asset in establishing a family arrangement which is both stable and workable. Without parental support the chances of a marriage succeeding are greatly reduced. Since Pakistani society still places strong emphasis on the family, any occurrences within the domestic sphere tend to engender involvement and/or interference from all. Parents are regarded with great respect and their judgement is deferred to, so obtaining their good wishes and seal of approval can go a long way in ensuring the success of the marriage. In some cases the relationship between a foreign wife and her mother-in-law is what makes or breaks the marriage. Mary was able to leave her children behind in the care of her mother-in-law when she accompanied her husband to the United States. His mother looked after the children for four years. On the other hand, Selma's mother-in-law disapproved of their marriage and repeatedly tried to convince her son to leave his wife. She used to take away all her money, and at one point even threw the couple out of the house.

The foreign wives who have chosen to reach a compromise between the two cultures are selecting a course of action which is less threatening (for them) than the other options available. In retaining parts of their own culture and upbringing they reduce the stress placed upon them in terms of their identity. They solve the problem of ontological insecurity by holding on to their sense of self, of who they are, and where they come from. However, in order to placate their in-laws and fit into the local society, these wives make the effort of adapting to certain customs which do not contradict their own. The biggest compromise they make is in terms of their children, who very often grow up knowing little if anything of their mother's culture and instead are fully socialized into Pakistani culture, both by religious beliefs and behaviour. As Pakistanis, their incorporation into the mainstream is guaranteed, their identity unquestioned.

It is clear that the situation facing foreign wives in Pakistan is not simple. Their identity is thrown into a state of crisis by the shock of having to interact within an unfamiliar society. As strangers in a 'traditional' land, they are necessar-

ily forced into a state of ontological insecurity. They have to establish a new identity—a sense of self which integrates that which they were with what is expected of them now. This situation places them in a classic double-bind, a no-win scenario. Whatever course of action they follow, their decision to migrate has already brought into play a sequence of events which brings into question their fundamental existence. They have to resolve this ontological insecurity in order to make any sort of success of their life in Pakistan.

### *Conclusion*

It has often been argued that Pakistani women are nothing more than second-class citizens, primarily because of the traditional kinship structure and the Islamic gender discourse within which they are situated. Women are expected to behave in a manner which safeguards family *izzat*, or honour. This entails maintaining a demarcation between domestic and public spheres of life, and, more conservatively, wearing a veil. The popular concept of Islam which prevails in Pakistan stresses the need for female virtue and chastity, a need which can only be attained by controlling access to, and the movements of, women in public life. Women could be argued to be doubly oppressed in the sense that they are subject not only to an overarching Islamic discourse, but also to constraints and limitations imposed by institutional and social, as well as economic structures constitutive of Pakistani society.

At the outset of this research it seemed plausible to assume that the position of incoming foreign wives would be much the same. Not only do they have to deal with the problems confronting Pakistani women, but they have the additional burden of having to negotiate and accommodate themselves to a new culture. Their identity is challenged and threatened, and they are apparently ontologically insecure, unless they concede a position of disempowerment. Within this position, of course, it can be demonstrated that they can operate with a range of strategies and tactics which consolidate a woman's domain of power.

The contemporary Muslim world is facing unprecedented changes, both internal and external. Many Muslim societies are struggling to confront enormous cultural dilemmas and are having to rethink, renegotiate, indeed reinvent their traditions. Where women fit into this struggle is crucial, since the Muslim social order in Pakistan and elsewhere is intricately connected to institutions such as *izzat*, in which a woman's role is pivotal. Conflicting notions regarding the position of women in the new social order have therefore resulted in profound social, economic, and political consequences. However, this has led to Muslims reasserting, in various ways, what they take to be a Muslim identity. Women find themselves both asserting their identity as women, with rights etc., and as Mus-

lims. Many, especially those in urban middle-class situations, are involved in negotiating a complex identity as 'new Muslim women'.

As 'white' women, foreign wives bring status to their husbands and in-laws. Yet this status is ambiguous. By marrying a Pakistani, they have placed themselves in the position of having to negotiate local kin structures and mediating networks in the context of the prevailing Islamic discourse. In practical terms this means that foreign wives must establish themselves within the kin group of their husbands' families. If they cannot successfully establish themselves as bona fide members of their family's networks, then they stand little chance of being accepted. Their identity as foreign women will override their identity as wives, and they will remain outsiders. In addition, their presentation of self must involve some positioning in relation to the discourse of Muslim women.

