

Lyrical “I” as a Prophetic Subject in the Poem “Alang-Alang”

by Abdul Wachid B.S.

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ABSTRACT

The poem “Alang-Alang” by Abdul Wachid B.S. explores the struggle of the lyrical “I”, representing the Indonesian people, to break free from the shackles of the New Order political regime. By focusing on the voice of the lyrical “I”, this study aims to dismantle the prophetic structure of the poem by analyzing the aspects of humanization, liberation, and transcendence within it. Kuntowijoyo’s concept of prophetic literature serves as the primary analytical framework, employing a qualitative-descriptive method. The findings of this study are as follows: first, the aspect of humanization is depicted through the lyrical “I”’s efforts to challenge the consciousness of power, aiming to restore the people’s conscience to its rightful place; second, the aspect of liberation is demonstrated through attempts to free the people from the constraints imposed by the New Order, including physical violence and ideological control; and third, the aspect of transcendence is reflected in the lyrical “I” awareness of God’s power (Sang Hyang or Allah Swt.), which surpasses human capabilities. This context establishes the lyrical “I” in the poem “Alang-Alang” as meeting the criteria of a prophetic subject in literary texts.

Keywords: *New Order; Prophetic; Humanization; Liberation; Transcendence.*

INTRODUCTION

Literary texts are produced by various motives, with the author’s intention playing a highly vital role within them. Among these motives, literary texts may emerge as a response to reality and simultaneously as a critique of the established order. In this context, reality refers to factual reality—anything the author perceives as reality (Kuntowijoyo, 2006a: 171)—whether it pertains to historical, cultural, socio-political conditions, economic circumstances, humanitarian issues, or other aspects. In order to articulate their motives or intentions, authors employ a range of strategies or alternatives to deliver their critiques. In doing so, they often adhere to a particular perspective or ideology.

As subjects, authors cannot elude the structures or systems that encompass them—for instance, the structure of the state as one of many examples. Within such systems, the dominant ideology largely controls the social relationships, while other ideologies are also distributed, formed, and contested with one another. It is important to emphasize that ideology is fundamentally an imaginary construction or a system of representation within society (Althusser, 2007: 187–188; Barry, 2010). This system

may manifest in various forms, such as legal, political, religious, ethical, or aesthetic orders, among others (Eagleton, 2006: 3).

In response to such systems, particularly within the historical context of Indonesian literature, there have been notable groups of writers and artists, such as the *Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat* (Lekra), which was affiliated with the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) and adhered to the ideology of socialist realism. Another example is the *Manifesto Kebudayaan*, which operated under the banner of universal humanism, as well as the *Lembaga Seniman dan Budayawan Muslimin Indonesia* (Lesbumi), affiliated with *Nahdlatul Ulama*, functioning as a cultural and artistic organization with an Islamic orientation.

Writers and artists that affiliated with these organizations responded to societal systems and realities in alignment with their respective worldviews. For instance, Lekra, a group rooted in Marxist or socialist values, strongly advocated for "the people" and made politics as the commander in all artistic activities, including literary creation (Susanto, 2018: 23–24; Foulcher, 2020: 36–37). This Marxist perspective stood in stark contrast to the *Manifes* group, which upheld the principle of art for art's sake, and even more so to Muslim writers' groups, whose focus on transcendence was fundamentally at odds with Marxist ideology (Rosidi, 2017: 182–185; Mintz, 2003: v). Eventually, it can be said that Lekra purely prioritized human collective agency as a way to respond to societal systems, while aspects related to the divine were set aside in the works produced by its authors.

Lekra's perspective is mentioned here as a comparison to highlight that many authors also adhered to Islamic religious values as the foundation or mode of their creative process in responding to or even critiquing societal systems. The texts they produced—whether poetry, prose, or drama—maintained transcendence or Islamic values as central themes. Beyond those affiliated with the previously mentioned Lesbumi, renowned figures such as Amir Hamzah, Hamka, Abdul Hadi W.M., Kuntowijoyo, Danarto, and Emha Ainun Nadjib (EAN), among others, also emerged.

Focusing on this topic (Islamic themes), it is worth noting that among the Indonesian literary figures who write literature with Islamic content, some produce Sufi literary texts, while others create sufistic or prophetic literary texts¹. This study narrows its discussion to the second type of Islamic-themed works: sufistic literature, or—aligning with the terminology popularized by Kuntowijoyo—prophetic literature.

The works of EAN in the poetry collection entitled *99 untuk Tuhanku* (99 for My Lord, 2015) or Taufik Ismail's *Tirani dan Benteng* (Tyranny and Fortress, 1993) can be regarded as prophetic literary works. This is because the lyric 'I' in these texts critiques

¹ Sufi literature, or *tasawuf* literature, is closely associated with literary texts that express a total experience or awareness of the divine (a personal experience of divinity) and are typically written by a Sufi who has withdrawn from the world (*uzlah*) into solitude. Meanwhile, *sufistic* or prophetic literature—in the Indonesian context—is characterized by the perspectives of Abdul Hadi W.M. and Kuntowijoyo. This type of literature, while demonstrating a high intensity of divine awareness, fundamentally remains engaged with human issues and historical realities (Anwar, 2013: 126–128). For Kuntowijoyo (2013: 14–16), *sufistic* or prophetic literature can never be isolated from its society.

structures of power while maintaining a strong focus on religiosity—integrating an awareness of God’s authority in every narrative expressed. In addition to these two authors, another prominent figure who remains active and consistently write prophetic poetry is Abdul Wachid B.S.

Wachid is classified by Rampan (2000: 1) as part of the 2000s Generation of Indonesian Writers, alongside several other literary figures. Both in terms of his personal life journey and his creative career, Wachid appears to be inextricably linked to Islamic themes, particularly Sufism or prophetism itself (Wachid B.S., 2017: 117–125).

Among his works that tend to—indeed, are particularly pronounced in—voicing such prophetic values is the poem entitled “*Alang-Alang*” (1998-1999), which appears in the collection *Kumpulan Sajak Nun* (2017). Lyric ‘I’ in this poem reflects on the moral conscience of the people in the face of state oppression during the final years of the New Order regime. Indonesians from various social strata are portrayed as striving to free themselves from the shackles strategically imposed by the New Order to prolong its power. These efforts are not solely focused on the collective strength of the people; they are also accompanied by a recognition of God's power, which surpasses human capabilities.

