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'Our Good Work' or 'the Devil's Work'? Inequality, Exchange, and Card Playing among the Gende

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ABSTRACT

This paper looks at Gende card playing and its responsiveness to a varied history of economic downturns and upswings, along with its multifaceted and creative uses. Card gambling has a role as a parallel exchange system that continues to help the Gende sustain their community by providing a means for less wealthy players to increase their incomes, and acting as a platform for prospect-poor bachelors to display their self-control and mastery in card games involving both skill and luck. Such capabilities have encouraged the flow of wealth and kept the traditional reciprocal exchange system active in the face of both inequality and uncertainty. Today, while social gambling continues, more aggressive and acquisitive forms of card playing are disrupting the public peace in villages that are now the site of large-scale mining activity and extreme inequality. Mine workers and their families, and returning migrants with aspirations of receiving landowner compensation from the mines, are challenged and challenging others in card games in efforts to keep their salaries for their own ends or to live off gambling income while awaiting land royalties. Both past and present card playing have generated discourse over the morality of different game strategies over the years.

Keywords: Papua New Guinea, gambling, inequality, development, mining.

INTRODUCTION

When I first described Gende card playing in my post-fieldwork seminar at the University of Papua New Guinea in May of 1983, it aroused more interest and excitement than the other topics I covered, including the bachelorization of Gende society. Card playing was then thought of by many outsiders to village societies as at best a way to pass time sociably and at worst an arena of conflict and pathology. While earlier writers had described card games played in other parts of Papua New Guinea – such as 'lucky' in the Mt Hagen area (Brandewie 1967) and variations of 'lucky' and 'seven' in the Sepik and Rabaul areas (Laycock 1966, 1967), they did not go far into the socio-economic and cultural analysis of these games in the context of the players' lives. While Brandewie noted a similarity between card playing and exchange – both resulting in social interaction and the extension of one's social contacts – he did not link card playing's popularity with any other economic factor than a 'desire to make fast, easy money' (1967:49–50). From Brandewie's point of view, which was not that of a long-term fieldworker who was told on a regular basis that card playing 'is our good work', the money 'lost' in card games was 'squandered' rather than invested. Farther afield, anthropologists Ronald and Catherine Berndt saw gambling as a significant contributing factor to the 'acute state of social collapse' they perceived among the Aborigines in the Northern Territory of Australia (Berndt and Berndt 1947:267–8). Witnessing card games in which men, women, and children gambled against one another, the Berndts viewed the breaking of traditional

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values and avoidance taboos as an indication of cultural breakdown rather than a neutral playing ground in which the stress of economic inequality can be managed.

Hearing about my talk and reading about it in the first post-fieldwork research report in *Research in Melanesia* (Zimmer 1983), Peter Lawrence – then editor of *Oceania* – invited me to write about the Gende's game network and its implications (see Zimmer 1986). Up to then, no one had presented a game network as a system of such social importance that it not only contributed to sociality but also helped maintain the larger exchange system in times of inequality and uncertainty. A central problem in systems of reciprocal exchange is to keep wealth flowing (*cf.* Barth 1967; Belshaw 1968:25; Schneider 1974:134). As a neutral and open playing field, card playing, as it was played (and still is) in Gende villages, kept relationships alive, kept cash flowing, and allowed less prosperous players to 'earn' money for investing in exchange relations and other productive activities. Migrant and villager, husband and wife, old and young – all could play against one another as long as they abided by the rules of card-playing civility and promoted equality within Gende society. Gende card playing was very much a creation of Gende 'develop-man', a distinction Marshall Sahlins would make between individuals intent on 'development' and those who work to 'encompass what is happening to them in terms of their own world system' (Sahlins 1992:24; see also Zimmer-Tamakoshi 2014a).

When I returned to the United States to begin work on my dissertation, my advisor Jane Goodale was equally excited by my card playing material. Together, we organized ASAO working sessions on 'Gambling in Oceania' for the 1985 and 1986 meetings. In my introduction to a special issue of *Oceania* (Zimmer 1987a:2), I noted that the papers added 'new dimensions to our understanding of how the peoples in question have taken games of European origin and made them their own' or not: Tiwi women using gambling to supplement traditional subsistence activities in an economic situation where they continued to be the main providers for families while men had greater access to cash income from wages (Goodale 1987); unemployed Gende youths using 'last card' as a means of demonstrating self-control and mastery of others and to increase their income and ability to participate in exchange relations with older clan members (Zimmer 1987b); Daulo women in the *Wok Meri* movement opposing card playing as anti-social and unproductive when compared with the network of women's savings groups (Sexton 1987); and how on Malo, in Vanuatu, money was rarely involved in card games that were a foil for events in Malo society and a means of expressing socially dangerous ideas (Rubinstein 1987). Other anthropologists have added to this nuanced understanding of card playing. Neil Maclean worked with the Jimi Valley Maring and found that it was the concentration of money in the form of winnings, rather than its redistribution, that motivated Maring gambling (Maclean 1984). More recently, anthropologists studying in Papua New Guinea have focused on the relationship between dreaming and the practice of gambling among the Yagwoia (Mimica 2006), gambling's magico-ritual dimensions among the North Mekeo (Mosko 2012), and gambling as a new analytic technique manipulating money in the urban setting of Goroka (Pickles 2012).

Drawing on thirty-two years of observations and reflection on Gende society and card playing, I present a comprehensive view of a multifaceted, creative, and provocative cultural phenomenon referred to variously as *kas*, gambling, card playing or as the Gende call it – depending on the nature of the engagement - 'our good work' or 'the devil's work'. In early publications (Zimmer 1983, 1985, 1986, 1987a, 1987b), my focus was on the socially productive aspects of Gende card playing and its role as a parallel exchange system. Card playing provided a means for less wealthy players to increase their incomes and a platform for prospect-poor bachelors to display their self-control and mastery in card games involving what can be translated as skill and luck, and encouraged the flow of wealth keeping the traditional reciprocal exchange system active in the face of both inequality and uncertainty.