Such a dilemma can lead to ontological insecurity and a re-evaluation of perceptions of self. This insecurity is fostered by the inherent power struggles which continue to exist between individual members of the family.

Identity is always relational. However, at the same time it is also mediated by internal structures of personality. Katherine Ewing's work on the 'intrapsychic autonomy' of Pakistani women clearly shows that their sense of identity is connected to, and dependent on, their ability to establish object-consistency and separation of the self. Only when this occurs is it possible to form satisfactory relationships within the extended family of their husbands. This is especially true with regard to the relationship between a new bride and her mother-in-law. Intrapsychic autonomy is therefore necessary to ontological security. What we have seen, however, is that while intrapsychic autonomy can be undermined, it can also be consolidated.

Power and identity are systemically linked: that is, they are interconnected so that one constantly affects the other. A wife's sense of self—her ontological security—cannot be established unless she perceives herself to be in control, in power. But this power is never absolute. In fact, it is constantly being renegotiated. As a result, foreign wives are caught in a Batesonian double-bind which appears to be a no-win situation. Although the Palo Alto team used the theory of the double-bind to explain schizophrenia, I have demonstrated that double-bind situations are not pathological but an integral part of normal relationships.

This means that a double-bind situation exists not only for the wife, but also for other members of the family, including her husband and in-laws. Ideally we would need to investigate all members' perceptions of their situation to disclose their own experiences of these double-binds. The shifting patterns of coalition in mixed marriages reflect this. Relationships are continuously being renegotiated in terms of symmetry and complementarity. Whereas power sometimes appears to lie with the wife, in that she has the choice of whether or not to integrate into Pakistani society, at other times she experiences herself to be totally disempowered, incapable of achieving an integrated sense of self because her in-laws

and society insist on keeping her alienated. This insistence may give her some hold on power relations within the family group.

The power situation *vis-à-vis* the wives may not actually be that different from women in the UK, for example, but the Pakistani context, where women have to negotiate a Pakistani identity, is bound to produce double-bind situations because whatever the actual personalities involved, the demands of the new rules of the game place them in the sort of dilemma referred to above. Yet because of their social and financial position within Pakistani society, foreign wives have a far greater capacity to exploit and/or negotiate coalitions than Pakistani women might have. As a result, they are in the contradictory position of having power, yet not having it. They can play the game and thus find themselves locked in to ongoing systemic paradoxical communication. No one wins, but no one loses either. Power is in the system, not the individuals. The case-studies I have described demonstrate this. It was originally argued that one condition of a double-bind was that the 'victim' could not leave the situation. In the case of the foreign wives this condition may not be completely operative.

Double-bind situations probably arise in every mixed-race marriage. As suggested above, further research would require an analysis of the version of the game held by each participating member. For example, a complementary study of the husbands would place the position of the foreign wives into a broader framework. What differentiates individual couples is the way in which they 'play the game'.

The issues of power and identity are also taken up in Islamic discourse. Wives must negotiate their identity *vis-à-vis* Islam, and this requires on their part a subtle reading of the shifting perceptions of gender within Islam. Refusal to convert can empower a woman in that she rejects the values and norms being imposed on her, thus retaining a certain leeway and freedom of behaviour. On the other hand, conversion may also lead to empowerment. A foreign wife who becomes a Muslim creates a stronger bond between herself and the family. She has, in effect, joined their clique and assured her in-laws of her intention to assimilate.

This article has sought to address some key issues of identity using the systemic approach. In particular, it has examined the problem in relation to specific issues of culture and ethnicity. I hope to have shown how an existential condition may be embedded in a particular cultural context.

The research leaves many serious and important questions unanswered. Can a mixed marriage ever be secure? What cultural conditions might help foster this security? It could be suggested that the emergence of a global urban culture predicated on multiculturalism might remove some of the obvious impediments. Yet the retrenchment of many people into identities more exclusive than ever leads one to doubt this. Hence my conclusions are not wholly pessimistic. It is true that the position of the foreign wife can easily be construed as one in which she is inevitably reactive—this does involve a negative connotation of her situation. But I hope I have demonstrated that her position is much more proactive and that it has positive connotations. She is, in fact, an agent of social change.

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