From the perspective of Kuntowijoyo, the initiator of prophetic literature, it can be argued that the three aspects of prophetic ethics he proposed (humanization, liberation, and transcendence) can be found in Wachid's poem “*Alang-Alang*”. Based on this premise, this study will employ the concept of prophetic literature as an analytical framework to examine the poem “*Alang-Alang*”. The analysis focuses on the voice of the lyrical “I” as a subject articulating prophetic values, referred to in this study as the “prophetic subject.”

The research question this study seeks to address is: “*How are the prophetic ethics of humanization, liberation, and transcendence expressed by the lyrical “I” in the poem 'Alang-Alang'?*” In line with this, the study aims to uncover the prophetic structure of the poem “*Alang-Alang*” by analyzing the foundational prophetic ethics of humanization, liberation, and transcendence as articulated by the lyrical “I” within the text.

The concept of prophetic literature cannot be separated from the idea of Prophetic Social Sciences (*Ilmu Sosial Profetik, ISP*), which was first introduced by Kuntowijoyo in the 1980s. Kuntowijoyo is renowned as a historian, sociologist, prolific literary figure, and activist who dedicated himself to the Islamic socio-religious organization Muhammadiyah. He is also recognized as one of the prominent intellectuals affiliated with the Indonesian Association of Muslim Intellectuals (Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia, ICMI).

For Kuntowijoyo (2017: 313–318), the term ISP is not intended to replace existing Western social theories but rather to serve as an alternative to those established theories. According to Kuntowijoyo (in Supraja, 2022: 46), Islam is not an exclusive religion but an open one, as evidenced by its historical developmental dynamics. Islam has consistently interacted with other civilizations—such as Greek, Roman, Persian, Chinese, and Indian—through the extensive translation of scientific works authored by

philosophers from these civilizations, excluding elements that fundamentally contradict Islamic principles (e.g., concepts of deities and similar notions). From the idea of ISP, Kuntowijoyo subsequently developed the text known as the “*Manifesto of Prophetic Literature*”, which elaborates on the principles, ethics, and structure of literature within his framework.

The prophetic literature proposed by Kuntowijoyo is built on several principles that form its foundation, as it absorbs, expresses, and guides reality. Prophetic literature is dialectical in nature, meaning it confronts reality, offering assessments and socio-cultural critiques in a civilized manner. For this reason, prophetic literature is deeply engaged with the course of human history and cannot exist in isolation from reality (Kuntowijoyo, 2013: 10). Moreover, prophetic literature is inherently democratic, as it is not confined to a single premise, theme, technique, or style—whether personal or conventional. It does not operate as an authoritarian movement, unlike Communism, which aggressively sought to suppress other streams through its socialist realism (Kuntowijoyo, 2013: 16).

Prophetic literature refers to the understanding and interpretation of sacred texts in relation to reality, adopting the epistemology of transcendental structuralism (Kuntowijoyo, 2006b: 27–29). As a literature grounded in sacred texts, it is intended for people of faith—not limited to Islam but also encompassing other religions (Kuntowijoyo, 2013: 10–11). Indirectly, Kuntowijoyo (2013: 9) visualize literature created by writers to serve as both an act of worship and as literature in its purest form. Literature as worship reflects a writer’s internalization of religious values, while pure literature represents an objective and universal expression of reality.

In this framework, divine consciousness and human consciousness are two major themes in prophetic literature, which must remain balanced, with neither overshadowing the other. For example, extreme Sufism characterized by seclusion (*uzlah*), celibacy (*wadat*), and monasticism is prohibited in Islam; conversely, the pursuit of human causes (freedom, democracy, and human rights) must also account the rights of God (Kuntowijoyo, 2013: 14–15). The foundational argument for this balance is derived from the concept of *hablun minallah wa hablun minannas* (the bond with God and the bond with humanity) as stated in the Qur’an (3:112). In the context of prophetic literature’s humanistic mission, this principle underscores the necessity for literature to expand human inner awareness while simultaneously awakening both divine and human consciousness (Kuntowijoyo, 2013: 14–16).

Building upon these principles—transcendental structuralism epistemology, literature as worship, and the interconnectedness of consciousness—Kuntowijoyo (2013: 17–33) formulated three foundational prophetic ethics central to his thought. These principles will be examined in this study through the analysis of the lyrical “I” in the poem “*Alang-Alang*” by Abdul Wachid B.S. The three foundational prophetic ethics are humanization (*'amar ma'ruf*), liberation (*nahi munkar*), and transcendence (*iman billah*). These are inspired by the actions of Prophet Muhammad SAW (peace be upon him) during the Isra’ Mi’raj, where he reached the highest spiritual state yet returned to

the world to fulfill his prophetic duties². They are also rooted in the Al-Qur'an from Surah Ali Imran (3:110): "*You are the best nation produced for mankind. You enjoin what is right, forbid what is wrong, and believe in Allah.*" (Kuntowijoyo, 2013: 16–17). Each of these ethics will be explored in more detail as follows.

First, humanization is necessary due to the emergence of signs of dehumanization within a society. The context discussed by Kuntowijoyo as the basis of his thought is Indonesia during the New Order period (1980s). Dehumanization refers to the condition of human objectification (theological, cultural, mass, or state-driven), aggression (collective or individual, including criminality), loneliness (privatization, individualization), and spiritual alienation. As a result of dehumanization, human behavior becomes more dominated by the subconscious than by conscious awareness. In the Indonesian context of the 1980s—symptoms of which can arguably still be observed today—dehumanization eroded society through the emergence of mechanized humans, mass individuals and societies, and mass culture (Kuntowijoyo, 2013: 17).

Second, liberation can be categorized into liberation from external forces (colonialism, aggression by superpowers, and global capitalism through economic manipulation) and liberation from internal forces within Indonesia. Both can serve as central themes in literature. Kuntowijoyo (2013: 22) places greater emphasis on the second aspect of this foundational prophetic ethic, focusing on liberation from internal forces within Indonesian society. These include political oppression of artistic freedom prior to 1965, state oppression of its citizens during the New Order era, economic injustice, and gender inequality.

Broadly speaking, liberation can be understood as freeing humanity from cruelty, poverty, exploitation, the domination of oppressive structures, and the hegemony of false consciousness. These forms of oppression can be found within systems of knowledge, social structures, economic frameworks, or political systems that constrain human beings, preventing them from actualizing themselves as free and noble creatures (*ukhrijat linnas*).