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Subsequently, the nexus between capitalism and egalitarian gift economy has become fraught with danger as extreme inequality came to Gende villages with two large mining projects – Ramu Nickel (at Kurumbukare) and the Yandera Copper and Molybdenum Project – and their attendant gender, intergenerational, class, and other social imbalances (Zimmer-Tamakoshi 1997b, 1997c, 2001, 2007, 2012, 2014a, 2014b). The uncertainty of local development, while important, is less an issue than the gross inequities between villages that are set to benefit from mining and between individuals who do or do not work for the mining companies and do or do not have land rights in the associated prospect areas.

Today, while social gambling continues to be widespread, gambling's more acquisitive and combative forms of ganging up (*kampani*) against the 'enemy' (*pilai birua*) disrupt the public peace in Yandera and Kurumbukare and – from the point of view of both villagers and mining companies – are a scourge. Mine workers and their families (most often workers' wives but sometimes children and parents) are challenged daily to play cards, often late into the night, making it difficult for workers to do their day jobs and wives to attend to their gardens and children. The least popular challengers in these situations are returned migrants who do not work for the mines and prefer card playing to work in the gardens. Ironically, many of these migrants were once a primary source of villagers' cash but now many villagers see them as parasitic.

Public discourse also suggests a more subtle aspect of competitive card playing has developed, namely a provocative edge with which villagers challenge the morals of the younger mine workers and visiting absentee landowners with their own more egalitarian, community-oriented ethics. When subtlety fails, things can fall apart quickly. In a dust-up over a high-stakes game in Yandera village (described in more depth in a later section of this paper), what appeared to be a critique about card playing as a 'loser's game' turned out to be a public shaming of the social indifference of young mine workers who had turned the tables on a few older card players. Ostentatiously tossing the young players' winnings down an outhouse hole while proclaiming them 'the devil's earnings', one of the older card players asked the young workers who they thought their fathers were and who they thought would be caring for them when the mining company left. By denying the older players a fair day's 'work' at cards, the young workers were portrayed as 'greedy', 'selfish', and 'un-Gende' in their behaviour. In challenging the young workers, the older men were not just interested in 'making money', they also wanted to teach the young men lessons about reciprocity and sociality and what held the Gende community together in the past. Such discourse indicates there is more to card playing than surface analysis suggests just as there has always been more to traditional 'gift-economy' practices. The morality of Gende card playing (and real-life exchange situations) depends, however, on whether one is playing by village rules (which is 'good' or *mogeri i.e.*, relation-sustaining) or town rules, a more aggressive play by individuals who are not concerned with the social well-being of other players, a disconnect considered 'bad' or *briki* by those who do care.

INEQUALITY AND EXCHANGE

Inequality and its aspects – economic, social, political, and physical inequality – are realities the Gende people have struggled with since time immemorial. Even in the 'best of times', inequality has necessitated clever responses and adaptations in order that the Gende maintain widespread sociality and that women, men, children, and even the dead continue to 'live' in a sustaining matrix of reciprocities and commitment.

According to Gende legend, in the primordial past, Moga-Omoi – whose name means 'without genitals' – created birds, tree kangaroos, bananas, snakes, and fire. He also 'fathered'

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the Gende by creating a son and daughter, Timbai and Dobume. Like his father, Timbai was without genitals. One day, his sister addressed this gender inequality by hitting her brother with a stick, causing him to sprout a penis. Timbai and Dobume then had sex and became the ancestors of the Gende people (Zimmer-Tamakoshi 1997a).

The stick Dobume 'hit' her brother with was, in all likelihood, a digging stick, Gende women's primary tool in working the sweet potato gardens that feed their families and pig herds. Prosaically, yet just as importantly, Gende sisters help their brothers become fathers by attracting large bride prices and raising large numbers of pigs, which they give to their clans in return for the puberty ceremonies their clans funded for them and the children they bear for their husbands' clans. A sister's success helps her brother(s) to marry and to replenish the brother and sister's clan. In return for this, brothers and their wives and children return the generosity of the sisters in contributions to the sisters' children's initiation ceremonies, the sisters' death payment ceremonies, and other occasions (Zimmer-Tamakoshi 1997a). Intra- and intergenerational obligations are further fulfilled when brothers and their wives 'pay back' the wives' bride prices to the grooms' marriage supporters (a Gende custom known as *tupoi*).

Not everyone is created equal, of course. Some men and women never marry or have children. And some clans die out or are subsumed into other groups for various reasons. Providing an individual is able and willing to work for others and invest pigs and labor in relationships; however, they can 'be' a 'sister' and 'mother', or 'brother' and 'father', without marrying or bearing children. Likewise, weak clans can associate or merge with stronger ones, thereby participating in the balancing and social activities of Gende society. In the case of men who are capable of marrying more than one wife, it is expected that they will not only have more children but that they will look after these and other children who need their help. Those Gende who are judged especially 'good' or 'big' are men and women who promote the well-being of their kin groups and settlements by looking after more than their immediate family, investing widely in child wealth payments, initiations, and marriages, and organizing large exchange events that cement ties with allies, assuage the ire of enemies, or ensure the peaceful ancestor-hood of the elderly and the retention and fair distribution of the deceased's rights to land or 'ground'. Nowadays, as we shall see, they also play cards.

Based on linguistic (Z'graggen 1975) and oral history evidence, we know that sometime in the distant past the Gende's ancestors faced an enormous challenge as they were driven from their old homeland near Goroka in the Eastern Highlands by more powerful neighbours (Zimmer 1985). Coming over the mountains via at least two routes, small contingents of Gende migrated into their present location in the mountains and foothills between Mt Wilhelm and the sparsely populated Ramu valley. Intermarrying with Chimbu and Ramu peoples, they established themselves as middle-men in the ancient north-south trade route linking the central highlands with the north coast of New Guinea.

Stories about the Gende's early relations with their Ramu in-laws have a Biblical flavour with a man working for his future father-in-law in return for his daughter's hand in marriage, land and hunting rights in the Ramu hills near Kurumbukare. Once married, couples worked together to cement rights to land. Reflecting this, one of the Gende's most important exchange events – the death payment party or *kwiagi* – involves the giving of large quantities of cooked pork and other gifts to a deceased person's relatives (most often mother's brothers or father's mother's people). Not doing so results in the loss of land rights and the possibility of ancestral ill will and malicious intervention in the affairs of the living. As husbands and wives, and sisters and brothers usually work together to see that a *kwiagi* is a success, women continue to have a relatively high status in Gende society as 'owners' - or caretakers – of land in their own and sometimes even their husbands' clan territories.

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Tupoi, as mentioned previously, is the redemption of a woman's bride price to her in-laws. Once a woman has repaid the pigs given for her by her groom's clan when she was first married, she is free to invest any pigs she raises in future as she wishes. Ambitious Gende women will invest heavily in the well-being of their own and their husbands' clans, a few acquiring the kind of influence and status that earmarks a 'big man'. Looking back in time, one can imagine that women (be they Gende, Ramu, or Chimbu) married to Gende husbands made prosperous in the north-south trade route, would want to achieve a balance of power in their relations with their Gende husbands and in-laws: Gende women so they might remain on a par with their husbands; Ramu or Chimbu wives so they might be free to leave husbands and return home when the husbands mistreated them or they were homesick.

The arrival of German missionaries in 1932 and Australian patrol officers soon after introduced new forms of inequality. On 2 July of that year, Father Alfons Schaefer and Brother Anthony Bass from the Divine Word Mission at Alexishafen arrived at the foot of the Bismarks and travelled from there to the Gende settlement of Guiebi (Schaefer 1960; see also Aufenanger 1976 and Mennis 1982). Schaefer and Baas stayed only two days before returning to the coast with news of their exciting discovery. They were the first missionaries to enter the Highlands. Returning on 1 October 1932, they built a mission at Guiebi and from there visited other Gende villages. The Gende quickly realized the white men were not returning spirits of the dead and they were excited to trade with and work for the newcomers who had come laden with shells and steel axes for barter (Zimmer 1985; see also M. Strathern 1992). A few steel axes had already been circulating within local trade routes before the missionaries arrived and their worth was already known, while the shells were major, and scarce, exchange items sought after by Gende men. In both cases, before the missionaries' arrival only small numbers of the items made it from the coast to the Gende, making them valuable. In 1930, a Chimbu pig – that today might be sold for K1000 – was worth a length of shell-covered rope only as long as the pig itself. Paid several cowry shells a day for their labour, however, it was not long before even 'rubbish men' and boys had more shells than had been in the possession of the men who had until then dominated the traditional trade. Big men found themselves in the position of having to work for the missionaries if they were to preserve their edge and influence in the shell trade. Few, however, did anything to prevent other Gende from benefitting from the unexpected boon. Indeed, some bragged about bringing the windfall to the people in the first place.

Remaining on a par with lesser men was the least of the 'big men's' problems, however, as they soon discovered. Not wishing to see all the shells go to their Guiebi exchange partners, Gende living near present-day Bundi Station invited Father Schaefer and Brother Baas to come live with them. Travelling to Bundi in February 1933, Schaefer and Baas were soon joined by two other missionaries, Father Cranssen and Brother Frank Eugene. Cranssen relieved Schaefer of his duties at Guiebi so that Schaefer could stay on at Bundi. With the paid help of local Gende – including some from Yandera – Brother Eugene and Father Schaefer began building the mission at Bundi. It wasn't long before a powerful Chimbu leader, Kavagl, invited Father Schaefer to travel with him over the Mondia pass to the more populous Chimbu side. In the past, Chimbu men had obtained shells and steel axes from their Gende trade partners in exchange for pigs, food, and marriageable girls. Some Chimbu had taken Gende wives in order to gain access to land on the Gende side of the Chimbu divide. Kavagl's mother was one such Gende woman, and it was said he had passed the initiation rites of both the Gende and his people. Kavagl, his Gende wife, and hundreds of Chimbu had come to Bundi – his wife's natal village – on a trading trip and to attend a pig kill when he met Schaefer. Kavagl wanted the missionaries to bring their material benefits to his people in the Chimbu valley (Brown 1992:99; Nilles 1987:13). Schaefer accepted Kavagl's offer and Divine Word missionaries set up mission stations on Chimbu lands in 1934 and as far west as Mt Hagen in 1935 (Schaefer 1938).

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The missionaries' rapid penetration of the highlands had a profound impact on the Gende. Everywhere they went, the missionaries (and later other explorers) paid for labor and food with steel axes, shells, beads, powder paint, and bits of clothing. With the clearing of airstrips they were able to airlift in tons of shells. For the brief time that the Gende had the missionaries to themselves, it seemed as if everyone could be a big man. As shells became prevalent in other areas of the highlands, however, their value decreased and the Gende had to work harder and harder to keep ahead of inflation. The Gende's monopoly over shells from the north coast was ended and the advantages they had enjoyed in marriage exchanges with Chimbu partners vanished. The collapse of the ancient shell economy was not long in coming. And soon the Gende had to look farther afield for ways to balance their relations with their exchange partners.

SUSTAINING SOCIETY IN THE FACE OF INEQUALITY AND UNCERTAINTY

With the coming of the missionaries and Australian patrol officers, the Gende had their first taste of long-distance migration, working as mission helpers and native police in other parts of what were then the Australian territories of New Guinea and Papua. The stories and gifts these early migrants brought home inspired other young men to follow in their footsteps. Fetching home steel axes and other novelties, the returning migrants attracted young women's admiration and the interest of older men and women who helped arrange their marriages. During World War II, Gende men served as carriers for allied forces in the Ramu Valley. After the war, the pace of migration quickened as others returned with news of developments in the central highlands. Young men went off to build towns like Goroka and to work as carpenters, domestic servants and cooks, hotel dishwashers, janitors, lay teachers, and catechists, some as contract labourers on coffee plantations. Others worked in places as far away as the island of New Britain.

The immediate effects of this migration pattern were many. Young men's initiations and marriages were often delayed until they returned home or, in the case of permanent migrants and missionized youth, their initiations were dispensed with entirely. Throughout the 1950s, many young women ran away from home to join their husbands or boyfriends in town, in some cases giving birth to children before their bride prices were negotiated. The potential loss of women's labor and marriage payments encouraged many anxious parents and unmarried brothers to promise their daughters and sisters to migrants who would return home early to settle down and raise pigs, often sweetening the deal with copious rights to land. This same strategy was common among young men's families as well, with fathers and father's-brothers offering the more promising young men bride price support for two or more wives and land that in some cases had been set aside for migrant sons who showed no inclination to return home anytime soon.