Third, transcendence, or divine awareness, is a theme widely explored in the corpus of Indonesian literature, often referred to as "transcendental literature" or "Sufi literature." According to Kuntowijoyo (2013: 30), transcendence does not necessarily have to signify divine awareness in a strictly religious sense; it can also encompass awareness of any meaning that beyond humanity. Quoting Garaudy, Kuntowijoyo (2013: 31) identifies three elements of transcendence: 1) the acknowledgment of human dependence on God; 2) the absolute distinction between God and humanity; and 3) the recognition of absolute norms from God that do not originate from human reason.

² The term "prophetic" originates from the English word "prophet," which means "nabi" in Indonesian. According to the *Oxford Dictionary*, *prophetic* is defined as: 1) of, pertaining to, or proper to a prophet or prophecy; having the character or function of a prophet; and 2) characterized by, containing, or of the nature of prophecy; predictive. Thus, *prophetic* can be understood as having the qualities or characteristics of a prophet or being predictive and foreseeing. In this context, *prophetic* can be translated as *kenabian* (prophethood) (Ahimsa-Putra, 2016: 2).

Since prophetic ethics are rooted in sacred scriptures, prophetic literature is seen as a cultural weapon for religious individuals to combat its adversaries, namely materialism and hidden secularism. This aspect of transcendence is essential in addressing the ongoing global civilizational crisis. In Islam, transcendence manifests in Sufism (Kuntowijoyo, 2013: 31). The essence of Sufism—characterized by fear (*khauf*), hope (*raja'*), surrender (*tawakkal*), contentment (*qana'ah*), gratitude (*shukr*), sincerity (*ikhlas*), and others—forms the thematic core of transcendental (or prophetic) literature.

The concept of the "prophetic subject" has been further developed from Kuntowijoyo's ideas by Aprinus Salam in one of his essays, "*Ke Arah Subjek Profetik*" (*Toward the Prophetic Subject*), included in the book *Kehidupan Sosiologi (Sociology of Life)* (2020). A prophetic subject is an individual who integrally embodies and grounds their life practices on the values of humanization, liberation, and transcendence. Since this concept is not confined to the context of Islam, each religion has its own prophetic subject, whose role models are drawn from the prophets of the respective faiths (Salam, 2020: 283–286).³

More specifically, regarding the role model, Salam (2020: 286) highlights that in Islam, the Prophet Muhammad SAW serves as the primary model. This is because he simultaneously managed a family, *imam* (Islamic leadership position), participated in battles, engaged in trade and travel, hosted discussion assemblies, and maintained social connections. However, it is worth noting that many figures can be identified as prophetic subjects, including national heroes, unsung heroes in remote areas overlooked by history, and individuals who have dedicated their lives to good causes on this earth, and so on. Thus, when applied to the context of literary works, the prophetic subject can be understood as characters, actors, or lyrical "I"s who strive to think, express, and act in alignment with the principles of prophetic ethics, as elaborated by Kuntowijoyo in his *Maklumat Sastra Profetik (Manifesto of Prophetic Literature)*.

Previous studies relevant to this research include those conducted by Dahlan (2018), Purnomo (2018), and Somadayo, Supriyono, Wardianto, & Kurniawan (2022). The first, Dahlan's (2018) study, aimed to uncover the social critique present in Abdul Wachid B.S.'s poem "*Alang-Alang*" using Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic approach. His findings revealed that: The metaphors in "*Alang-Alang*" are predominantly structured around tenor (core meaning) and vehicle (explanation); *Alang-alang* (wild grass) serves as a symbol for the people, occupying the most significant position within the state; The social critique in the poem targets the ruling authorities for their repeated

³ The concept of the prophetic subject is introduced to address the potential shortcomings of the ethical subject and the authentic/radical subject. Each of these is defined as follows: The ethical subject prioritizes whether, as a human being, one can act to uphold morality, even in its most general sense, without concerning themselves with questions of identity, such as who a person is, their origin, or their religion. In this framework, the goodness of life becomes paramount (Salam, 2020: 277); The authentic/radical subject, drawn from Zizek's thought, is one who acts purely—to act—doing something without thought, without knowledge, driven by instinct and spontaneity (Salam, 2020: 149–150).

deception of the public with false promises, as well as the people's propensity for inciting riots and hostility.

Second, Purnomo's (2018) study also employed Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic approach to examine the metaphors and symbols present in the poems contained in *Kumpulan Sajak Nun* by Abdul Wachid B.S. The research yielded three key conclusions: The poems in *Kumpulan Sajak Nun* convey moral values, such as tolerance, brotherhood, intellectual insight, and critiques of free sexual behavior; The metaphors and symbols were interpreted through Paul Ricoeur's theoretical framework; The poems in *Kumpulan Sajak Nun* are relevant as instructional material for the *Akidah Akhlak* (Creed and Ethics) curriculum for ninth-grade students. The book can serve as supplementary reading and an innovative resource to achieve learning objectives.

Lastly, the study by Somadayo, Supriyono, Wardianto, and Kurniawan (2022) aimed to analyze and describe the depiction of religiosity in *Kumpulan Sajak Nun* by Abdul Wachid B.S. The research identified three types of religiosity: the relationship between humans and God, the relationship between humans and other humans, and the relationship between humans and themselves. Essentially, values such as surrendering to God, purification before approaching God, worship and prayer, practicing love and compassion toward others, as well as internal dialogue and repentance, are illustrated through these three dimensions of religiosity.

Unlike the previous studies, this research employs Kuntowijoyo's prophetic literary framework to analyze the poem *Alang-Alang* by Abdul Wachid B.S. Furthermore, the previous studies did not limit their analysis to a single poem but instead examined multiple poems compiled within an anthology—except for Dahlan's (2018) study, which, however, had a different focus. Dahlan's research concentrated on social critique, whereas this study explores the fundamental prophetic ethics—humanization, liberation, and transcendence—through an analysis of the lyrical "I" in *Alang-Alang*. Therefore, this research aims to provide a more in-depth examination of one of Abdul Wachid B.S.'s poems, particularly in relation to prophetic elements as conceptualized by the Muslim scholar Kuntowijoyo.