In the late 1950s and 1960s, new developments supported by leading men and women promised to put some order back into the Gende's exchange relations, but in fact the effects were otherwise. In 1958, a newly arrived Father Mike Morrison opened the first English school – in the highlands – in Bundi. The first class was made up of 36 boys. Several months later, twenty girls were also admitted. Most parents were afraid to leave young children at the boarding school, but others took a chance on their children's future, helping the missionaries build dormitories and classrooms and travelling long distances to Bundi once a week with loads of food for the children to eat. The St Francis of Assisi Boarding Primary School would eventually introduce inequality of a kind previously unknown to the Gende because only some boys and even fewer girls received an education that prepared them to attend institutions of higher learning outside the Gende area. In the 1970s, when Papua New Guinea became

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independent and opportunities opened up for well-educated nationals, many of these early mission-school graduates entered lucrative professions, while their uneducated peers stayed in the village (often using land that belonged to their prosperous absentee brothers) or worked – if they worked at all – at poorly paid jobs in town.[1]

In the 1960s, the arrival of foreign mining companies and the widespread planting of coffee drew some migrants back and raised villagers' hopes that new sources of cash would offset the loss of exchange payments resulting from outmigration. Work at the mining camps at Kurumbukare and Yandera was uncertain, however, because various companies came for short bursts of exploration, only to leave as unexpectedly as they came. And it was not until 1986 that a road linking the Gende to outside coffee markets was finally completed. Unfortunately, it has been often impassable due to the recurrence of landslides during the annual rainy seasons. The Gende's exchange relations became more confused than ever. Not only had many workers at the mining camps overcommitted themselves – by contracting expensive marriages and other exchange relations they could no longer maintain when their wages were cut off – but the inflationary tactics of other villagers had also raised the cost (in pigs and cash) of most exchange payments. Such levels could only be sustained by a steady flow of urban remittances and periods of wage labor on the part of village men seeking to assist overburdened wives and mothers.

WHEN YANDERA WAS 'HOME' AND CARD PLAYING WAS 'OUR GOOD WORK'

When I first went to study the Gende and lived in Yandera village for a year in 1982–83, the realities and consequences of economic inequality and the Gende's attempts to even things out revealed themselves in various striking ways. I already knew from national census records that a high rate of out-migration – averaging 25% of the total populations – existed in all Gende villages. My own surveys and census work in Yandera confirmed this and showed that in 1982, one half of the males and a quarter of the females between the ages of 18 and 45 were absent from Yandera, some for five or less years, others for twenty or more. Only half the male migrants were employed and few had steady, well-paying work, which would enable them to make 'generous' remittances to villagers and fulfill their exchange obligations.

In Yandera, my survey of 41 household budgets revealed gross intra-village inequality in terms of access to cash. In 1982, when the exchange rate was USD1.39 for one PNGKina, annual incomes in Yandera ranged from less than K25 (approx. $35) to more than K2000 ($2780) for several wealthier households. Very little income was earned from the sale of coffee (annual profits varying between K25 and K50) or other local developments; most was received in urban remittances from migrant children and other relatives or in local exchanges like bride price and gambling. The average bride price had soared from a maximum of five pigs and fifty Australian pounds in the 1950s to an average between K1000 and K2000 and ten or fifteen pigs in the early 1980s. A number of households benefitted from exchange obligations being fulfilled by more prosperous migrants during Yandera's 1982 Pig Kill, a large event involving many different exchanges between individuals and clans throughout Gende society. The local manager and the night watchman were the only people who were earning regular wages (each K1200 annually) from mining, which at that point had been scaled back for several years.

The consequences of income inequalities, fluctuations, and exchange pressures were many. There were Gende migrants without any viable rural option because of their failure to fulfill exchange commitments to parents and others (who had their own commitments to fulfill) and the resulting loss of land rights to more prosperous individuals. There was an increase in village women's workload as they raised more pigs and gardens in order to meet rising bride prices, *tupoi*, and other exchange demands. And – most striking of all – was the

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bachelorization of Gende society with a preponderance among men in their late twenties and thirties in both villages and town and a large number of Gende women marrying non-Gende husbands who could afford higher bride prices.

In 1987, the opening of a cardamom plantation promised some welcome relief for villagers living near Bundi. However, much of the income that workers earned was lost in an inflationary spiral of higher-than-ever bride prices and the aggressive gambling tactics of distantly related Chimbu, Gende, and Ramu peoples, who showed up on paydays to engage workers in gambling sessions that lasted until the visitors left with extra cash in their pockets (Zimmer-Tamakoshi 1996).

Obviously, such inequalities had enormous impacts on the conjugal and familial relations of most Gende (Rosi and Zimmer-Tamakoshi 1993; Zimmer-Tamakoshi 1993, 1998). Perhaps the most pernicious impact of inequality was its effects on gender relations and the marital chances of young and not-so-young men who could not compete with their educated brothers and men from more prosperous areas. Young women were frequently pushed into marriage with men who could afford larger bride prices so that the young women's parents could balance other exchange obligations, in some cases using a woman's bride price to obtain a bride for her brother. While women's statuses rose within their families, all too often, the non-Gende husbands (and in-laws) in these marriages treated the young wives as possessions and not partners (see also Filer 1985). In urban areas, domestic violence was common, especially in cases where it was the young man who had made a significant cash contribution to his wife's bride price. While I do not have statistics for domestic violence among the Gende, studies carried out by the PNG Law Reform Commission throughout Papua New Guinea showed that 62% of elite urban women admitted to being struck by their husband compared with 56% of low-income urban women (Ranck and Toft 1986:22–23). Not surprisingly, intergenerational tensions and sometimes violence resulted among the Gende, with daughters running away from detested husbands, brothers who had hoped to use their sisters' bride prices to get wives of their own turning on their sisters, and young men fighting with elders who gave away their land rights in exchange for help with other exchanges (Zimmer 1990).

In spite of inequality and its negative impacts, in the 1980s Yandera and surrounding villages were home to thousands of Gende and many Gende migrants wished to return home on holidays and when they retired. In efforts to sustain their society in times of uncertainty, Gende leaders sought ways to lessen inequality's sting and to give hope to anxious followers who wondered if development would ever come to their homeland. One of the Gende's more clever innovations (despite its aggressive use at the cardamom plantation at Kobum) was (and still is) a card playing system that facilitates the distribution of cash from those who have to those who have not, alleviating tensions engendered by inequality and keeping the social relationships of card players alive and well. While the haves may or may not have invented the system, they contribute(d) to its social protocol and support it by playing cards on an almost daily basis. They also defend it against those who would ban it forever – such as church officials and other outsiders like mine supervisors who do not understand it, and the few 'greedy' Gende who seek to use card playing for their own short-term gains and not its intended social ends.

What is ingenious about the Gende card system is that everyone can participate and no one loses (Zimmer 1983, 1985, 1986). Many Gende told me this when I arrived in Yandera in May 1982: '*Kas em gutpela samting! Em gutpela wok bilong mipela. Ol mipela i save pilai kas i no gat wari long mani*' (Cards are good. It is our good work. Those who play cards don't have to worry about having enough money). While I didn't believe them at first – thinking that card playing was a sure way to poverty – the fact that my Gende friends kept insisting that people who played cards could relax about money and the fact that I had come to study the impact of

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inequality on Gende exchange relations made me think twice. After my initial resistance I began observing games in earnest, counting the daily wins and losses of players in Yandera.

Card games, as played by the Gende then and now, operate as a parallel exchange system in which losers in the regular exchange system can be winners. The most basic rules of participation in the game system are:

- One must be always ready to play, especially anyone who has come into a windfall (but not an exchange payment that is already earmarked under the traditional system of reciprocity) or who is wealthy by village standards;
- Players must invest winnings in productive activity such as: a trade store, a baby pig that will grow up to be part of an exchange payment, a carton of cigarettes sold individually in a village market for a profit, which in turn is used for an exchange or plowed back into the game system, a meal shared with others;
- There should be no cheating or purposely losing a game (which would be equivalent to shaming someone by giving them something they could not reciprocate; whereas in a game, winning is considered to be the result of work);
- And no ill will, jealousy or traditional divisions are allowed in the card playing arena, and therefore no constraints against women playing against men (even their husbands), or young against old.

How these rules operate in real life was revealed in the hundreds of games I witnessed and discussed with players. In the 1980s, the Gende's favorite card games were *Tri-lip* and *Seven*. *Tri-lip* (three 'leaves' or cards) is a version of black-jack which is what Westerners would call a game of chance in which a quick succession of high stakes hands can use up the cash reserve of the most prosperous player, redistributing it among the other players, who then go on to start secondary and tertiary games, thereby spreading the money over a wider network of players. On one such occasion in 1983, a prosperous young migrant who missed Yandera's 1982 pig kill, came home after Christmas break and initiated a game of *Tri-lip*, inviting big-men from several villages to be his opponents. After a day of play, he had 'lost' over K1000 that he received as part of his sister's bride price. Not yet married but comfortably employed in a steady job in town, the young man viewed his 'gaming losses' as an investment in future bride price support and a secure position in Gende society, thereby proving himself to be a dual master in two world systems, what Sahlins came to distinguish as 'develop-man' and 'development' (Sahlins 1992). The Big Men took their winnings back to their own villages where they initiated games of their own, in turn 'losing' money to select opponents. A week – and many games – later, the money was distributed among hundreds of players. By that time, however, the game being played was *Seven*, a slower game usually played for lower stakes than *Tri-lip* and among players more evenly matched money-wise (see Pickles 2013 this issue).

For the Gende, card playing remains a 'good thing' and a form of legitimate 'work' when it acts as a venue for people to interact on an equal footing with people they are otherwise in conflict with. Rather than hiding in their gardens and avoiding the village, those deeply indebted to other villagers can play cards with them, sometimes win, and show that they know how to play by the rules by using their winnings to buy a meal that they share with their creditors or to pay off some of their debt. Such a social conduit allows village life to carry on in spite of inequality and conflict. It is not so in town, where games are often predatory. Today, many long-term residents of Yandera remark how in recent years Yandera has come to be more like a town and as a result they prefer to do most of their card playing in the surrounding hamlets with others who understand how and why games should be played.

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EVERYONE (OR NO ONE) A WINNER

It was in 1995, during a landowners/genealogical survey I was conducting for Highlands Gold at Kurumbukare (the site of Ramu Nickel) that I came to understand in a very intense way how card playing and other Gende exchange activities can be worked to promote community over dissonance in a very uncertain and unequal situation (Zimmer-Tamakoshi 1997b, 2001). Kurumbukare is a flat, swampy plateau in the densely forested foothills of the Bismarck range overlooking the Ramu river valley. According to both Gende and Ramu peoples' oral histories, at some time in the distant past, small groups of Gende – escaping tribal warfare in their previous homeland, what is now Eastern Highlands Province – came down to the Ramu plains before they arrived at their present location. There they married Ramu women and, together with their wives, hacked small settlements and gardens out of the malarial and poisonous snake-infested, rain-forested Bismarck foothills overlooking the Ramu river (Zimmer 1985). The descendents of these Kurumbukare pioneers soon made their way up into the higher (and healthier) mountains where the Gende have subsequently lived for many generations. While very few Gende stayed behind in the rain forested hills around Kurumbukare, it remained part of their territory and was regularly used for hunting and trading trips, and sending male initiates for trials. With the arrival of missionaries and colonial officials, and the effective collapse of the old trade routes, the Gende focused more on education and urban migration and less on the old ways that took them to these lowlands. Few Gende spent significant periods of time in the forest (except during sporadic visits by foreign mining companies beginning in the 1960s) and even fewer maintained ties to the land by participating in *kwiagi* and other obligatory exchanges.