METHOD

The method employed in this study is qualitative. A qualitative approach is expected to produce an in-depth analysis of the speech, writings, and/or observable behaviors of individuals, groups, communities, or organizations within a specific contextual setting, examined from a complete, comprehensive, and holistic perspective (Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2016: 137). The researcher assumes the role of the key instrument.

Broadly speaking, the steps of this research consist of determining the object, collecting data, analyzing data, and drawing conclusions. The first step involves identifying the material object and the formal object. The material object refers to the field of study, while the formal object pertains to the perspective through which the material object is examined (Faruk, 2017: 23). The material object in this study is the

poem "*Alang-Alang*" from the book *Kumpulan Sajak Nun* (2017) by Abdul Wachid B.S., which also serves as the data source for this research. Meanwhile, the formal object is the foundational prophetic ethics in Kuntowijoyo's prophetic literary thought, encompassing humanization, liberation, and transcendence, as reflected in the voice of the lyrical "I" within the poem "*Alang-Alang*."

Subsequently, data collection was carried out through a literature review and a reading-and-note-taking technique. The researcher conducted an intensive reading of the poem "*Alang-Alang*" to identify symbols, metaphors, or narratives in the form of lines and stanzas within the text that are relevant to the research objectives. The collected data were then organized into a data table for analysis using content analysis techniques. This involved interpreting the extracted and classified data in alignment with the research questions and objectives.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As mentioned in the introduction, Abdul Wachid B.S.'s poem "*Alang-Alang*" is one of the many texts within the trajectory of Indonesian literature that distinctly articulates prophetic values. It is essential to emphasize that the focus of this research is on the voice of the lyrical "I" (*Aku-lirik*) in the poem, which differs from the voice of the poet himself. The analysis centers on the text, not the poet. In "*Alang-Alang*", the lyrical "I" does not appear explicitly but is instead implicitly embedded as part of the collective "we" (*Kami-lirik*) and "us" (*Kita-lirik*). This is evident in lines such as the 6th line in the 6th stanza (*kami*), the 3rd line in the 12th stanza (*kita*), and the eighth line in the 13th stanza (*kita*).

The lyrical "I" in the poem reflects the conscience of the people in the face of state oppression during the final years of the New Order regime. This interpretation is based on the poem's temporal marker, inscribed by Wachid as 1998–1999. The poem narrates the efforts of Indonesians from various backgrounds to break free from the constraints strategically imposed by the New Order regime to maintain its power. These efforts are not solely reliant on the collective strength of the people—through protests, critiques, legal challenges, or demonstrations—but are also accompanied by an awareness of God's sovereignty, which surpasses human capability.

The three aspects of the foundational ethical structure of prophetic (literature) thought proposed by Kuntowijoyo—humanization, liberation, and transcendence—are evident in the poem "*Alang-Alang*." Based on this perspective and aligned with the research objectives, the discussion is divided into three subsections corresponding to these core prophetic ethics: 1) Humanization: "*Alang-Alang*" as a Symbol of Conscience; 2) Liberation from the Political Structures Constraining Subjects; and 3) Transcendence: Surrendering to the "Hyang" (The Divine) and Grounding in "Bismillah" (in the name of God).

Humanization: "*Alang-Alang*" as a Symbol of Conscience

The poem "*Alang-Alang*" begins with the presence of the symbol "alang-alang" in the first stanza: "*Alang-alang basah oleh darah / Tak di taman tak di hutan / Alang-alang*

akan terus tumbuh / Tak kemarau tak penghujan." This stanza can be interpreted as portraying the resilience of "alang-alang," which continues to "grow" or appear anywhere—whether in "gardens" or "forests"—and persists regardless of the "dry season" or the "rainy season." This growth serves a purpose, as indicated in the second stanza: *"Alang-alang nusuk sepatu serdadu / Alang-alang merambati tembok istana / Alang-alang menyilet jidat rektorat / Alang-alang berdansa, jalanan berbatu.*" The question arises: "Why does 'alang-alang' engage in such acts?"

The answer can be found in the third stanza, which introduces: *"Kepala-kepala batu / Tangan-tangan batu / Di kampus dan jalanan terbuka / Udara mabuk candu kekuasaan sang Raja.*" It becomes evident that the entities being pierced, climbed upon, and cut by *alang-alang* are affiliated with the oppressive power of the "King," characterized as having a "stubborn" (*kepala batu*) and "firm hand" (*tangan batu*). Upon closer examination, the soldiers, palace walls, and rectorate mentioned in the second stanza symbolize positions of authority. These elements can be interpreted as facilitators or, in Althusser's terminology (2007: 159-168), the repressive and ideological apparatuses of the state. In essence, the symbol of *alang-alang* in the poem "*Alang-Alang*" is set in opposition (*vis-à-vis*) to the "King's power" and all its instruments. This leads to the next question: "What or who, precisely, does *alang-alang* represent?"

In several lines, *alang-alang* is further depicted in various conditions or forms, such as: *basah oleh darah; akan tambah tumbuh / Tak peduli irigasi, tak hirau kemarau; di pundak mahasiswa / Jadilah bendera; mengakar di tangan rakyat semesta / Menjelma senjata; berupa pena tajam, menari-nari / Di kubah parlemen; tanpa pernah penat.* Finally, the lyrical "I" explicitly states in the last line that *alang-alang* is: *Dialah hati nurani rakyat / Pohankan jangan terlewat / Jika tak ingin tersengat.* At this point, by revisiting the narrative of the third stanza previously cited, it can be asserted that this stanza seeks to portray the forces that shackle the people's conscience—whether within the university environment, on the streets, or, ultimately, at the palace walls. This oppressive force is none other than what is symbolized by the presence of the "King's power." Simply put, it is power that seeks to bind the conscience or *alang-alang*.

The awareness of the suppression and stagnation of the people's conscience caused by political manipulation, such as campaign promises, lies, and the indifference of politicians—compels the lyrical "I" to perceive reality more critically and take action toward liberation (discussed in the next section). These instances of empty campaign promises, deceit, and neglect by elected officials are depicted in lines such as: *"Esok tempe, Mas, sore tahu / Kemarin dukung rame-rame, Mas, / Esok bantai bahu-membahu"* (7th stanza); *"Kini kita rakyat yang lelah / Kita kini bangsa yang sangsi / Oleh teka-teki yang bukan nasib / Oleh air liur politisi / Yang batin mendengkur"* (8th stanza); and *"Jika petinggi dan politisi ngelindur / Demokrasi pelangi tak akan meluncur / Jalan-jalan, pohon, riuh-redam / Orang-orang mengasah saling dendam"* (9th stanza).