The situation I first encountered at Kurumbukare involved a number of competing clan groups claiming ownership of land in the vicinity of the proposed nickel mine. Some groups had their own *waspapa*; most did not. *Waspapa* – or caretakers – were old men who preferred staying in the forest where they could both look after their clan's interests and resources (such as wild fruits, good fishing and hunting locations, and grave sites) and live a solitary life. Recently moved-in families living in small, newly built settlements and working new gardens hosted hordes of other mostly male 'residents' who showed up to be sure they were included in the official genealogies. Genealogies going back to the alleged founding ancestors who first settled in the area were being given as evidence of landownership. Many claims and origin tales overlapped, with several lines of individuals claiming descent from the same ancestor. Revisions were being made on a daily basis as more and more Gende came down from their mountain villages or in from town to insert themselves in one or the other genealogy, and in a few cases, creating completely new ones.[2]

Gende land tenure has always been flexible with land rights negotiable and often distributed over a wide range of relations, even extending beyond a strictly defined patrilineal core of 'brothers'. Gende funeral payments – *kwiagi* – are at the core of this negotiability in that whoever contributes the most at the post-mortuary rites for a deceased individual is the new primary 'landowner' or *papa bilong graun* of whatever land rights the deceased had during their life.[3] While today *kwiagi* open the door to land grabs by wealthy contenders, groups of concerned individuals can come together *(kampani)* and compete (*pilai birua*) – as in card playing – to make bigger contributions to a *kwiagi* in order to best a contender bent on claiming sole land rights. This was especially apparent at Kurumbukare where 'landowners' were less interested in using the land for crops as they were in making sure that they would get compensation for land rights from the company. Relations to former landowners were murky and had to be 'recreated' – or gerrymandered. While I recorded the ever-increasing names included in the genealogies being given, my work extending well into the night, the various land-claiming clans were holding intense conversations with one another as well as small- and

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large-scale *kwiagi* ceremonies in which money, food, and pigs were being distributed. Card playing was ubiquitous. While I had little time to witness these transactions, the aftermaths were apparent in subsequent days, as more revisions were made to genealogies and former contenders were suddenly in accord (or the reverse). According to eye witnesses, most card games were friendly (or 'good') with wealthier players who had just invested heavily in *kwiagi* payments (thereby guaranteeing their primary ownership of particular land claims) contentedly losing to *kampanis* of competing 'clansmen' who then went on to smaller, lower bet games with family members, thereby distributing their gains to 'everyone' or *olgeta papamama*.

While rearranging networks of relations in the reproduction of useful descendants and ancestors is an old Gende custom, being greedy with the process is not. For example, one individual claiming land at Kurumbukare was a man I knew from earlier fieldwork to be a member of a Yandera clan. When I brought this up during our interview, the man asserted that I had got it all wrong when I did my census in Yandera in 1982, that it was his wife who was from Yandera and not him. While I knew this to be untrue, I let it pass since his wife, a gentle woman, laughed and said it was true. Others of his alleged clan mates did not, however, refusing to play cards with him, thereby cutting him off from a source of local 'income' necessary for buying fuel for lamps and other small store-bought necessities. In 2007 when I was carrying out a census for Marengo Mining in Yandera village, the same individual showed up to reclaim his Yandera roots, leaving his wife at Kurumbukare to maintain their claims there. Others in Yandera despised him as a 'double-dipper' or man who did not know his place of origin (known in *Tok pisin* as *as ples*).

The fact that many women were getting short shrift from their brothers and husbands who were not including them in the genealogies did not accord with Gende card-playing ethics (which provided for the inclusion of women in card games), nor with the Gende system of balanced exchanges in which all members of society were encouraged to participate.[4] Some claimants, moving into their wives' family lands through legitimate mechanisms such as *kwiagi* and heavy investments in their wives' relatives, listed themselves as the adopted sons of their in-laws. When asked how to include their wives, they replied that their names did n't need to be in the genealogies. As disturbing was the fact that most men, when giving their spruced-up genealogies, left out their sisters and daughters. At my urging some were reluctantly put back. Hoping to establish both closer relations with other claimants and genealogies that looked ancient and strictly patrilineal, men were – in attempts to cater to the mining company's more Western notions of kinship – leaving out the 'conflicting data' acknowledging Gende women's rights and women's kinship histories. They were also lessening the likelihood that others could do the same as they had done – turning an affinal relation to land into a pseudo-patrilineal relation – by removing women from the gerrymandered genealogies.

WHEN YANDERA BECAME LIKE A 'TOWN' AND PLAYING CARDS BECAME 'BAD'

In recent years, Gende society is being further challenged by extremes of inequality among long-term residents as well as an influx of (primarily) townspeople flooding into the two project areas at Yandera and Kurumbukare. One divisive element is that not everyone is a 'landowner' at one or both of the mine areas and their associated impact zones. In six years (2007–13) of intense data collection carried out in areas to be impacted by the Yandera project, I discovered that clusters of clans were invalidating marriages to other Gende clans (and Chimbu and Ramu partners) and in-marrying within their own clusters in order to curb

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ancestral gerrymandering and keep future spoils to themselves. In other words, Gende society appears to be fracturing into three parts: those with claims near Yandera, those with claims to Kurumbukare, and those without either.[5]

Of more relevance to this paper, however, are gender, age, and income inequities involving access to work and income from working for the mining camps. Mining is primarily young men's work. The first baseline social/census survey I carried out for Marengo Mining in 2007 showed that most village youth and a sizeable number of returned, educated youth worked for the mining company in some capacity. I also learned that in Yandera, at least, there were virtually no bachelors over the age of 24. A reversal, in other words, from the bachelorization that existed in the 1980s (Zimmer-Tamakoshi 1993, 2009). The reversal extended so far that young men – many of them Christians – were taking up polygyny. Marrying 'rich' men, or convincing one's daughter to marry a prosperous husband, had long been a route to cash for the Gende, and with most of the jobs going to Yandera residents – at least in 2007 – surrounding families were hopeful their daughters would snare a Yandera partner, shared or not.[6]

Unlike the old polygynists, however, the new polygynists do not act like Big Men of old. They generally do not invest their wealth in widespread networks of exchange partners and they do not know how to organize large pig kills and other such exchange events. When they do make a display of wealth it is frequently a drinking party or in-town debauchery among themselves with hired prostitutes and expensive hotel bills 'eating' large sums of cash (*cf.* Pickles 2012). Working for the company, they have little time to make gardens for their wives, some of whom – coming from town – do not know how to make gardens anyway. And being able to pay for their own wives, many young men do not feel as beholden to their elders as their elders might wish, failing to pay back parents for having raised them well and not interested in maintaining community through complex exchange activities. Not surprisingly, such behaviour is associated with increased domestic and intergenerational violence and discord.

In 2007, household incomes continued to vary in Yandera, with many earning less than K250 a year while others, including the independent households of young couples, receiving K8000 to K30,000 or more. What differed in 2007 from 1982, however, was that much of the money was in the hands of young men. Wealthy young men were easy targets for the aggressive card players who had moved back from town to take advantage of future land compensation from Marengo and who – since many had never lived in the village and did not know how (or did not want) to make gardens – lived off their card-playing earnings. These predatory gamblers were primarily older men who, often along with their families, bought most of their subsistence needs from local trade stores and markets. Many lived with their rural kin only until they could return to town once landowner pay-offs begin and they have ensured that theirs are deposited in a bank.[7]

With aggressive gambling focused on individuals who work at the mine (and often, their wives and parents) and Chimbu business men and women coming over the mountain on paydays to divest young workers of their pay by offering sex and alcohol, many villagers now see Yandera – whose population had doubled in size from 1982 – as like a 'town': crowded, dirty, and dangerous. Many stay away from the village to avoid sociality and sharing with the returned migrants and other newcomers who have moved into their village houses. Such villagers now prefer living in their garden settlements, which have grown to the size of small hamlets, coming to town only for church and markets and the occasional card game.

My ongoing observations and questions about Gende card playing in the surveys I was carrying out revealed that the old style of sociable, non-threatening card playing continues in Yandera's garden hamlets and more distant Gende villages (Zimmer-Tamakoshi 2009, 2011). Card playing in both Yandera and at Kurumbukare on the other hand is aimed directly at those

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with money and is so aggressive that exhausted workers sometimes fall asleep at their jobs. One employer felt it necessary to make it a rule that workers stay at the drill sites so they could sleep when they were off shift. At this point, the wives and families began to bear the onus of having to satisfy the demands of aggressive card players.

It is in this context that card playing is no longer touted as a 'good thing'. 'Development' has come to Yandera and Kurumbukare, and those places are now like towns. The sense of community and 'everyone or no one a winner' seems not to be shared by the entire Gende population (Zimmer-Tamakoshi 1997b, 2001). The past gifts of average migrants (as opposed to the few really wealthy ones) seem no longer to count in villagers' estimations of migrants' rights to return to the village and many migrants see no problem living off the young mine workers as opposed to staying in town and continuing to make a living there while waiting for compensation (Zimmer-Tamakoshi 1998). After all, Yandera and Kurumbukare had become their new 'towns'. Migrants who failed to make a living in the old town are no longer welcome back at all.

The abortive game mentioned in my introduction, occurred while boundary demarcation teams were in operation and there were important meetings of both migrant and village clansmen in Yandera. The game involved two Marengo workers, several of their older clansmen and a couple of returned migrants; it demonstrates both the ways in which card playing is considered 'bad' in its new guise and how the older villagers used this particular game as a lesson on how the young players should be participating in the upholding of their society.

The game took place on a Sunday afternoon, not far from where I was taking pictures of villagers for a photo census. While I did not witness most of the particulars of the game, I did hear and see its dramatic ending and was able to ask questions later of both participants and observers, all of whom were waiting to have their pictures taken. At the beginning of the game, money was quickly leaving the hands of the Marengo workers. Much of it was ending up in the pockets of older clansmen who started off the game in competition with the returned migrants, hoping that together, they and their young relatives (the workers) could show the migrants that card playing was for the community and not them. At some point, however, the young working men became aggravated by playing second fiddle to the older men, complaining that they were not losers and that they could outlast all the other players by getting other workers to bankroll them.

After the young players had a run of successful hands, tensions started rising among the older villagers. Finally one old man who had pulled out of the game and left the playing field that was crowded by onlookers, came raging back, grabbed hundreds of kina off the mat and threw it in a nearby toilet, berating his younger kinsmen for their greed (in not quitting after they had lost their money), calling the game an 'evil thing', 'the devil's work' and telling them they should go 'home' and help their wives in the gardens instead of playing cards with 'strangers' – an insult to the returned migrants who the infuriated villager said had never done much of anything for villagers in the past.

CONCLUSION

Looking at the Gende's situation today, it would appear that while card playing can still be a 'good thing', it is no match for the kinds of inequality that are disrupting Gende society. With marriage and exchange patterns dividing society into three parts, the ending of the Big Man era and the pig kills they organized (Zimmer-Tamakoshi 1997c), and most social gambling occurring within the confines of garden settlements an hour or more away from Yandera (and even Kurumbukare), there are fewer and more circumscribed opportunities for card playing to act as a Gende-wide complementary exchange system. Smaller orbs of sociality and more

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emphasis on individual consumption are replacing the old ways as young mine workers spend income on drinking and carousing with 'mates' and less on reciprocating to the community, many young men seeing their wages as earned from their own hard labor and not the result of parents' work in raising them.[8]

However, while card playing may no longer have the capacity to rein in the kinds of inequality that are now jarring Gende society, it is still too soon to call it a 'losers' game'. Card playing may yet serve important political functions for the Gende. While carrying out the genealogical survey at Kurumbukare, I witnessed more than nightly *kwiagi* and seemingly endless ancestral gerrymandering. I also witnessed many card games. Although I had no way of knowing what happened to money won in particular card games, I did see games between leaders from clans competing for special ancestral claims, games that were sociable and relaxed, not tense and disruptive. In 2009 (and on other such occasions before and after), I have also seen large groups of male landowners who assembled from many different Gende villages for special meetings with Marengo company personnel, break up after the meeting into friendly card games. Very rarely did I witness any conflict during these games. In one instance that there was trouble, it was caused by a sulky migrant who was losing money and who shouted at the villagers saying they were 'stupid' for playing cards when they should be working harder to get a better deal from the mining company. The other players laughed at him, telling him to go back to Madang. It seemed to me, that the other players knew full well that they were politic'ing with one another and creating a more united front. In a sense, they were playing *kampani* in preparation for future negotiations with the mining company, getting their 'stories' (genealogies) straight and ready to support one another's games (claims).