Through its protest-oriented narrative and the overall content of the poem, the lyrical "I" can be seen as a subject whose conscience is awakened and capable of perceiving the reality of oppression on a deeper level. While being part of the

Indonesian people—subjects who are themselves oppressed—the lyrical "I" demonstrates resistance against the existing system. It aspires for the Indonesian citizens (WNI), as humans with inherent conscience or spirit (*nafs*), to be restored to their rightful position (humanization). This stands in contrast to their current treatment as mere supplementary objects in the state and democratic system (ensuring elections are conducted), as objects of exploitation, manipulation, or even oppression (dehumanization).

The lyrical "I" recognizes that the people, whom it views as its own brothers and sisters, are subjected to dehumanization due to the collective aggressiveness of those in power. The people endure suffering, despair, exhaustion, spiritual barrenness, and turmoil, as expressed in the 12th stanza: *Siang membara, Indonesia / Di lingkaran khatulistiwa / Kita orang semua bersaudara / Tak tahan lagi derita dan nestapa / Tanah basah embun, kemarin hijau zamrud / Telah terengah, gersang dan kian kalut*. It is also crucial to note that beyond the aggressiveness of the rulers, humanization is necessary because of the condition of human objectification—whether theological, cultural, social, or political. The people, as subjects in the poem "Alang-Alang," are deeply entrenched in such objectification. The broader impact of this dehumanization, as Kuntowijoyo (2013: 17) notes, is the emergence of the "mechanical human."

In the future, the behavior of "mechanical humans," driven solely by stimulus and response, will no longer be guided by reason, values, or norms. Instead, it will manifest in acts of aggression, corruption, infidelity, brawls, and other forms of criminality (Kuntowijoyo, 2013: 18). A concrete example is the emergence of subjects previously mentioned—those with "stubborn and firm hand," whose inner selves (*batinnya*) are snoring (*mendengkur*) yet occupy positions of power. At this point, it becomes evident how crucial the role of conscience is—advocated and defended by the lyrical "I" in managing both individual and societal order. Quoting Chaplin, Kuntowijoyo (2013: 18) further emphasizes that abnormalities in society stem from *anomie*, a state of disorganization in social and personal values.

Essentially, in Abdul Wachid's poem "Alang-Alang," the lyrical "I" asserts that the conscience of the people must remain alive amidst the constraints of power (the power of the "King"), which in this context refers to the New Order regime in Indonesia. This is because only through the presence of a living conscience can dehumanization be countered promptly. It is not the eyes or cognitive intelligence but rather the conscience that will first recognize the existence of a weary people (*rakyat yang lelah*), a doubtful nation (*bangsa yang sangsi*), and riddles that are not fate (*teka-teki yang bukan nasib*) / From the saliva of politicians (*Oleh air liur politisi*) / Whose inner selves are snoring (*Yang batin(-nya) mendengkur*) within the framework of a state.

Concerning the concept of conscience, Al-Ghazali (2017: 22-31) regards it as an inner eye capable of overcoming the limitations of human physical sight. For instance, physical sight can perceive external objects but cannot see itself without assistance; it cannot discern objects that are either extremely distant or exceedingly close, nor those concealed behind a veil. It can only observe the surface of things, not their inner essence; it perceives only a fragment of existence, not its entirety; and it is limited to

apprehending finite phenomena, not the infinite. Conscience, also referred to as intellect (*'aql*), spirit, or soul (*nafs*), transcends these limitations. It is perfect in nature, capable of unveiling the veils, and it perceives good and evil as they truly are—earning it the designation of the true "light."

Ultimately, it becomes evident that only through the sharpness of the inner eye, more discerning than physical sight—whether possessed by the people or the rulers themselves—can the initial steps toward a government rooted in an ideal, just, and harmonious democracy (a rainbow democracy) be envisioned and realized. This is the aspiration of the lyrical "I" in the poem "*Alang-Alang*." In essence, recognizing and prioritizing the role of "conscience" is a fundamental prerequisite for a healthy democracy.

Liberation from the Political System Enslaving Subjects

A close examination of the lines and stanzas in the poem "*Alang-Alang*" reveals various forms of oppression strategically employed by the New Order regime to control the masses or the Indonesian people. These mechanisms of control, aimed at shaping the populace into disciplined subjects, were implemented through both physical enforcement (violence) and ideological manipulation. These include: 1) The decadence and depoliticization of student movements and the dominance of the military over them (2nd, 3rd, and 11th stanzas); 2) The legalization of violence and human rights violations (3rd and 5th stanzas). 3) A hypocritical and corrupt government (3rd, 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th and 12th stanzas).

These conditions prompt the lyrical "I" and the people to speak out, engaging in protests, criticisms, lawsuits, or demonstrations (liberation), accompanied by an awareness of God's power that transcends human capacity. The voice of the lyrical "I" resonates throughout the narrative of the poem "*Alang-Alang*". The oppressions faced by the people—targeted for liberation by the lyrical "I"—will be discussed one by one in this section, while also linking them to the context of the New Order government in Indonesia, which serves as the backdrop for the poem.

First, the decadence and depoliticization of student movements are implicitly delivered in several stanzas, for example, through the use of the term "*rektorat*" (rectorate) in the second stanza, the reference to "*di kampus*" (on campus) in the third stanza, and the depiction of "*alang-alang di pundak mahasiswa*" (alang-alang on the shoulders of students) in the eleventh stanza. In the second and third stanzas, the lyrical "I" states: *Alang-alang nusuk sepatu serdadu / Alang-alang merambati tembok istana / Alang-alang menyilet jidat rektorat / Alang-alang berdansa, jalanan berbatu // Kepala-kepala batu / Tangan-tangan batu / Di kampus dan jalanan terbuka / Udara mabuk candu kekuasaan sang Raja*. These stanzas suggest a desire of the conscience (*alang-alang*) to slice the foreheads of the rectorate—"slicing" (*menyilet*) is directed at the rectorate because they, too, in the campus environment, have become subjects with stubbornness (*ber-kepala batu*) and firm hand (*ber-tangan batu*). This has resulted in campuses becoming spaces where the intoxicating opium of the the president's power (*mabuk candu kekuasaan sang Raja*) also takes hold.

The phrase "*mabuk candu kekuasaan sang Raja*" signifies that the rectorate must submit and obey every command of the king/president, even if it means disregarding the "alang-alang" carried and upheld by the students. The students, in turn, resist the rectorate's stance, which represents all that is situated within the campus. The slash of the "alang-alang" is the climax of resistance against neglect and oppression, leading them—and the entire people—to protest and take action, as described in the eleventh stanza: *Alang-alang di pundak mahasiswa / Jadilah bendera / Alang-alang mengakar di tangan rakyat semesta / Menjelma senjata / Alang-alang berupa pena tajam, menari-nari / Di kubah parlemen. Mereka melakukan itu karena sadar Bumi telah pagi / Dan (alang-alang as it should be) akan bangun tegak / Di tanah pertiwi, meskipun langit (still feels) bagai tombak* (4th stanza).

The conditions described in several stanzas of the poem "*Alang-Alang*" are clearly analogous to the campus depoliticization strategies implemented by the New Order regime through the Normalization of Campus Life and the Student Coordinating Body (*Normali Kehidupan Kampus dan Badan Koordinasi Kemahasiswaan*, NKK/BKK), which explicitly aimed to stifle student political activities. This was further manifested by the regime's prohibition of the reactivation of the Student Council, with the scope of activities limited to welfare, interests (sports and arts), and intellectual development. All of this was done systematically to subdue the student movement—politicization of education not only through curriculum content but also through the institutionalization and the educational direction that became subordinate to economic development, although resistance still emerged in various forms (Mustafidah & Purwaningsih, 2016). The issuance of the Ministry of Education and Culture Decree No. 028/U/1974, which banned all political activities on campuses, can simply be understood as an effort at repression to quell the unrest within the campus environment, which was seen as a potential threat to the Soeharto regime (Maiwan, 2014; Mardianti, 2022).

However, the discussion does not end there. The struggle carried out by students and the people in the poem "*Alang-Alang*" must face obstacles. For example, on campus, it is represented by ideological apparatuses, while in their actions on the streets, they confront the presence of the state's repressive apparatus, including the police and military. The presence of this repressive apparatus is symbolized by the line "*Alang-alang nusuk sepatu serdadu*" (The alang-alang pricks the soldiers' shoes), because logically, students and the people who advocate for "*alang-alang*" must first face security forces in order to reach the palace walls or to confront the rectors.

Clearly, this condition is identical to the large-scale demonstrations leading up to the fall of President Soeharto in 1998, which aligns with the timeline of the poem "*Alang-Alang*" (1998-1999), marking the climax of the student movement that felt its critical voice was being suppressed and politicized. The inevitable mass riots, the abduction of several students whose fates remain unknown to this day, coupled with the shooting of students from Trisakti University on their campus, complete the chaotic situation that unfolded—there were also hundreds of victims burned alive at Ciledug Plaza in Tangerang, and official figures reported 499 deaths along with 4,000

buildings destroyed or burned in the May 1998 riots (Tempo, 2018: 56-61). In addition to student demonstrations, the mass riots cannot be separated from other factors such as the economic crisis and national leadership issues, which constructed communication themes that formed a drama of change and demands for reform (Suparno, 2012: 178). This is why lyrical "I" in the poem "*Alang-Alang*" also expresses the flowing of blood like water (*darah mengalir air*) and tears like water (*air mengalir airmata*), as a symbol of the sorrow over the confusion it witnessed in his country.

Secondly, as a continuation of the chains of student decadence and depoliticization mentioned earlier, the lyrical "I" also portrays the "metaphysical" impunity or the legal right to commit violence and human rights violations possessed by the New Order regime through its apparatuses (3rd and 5th stanzas). In the poem "*Alang-Alang*", in addition to the symbols of *kepala-kepala batu* and *tangan-tangan batu—yang mabuk candu kekuasaan sang Raja—di kampus dan jalanan terbuka* (third stanza), lyrical "I" further illustrates with: *Di ujung jalan buntu / Segerombolan penyamun teriak / "Hiduplah demokrasi negeri!" / Kemarin mereka mengecu / Atas nama bangsa yang gemah-ripah lohjinawi / Membunuh, sembari bersenyum gigi.*

Power is symbolized by the "*Segerombolan penyamun teriak / "Hiduplah demokrasi negeri!"*" and not hesitating to "*Membunuh, sembari bersenyum gigi.*" Violence and human rights violations are indeed associated with the New Order, as they were among the key characteristics of the regime under Suharto. Gaffar (2006: 149-163) also outlines the main characteristics of the New Order government under President Suharto's leadership, which include: 1) an overly dominant Presidential Institution; 2) low equality among State Institutions; 3) closed political recruitment; 4) bureaucracy as an instrument of power; 5) non-transparent public policy; 6) centralization; 7) poor implementation of human rights; and 8) a judiciary system that is not independent.

Specifically, in the context of the low implementation of human rights during the New Order, numerous cases of violations and violence can be found, such as the 1965 PKI Massacre, the January 15th Tragedy (*Malapetaka Limabelas Januari, Malari*) in 1974, the Tanjung Priok Incident in 1984, and the Military Operations Zone (DOM) in Aceh in 1989, among others (Hutagalung, 2005). However, in the poem "*Alang-Alang*," it can be interpreted that the context referred to is violence specifically against students during the mass demonstrations of May 1998, both at Trisakti University and in Surakarta, as well as in other regions.

While the context of violence and killings in the Trisakti Tragedy was addressed in the first part of the liberation discussion, the Surakarta Riots can be briefly mentioned here to provide an overview of the violence carried out by the authorities against the students. Demonstrations in Surakarta are recorded to have occurred approximately 30 times at Sebelas Maret University (UNS) in Kentingan and Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta (UMS) in Pabelan, before the May 1998 riots erupted. The actions escalated due to the presence of provocateurs, leading the authorities to fire tear gas at the student lines—clashes between students and the authorities were inevitable, and attempts to force students out of the campus area caused them to scatter in all directions (Salim & Ramdhon, 2020). This, at least,

reflects the context of violence and human rights violations highlighted by the lyrical "I" in Wachid's poem "*Alang-Alang*."