NOTES

1. Issues surrounding land rights and migration have been the subject of many anthropological inquiries including my own back in the 1980s and subsequently. Louise Morauta and Dawn Ryan's 1982 *Oceania* article on migrants from the Malalaua District, Papua New Guinea and the Salisburys' 1972 article on Siane migrants' rural-oriented strategy in Port Moresby showed that, at least in some Papua New Guinean societies, a place in the village was not guaranteed for return migrants unless individuals had fulfilled exchange obligations and that more prosperous migrants might have an advantage over other migrants and some villagers in both land rights and marital prospects. The Gende have more than confirmed these possibilities over the years I have worked with them as well as demonstrated how inflationary spirals can undercut even those who have fulfilled exchange obligations in the past (Zimmer-Tamakoshi 2001, 2007).
2. My survey work at Kurumbukare took place over two months in 1995 in five locations – four small and relatively new settlements in the area within the proposed mine site (and within Gende territory) and one at Daunangare, a mixed Ramu and Gende settlement at the foot of the hills leading up to the Kurumbukare plateau. I returned, on my own, to Kurumbukare and several former survey locations for brief visits in 2000 and 2009. By 2009, much of the surrounding rainforest had been stripped from the land, local settlements had multiplied, and there were thousands of Gende living in the vicinity of Ramu Nickel and Metallurgical Corporation of China's massive buildings and mine construction. All this was in stark contrast to the very small numbers of Gende noted during surveys carried out by Peter Lawrence in 1982 and John Tovue in 1993.
3. According to Gende custom, a man shows ground he has used to his sons when they are about ten or eleven years old, telling them 'This is yours when you marry'. When a woman is newly married, her father-in-law shows her ground on which she will make her first gardens as a wife. When there are many sons, they may be shown ground by their father's brothers or other men in their clan. And when a woman's husband has insufficient ground, the woman and her husband may be shown ground by her father and clansmen, which can be passed down through their children. None of this is guaranteed, however, if exchange obligations to the giver(s) are not reciprocated or if someone else with more resources wants the land (Zimmer 1985:11, 178–80, 295–9). A recent *Kwiagi* in Yandera village involving tens of thousands of *Kina* and many pigs and other items incorporated the donor into a local clan, with claims of 'distant kinship' and the donor's rights to land (within the Yandera project area and presumably worth a lot of money when Marengo commences mining) upheld in spite of bloodshed between contesting kinsmen.
4. Gende women's direct engagement in exchange relations is remarkable, although not entirely unique among Highlands women (see Faithorn 1976 and Lederman 1990). Achieving *tupoi* and the accompanying respect, Gende women are often in the foreground in decision-making and vocal contestants in public discussions. The women at Kurumbukare did not agree that their names should be left out of genealogies in order to match the understandings of foreign miners. That the men persisted was a source of domestic conflict in quite a few marriages. And the situation was hardly a theoretical moment for me where I might feel it best to not intervene. When I returned in 2000, several women were very angry with me because – unbeknownst to me – Highlands

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Gold (then Highlands Pacific) – had begun making payments to male 'heads' of household and insisting that I was in agreement with this. My attempts to get women recognized as a co-heads of household during the 1995 work had failed. Hopefully this and other publications will get the message across to a wide audience that Gende women can be landowners.

5. In 2006 I was asked by Marengo Mining to carry out baseline social mapping in Gende and non-Gende settlements that would be impacted by Marengo's exploration and future mining of the copper-molybdenum-gold ore body in the vicinity of Yandera village. Knowing that I had done anthropological research in Yandera and with the Gende since 1982, Marengo's Australian executive Les Emery and Project Manager Peter Dendle asked that I design my own questionnaire and put together a team with whom I would work closely over the next five years (2007–11). With advice from anthropologists who do social mapping at other resource extraction areas in Papua New Guinea (such as John Burton and Colin Filer), I put together an eleven-page questionnaire that included Gende-specific questions about exchange and gambling along with questions about identity, age, sex, marriage, migration, education, work, income and expenditures, farming, pig raising, food consumption, health, and much more. In seven periods of fieldwork, each lasting around two months, my team (composed of female and male students from Divine Word University or who worked for Nancy Sullivan in Madang) and I carried out interviews in over twenty villages (mostly Gende but also some Ramu and Rai Coast settlements). Our coverage was universal (versus random) and included information on absentees. Since our work was advertised beforehand, it was not unusual for absentees to 'come home' to give their own interviews and then depart. In addition to doing about one fifth of the interviews, upon returning to the United States I entered all the data from all the interviews into databases before analyzing the data and writing up reports for Marengo, copies of which were deposited in the National Research Institute in Port Moresby.
6. Interesting similarities and contrasts can be drawn by comparing Dan Jorgensen's material on the Telefolmin in Sandaun Province with mine on the Gende. One example is how an influx of cash in the Telefol exchange system beginning in the 1960s (well before Ok Tedi's development in the 1980s) encouraged a shift from sister-exchange to daughter as trade store (Jorgensen 1993). Uncommon among the Gende in the past, something akin to sister-exchange is now taking place in the constricting of marriages within smaller and smaller clusters of clans in the vicinities of Ramu Nickel and the Yandera Project. More recently, Jorgensen has written about the complexities of mythologies involved in delimiting who is and isn't a Telefol landowner (Jorgensen 2004), a situation comparable (but not identical) to the Gende's.
7. In a survey of around 10% of an estimated 1200 households living in the vicinity of the Porgera mine in Enga Province, Glenn Banks discovered that only 15 out of 231 respondents reported having received income from gambling in the previous fortnight and that gambling winnings accounted for only 2% of reported income (Banks 1999:114–115). Banks's study contrasts significantly with the Gende material – where some households' main income is from gambling – demonstrating that gambling is not everywhere a solution to inequality or, in the case of migrants, a handy means of subsistence.
8. The institutional strengthening that Susanne Bonnell describes in her lengthy article on social change in the Porgera Valley as replacing the glue exchange activities once provided has yet to take place among the Gende (Bonnell 1999). The occasional rugby competitions organized by mining companies and celebrated visits by the Bundi-Usino MP do little to stop the tripartite rupturing of Gende relations. For the Gende, at least for now, card playing – in its benign form – is the only game in town.

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