Third, the chains of hypocritical and corrupt power are the most frequently depicted theme by the lyrical "I" in the poem "*Alang-Alang*." This theme is present in 3rd, 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, and 12th stanzas. The expression begins in third stanza, where the lyrical "I" conveys "*udara mabuk candu kekuasaan sang Raja*", even the air, which is inhaled and exhaled by human lungs, is portrayed as carrying the potential to intoxicate with the King's power. What aspect of the King's power is it that causes this intoxication and addiction?

The lyrical "I" explains in 6th, 7th, and 8th stanzas as follows: *Di tangga-tangga parlemen / Sekelompok Tuan Hipokrisi / Memainkan tongkat pesulap / "Jangan sentimen / Apalagi apriori / Kami akan ciptakan demokrasi kelas kakap!" / Kata mereka // Maka / Sayup-sayup di antara / Gubuk-gubuk orang ungsian / Nyanyi pasemon bocah entah buat siapa / "Esok tempe, Mas, sore tahu / Kemarin dukung rame-rame, Mas, / Esok bantai bahu-membahu" // Di tengah sawah / Holobis kuntul baris / Kita kini bangsa yang sangsi / Oleh teka-teki yang bukan nasib / Oleh air liur politisi / Yang batin mendengkur*. The group of hypocrisy is even explicitly mentioned by the lyrical "I", and they are subjects within the sphere of power who neglect the poor (*gubuk-gubuk ungsian and nyanyi pasemon bocah*), are inconsistent with their promises to the people (*Esok tempe, sore tahu*), and cannot be trusted in anything they say about improving the citizens' fate (*bangsa become sangsi oleh teka-teki yang bukan nasib and oleh air liur politisi yang batin(-nya) mendengkur*).

If the types of rulers present are hypocrites as described, then the following occurs: 1) disharmony arises within society, such as mass riots, as previously mentioned, and also referenced in 9th stanza, which depicts the provoked or vengeful condition of the people (*Jika petinggi dan politisi ngelindur / Demokrasi pelangi tak akan meluncur / Jalan-jalan, pohon, riuh-redam / Orang-orang mengasah saling dendam*); and 2) the people suffer and endure misery due to corruption involving the nation's wealth and natural resources, symbolized by *tanah basah embun yang kemarin hijau zamrud* (representing fertility and natural wealth). In simpler terms, the people lose faith (*sangsi*) in the improvement of their lives due to the misuse or misallocation of funds intended for their development and welfare. This situation is fully narrated in 9th stanza: "*Siang membara, Indonesia / Di lingkaran khatulistiwa / Kita orang semua bersaudara / Tak tahankan lagi derita dan nestapa / Tanah basah embun, kemarin hijau zamrud / Telah terengah, gersang dan kian kalut*. Kondisi *tanah basah embun yang kemarin (bagai) hijau zamrud, kini telah terengah, gersang dan kian kalut*" is a vivid representation of exploitation, with the results ultimately enriching the pockets of the elites (almost) entirely.

These stanzas can be linked to the economic disparity during the New Order regime, as well as the corruption that became an open secret under President Suharto's rule. Regarding the economic imbalance, Ricklefs (2017: 434-435) notes that poverty rates in Indonesia during the New Order period, particularly in the 1980s, rose alongside rapid population growth. While development was actively promoted and

yielded positive results, the threat of poverty remained a daunting concern for the Suharto regime. Meanwhile, corruption occurred largely due to the monopoly of power held by individuals in positions of authority. The widespread development programs created opportunities for these individuals to exploit their positions and conditions for personal gain. As a result, the initial anti-corruption efforts, which had been promising, eventually faced failure over time (Syuraida & Purwaningsih, 2015).

The consequences of the political constraints of the New Order regime, such as the strategies of student decadence and depoliticization, the "metaphysical" impunity or legality of the apparatus to commit violence and human rights violations against the people, and the hypocritical and corrupt nature of power, are vividly expressed by the lyrical "I" in the 13th stanza: *Darah mengalir air / Membentur batu-batu / Air mengalir airmata / Membentur batu-batu / Airmata mengalir samodra / Mengusung alang-alang / Ke tiap tidur dan jaga / Kita*. The lyrical "I" witnesses the people bleeding and crying, yet everything is in vain (*membentur batu-batu*) in the face of power. Nevertheless, the fervor to fight for the "conscience of the people" continues to burn and linger throughout their wakefulness and rest (*mengusung alang-alang ke tiap tidur dan jaga kita*). Therefore, as a subject whose conscience is open and capable of perceiving the deeper reality of entrapment, he, along with students, the masses, and the people, drives resistance (liberation), while warning the rulers, "*Alang-alang itu tanpa pernah penat / Dialah hati nurani rakyat / Pohonkan jangan terlewat / Jika (penguasa) tak ingin tersengat!*" (14th stanza).

Transcendence: Surrendering to the "Hyang", Standing on "Bismillah"

Kuntowijoyo (2013: 10) explains that prophetic literature is literature that absorbs, expresses, and simultaneously provides direction for reality. Prophetic literature is dialectical literature, meaning it confronts reality, offering social and cultural evaluations and critiques in a civilized manner. Therefore, prophetic literature is involved in the history of humanity and cannot be detached from reality. The underlying argument for this is the necessity of *hablun minallah wa hablun minannas* (Qur'an, 3:112), which, when applied to the humanistic task of prophetic literature, requires this literature to expand the inner space of humanity and to awaken both divine and human consciousness (Kuntowijoyo, 2013: 14-16).

The aspects of humanization and liberation in the poem "*Alang-Alang*" by Wachid, as discussed earlier, reveal that the voice of the lyrical "I" is that of a subject involved in human issues (*hablun minannas*): striving to reposition the conscience of the people in the face of power, while also liberating them from various constraints strategically imposed by the authorities, such as the decadence and depoliticization of students, the "metaphysical" impunity or the legal legitimacy of violence and human rights violations against the people, and the hypocritical and corrupt nature of power.

In the final section of this discussion, the analysis will focus on the voice of the lyrical "I" that involves God or divine consciousness in the humanitarian struggle it engages in alongside the people (*hablun minallah*). This subsection will analyze the

fundamental prophetic ethics of transcendence articulated by the lyrical "I" in the poem "*Alang-Alang*".

The chains, various forms of repression, and the indifference of the authorities toward the conscience of the people (represented by *alang-alang*) are depicted by the lyrical "I" as causing the people to protest, challenge, and resist the power of the King. This resistance is most vividly illustrated in stanza 11: *Alang-alang di pundak mahasiswa / Jadilah bendera / Alang-alang mengakar di tangan rakyat semesta / Menjelma senjata / Alang-alang berupa pena tajam, menari-nari / Di kubah parlemen / Tatkala orang-orang dalamnya sentimen / Tak bicara, dan tanpa cahaya / Tak taktik bersama batin samodra / Tak merekam desir alang-alang / Yang nyanyikan hening dalam sembah / Hyang.*

A significant symbol appears in this stanza, namely the presence of "*Hyang*" in the final line of stanza 11. It seems that the resistance of the lyrical "I" and the people is accompanied by an act of surrender to "*Hyang*", as it is stated that *orang-orang yang di kubah parlemen abai dan tak merekam desir alang-alang yang nyanyikan hening dalam sembah Hyang*. "*Alang-alang*", or the conscience of the people, despite being in a critical condition, is depicted—in silence—as still "whispering" worship to The Divine (*Hyang*). The concept of "*Hyang*" in Javanese or Balinese tradition is typically preceded by the term "*Sang*." The word "*Sang*" itself carries a meaning of personalization, while "*Hyang*" refers to a noble spiritual existence that deserves honorable respect (Suparta, 2022; Nata & Gunawijaya, 2021).

The act of worship to *Hyang* performed by the lyrical "I" is an act of placing the noble entity of God, who possesses power beyond anything, above all the efforts they make. Divine consciousness is clearly shown at this point, and another form of divine consciousness—more specifically referring to a particular religion—reappears in the final stanza: *Bismillah, Indonesia / Alang-alang itu tanpa pernah penat / Dialah hati nurani rakyat / Pohonkan jangan terlewat / Jika (penguasa) tak ingin tersengat.*

The symbol "*Bismillah*," which is associated with Islam, evidently serves as a foundation for the resistance/threat against the arbitrary power of the King faced by the lyrical "I" and the people of Indonesia. "*Bismillah*" or "*Basmallah*" literally means "In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful." Within this phrase lies a lesson that whoever begins any task—particularly one within the realm of virtue and not immorality—should invoke the name of Allah, thereby establishing a strong connection between the speaker and the Creator. The addition of the attributes "*ar-Rahman*" and "*ar-Rahim*" emphasizes the immense mercy of Allah, reminding the speaker not to despair, no matter how heavy or difficult the situation may be (Shihab, 2012: 6).

"*Bismillah*," which is part of Surah Al-Fatihah, is also believed by some scholars of exegesis to be a phrase that encapsulates the entire content of the Qur'an. Al-Fatihah, regarded as a divine guide, is also called *Ummu Al-Qur'an* and *Ummu Al-Kitab* because it is the parent of all verses in the Qur'an, with *Bismillah* being its essence (Shihab, 2012: 3; Rachman, 2010: 23-27; Saleem, 2018). This means that by relying on "*Bismillah*," in addition to hoping for a strong connection between himself and his Creator, the lyrical "I" also considers the Qur'an—as *Al-Huda* (guidance)—whose

essence is captured in the phrase *Bismillah*, as his guide while confronting the authoritarian power of the New Order regime. He understands that true struggle, as detailed by Al-Ghazali (2016: 198), involves having a sincere intention for the sake of Allah, exerting all efforts, being willing to sacrifice one's soul, elevating the words of Allah above all else, avoiding overstepping boundaries, and continually engaging in remembrance (*dhikr*) throughout the struggle.

In short, it can be said that with his surrender to "*Hyang*" and his firm grounding in "*Bismillah*," the lyrical "I" then, without hesitation, moves alongside the people to fight for their conscience (*alang-alang*), challenging the hypocritical rulers to listen once again to the matters that have long been ignored. The lyrical "I" strongly threatens in 12th stanza: *Bismillah, Indonesia / Alang-alang itu tanpa pernah penat / Dialah hati nurani rakyat / Pohonkan jangan terlewat / Jika (penguasa) tak ingin tersengat!* He desires a paradigm shift in governance, from one controlled by the hypocritical and corrupt elites of the New Order, to a more democratic government that better considers the conscience of the Indonesian people. This is what the lyrical "I" refers to as the "*pelangi demokrasi*" (rainbow democracy) in the poem.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the poem "*Alang-Alang*" by Abdul Wachid B.S. using prophetic literary thought, the following conclusions can be drawn. The lyrical "I" in the poem addresses the position of the people's conscience being bound in the face of state oppression during the final years of the New Order regime (1998-1999). The Indonesian people from various background are depicted as striving to break free from the constraints strategically imposed by the New Order to perpetuate its power. Through the narrative, which carries a tone of protest throughout the poem, the lyrical "I"—who has an open conscience and is able to perceive the reality of the people's oppression on a deeper level—desires for the people, encompassed in the identity of Indonesian citizens (WNI), to be returned to their inherent nature as human beings with conscience or soul (*nafs*), be restored to their rightful position (humanization), not merely treated as objects in the state's political structure.

The bound strategically imposed by the New Order to control the people were implemented through both physical (violence) and ideological (mental) means, such as: the decadence and depoliticization of the student movement and the military's dominance over it (2nd, 3rd, and 11th stanzas); the legality of violence and human rights violations (3rd and 5th stanzas); and the hypocritical and corrupt exercise of power by the elites (3rd, 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, and 12th stanzas). It was these conditions that motivated the lyrical "I" and the people to raise their voices, protesting, criticizing, challenging, or demonstrating (liberation), while also being accompanied by an awareness of the power of God (*Sang Hyang* or Allah Swt.) that transcends human capabilities (transcendence). With surrender to "*Hyang*" and the firm foundation in "*Bismillah*," the speaker then moved, without hesitation, alongside the people, fighting for their conscience (*alang-alang*), challenging the hypocritical rulers to listen to the issues that had been ignored. The speaker firmly threatens the rulers because they

desire a paradigm shift in power—from one previously dominated by the hypocritical and corrupt New Order elites to a democratic government that gives greater consideration to the conscience of the Indonesian people. This is what the speaker refers to as "*pelangi demokrasi*" (rainbow democracy) in the poem.

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