

Review Article

CRITIQUE OF DEVELOPMENT THEORIES AND THE FEATURES OF ISLAMIC DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims to critique development theories and examine the features of Islamic development. The research method is descriptive-analytical and is based on library resources. Development is not a purely economic phenomenon; rather, many non-economic factors are involved. Moreover, achieving development is not possible through imitation or blind following; rather, it depends on conscious movement guided by identity-forming and identity-defining elements. The findings indicate that, unlike modernization theory, dependency theory accepts an exogenous model of development. This model has an external origin and orientation and is essentially imitative, derived from developed countries. In this model, little attention is paid to the internal conditions and circumstances of society, and by adopting the standards of capitalist systems, efforts are directed toward achieving Western-style development. This school has also faced numerous criticisms, including that by descending into rhetoric and sloganizing at a high level of abstraction, it has lost its scientific credibility. Furthermore, by placing excessive emphasis on external factors, it neglects the role of internal driving forces such as class struggles and the state. It presents an inaccurate image of peripheral societies as helpless and constrained. Consequently, new dependency theories have emerged, in which dependency is viewed as a harmful factor on the development path. However, unlike earlier studies, these theories do not emphasize a general model of dependency, nor do they focus solely on external factors, the purely economic nature of dependency, or the one-sided nature of underdevelopment.

INTRODUCTION

Development is a value-laden concept, as it encompasses all actions undertaken to guide society toward achieving an organized set of collective and individual living conditions that are considered desirable in relation to certain values (Dirbaz & Dadgar, 2007: 15). In past decades, development was perceived merely as the sustained increase in per capita Gross Domestic Product, accompanied by structural transformation of the economy and an overall improvement in living standards for large segments of the population. However, it is now widely acknowledged that development is more than modernization and economic growth; it also includes social justice, political freedoms, and the preservation of indigenous values and traditions (Akhtar Shahr, 2007: 137). Even development economists—who primarily consider their field within the domain of economics—acknowledge that development is not solely an economic phenomenon. Beyond improvements in income and production, it clearly entails fundamental changes in the structure of social and administrative institutions, as well as in public attitudes and, in many cases, cultural and intellectual beliefs. Therefore, when discussing development, all these dimensions must be taken into account.

Development is a process that provides the conditions for the flourishing of diverse human capacities. In this process, by optimally using various resources, a suitable foundation for comprehensive growth is created. As a result, individuals in society follow an appropriate evolutionary path. In other words, development is a long-term, comprehensive (structural and qualitative) transformation within a social system called society, aimed at meeting its expanding needs through rational methods to the extent possible. In short, development means a transition from the existing situation to a desirable one in a comprehensive manner (Dadgar, 2008).

Whether in relation to the transformations of European societies after the Renaissance and the Industrial Revolution, or to the transition of Third World countries from traditional to modern societies, development is a term used to describe the transformations of the modern era. These transformations have led to the emergence of interconnected modern institutions, such as the nation-state, national army, market economy, and modern technology, resulting in increased material welfare. In the second half of the twentieth century, Western researchers established development studies as an independent field aimed at identifying the economic prospects of Third World countries following decolonization and independence. Subsequently, development economics emerged as a branch of economics, evolving from earlier studies known as colonial economics (Dalirpour, 2010: 1). By the 1990s, these researchers realized that economic analysis alone was insufficient to address issues such as political effectiveness and educational development (Gillis, 2000). As a result, development studies evolved into an interdisciplinary field, integrating political and economic perspectives. Since then, such studies have increasingly taken on a multidisciplinary nature, being examined across various fields of social sciences, including political science and economics.

In this context, the right to development is process-related. A country may develop through different processes. For instance, there may be a surge in Gross Domestic Product, yet wealthier groups—having greater access to financial and human capital—may disproportionately benefit, while poorer groups fall behind. Similarly, industrialization, export growth, and increased access to global markets may occur, but income gains may not be distributed across all sectors, leaving smaller or informal sectors increasingly marginalized. Therefore, this study, using a descriptive-analytical method and library resources, seeks to critique development

theories and examine the features of Islamic development.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE STUDY

Development

Development is the Persian equivalent of the term 'Development,' derived from the verb 'develop'. According to Webster's dictionary, it means gradual growth in various forms, progressively becoming more complete, larger, and better. Two points are essential in defining development: first, regardless of how it is defined or from which framework it is derived, development is a value-laden concept with normative assumptions, because it involves the selection, ordering, and allocation of values and norms within society. Thus, development inherently implies a goal and refers to a desirable state of society at a given time, possessing a value-based, normative, and relative nature (Abbasi, 2004: 25). Consequently, development is not merely an economic phenomenon; rather, many non-economic factors are involved. Moreover, development is not achieved through imitation or blind emulation of others; rather, it depends on a conscious process grounded in identity-forming and identity-defining elements (Arabi & Lashkari, 2004: 14).

In economic development, variables are considered qualitatively; therefore, development essentially reflects qualitative changes within a society, which may manifest in economic growth. Economic development thus refers to qualitative transformations in the structure of a society's economy and those fundamental changes that affect Gross National Product (Khatib, 1994: 15). As a branch of economics, economic development emerged in the mid-twentieth century among social science and economic researchers. Despite its relatively short history, it has attracted considerable attention due to widespread interest in national progress, which has led to extensive scholarly debate and literature. In general, development refers to the rational, material, and spiritual evolution of the cultural, economic, political, and social subsystems within a country's socio-cultural system.

Development Theories

Traditional or Conservative Perspective

Many of the most prominent economists, both past and present, fall within this perspective. These scholars are often from advanced industrial countries. However, particularly since the twentieth century—and especially after World War II—they have focused on the development of underdeveloped countries, proposing numerous development models and strategies. Among the proponents of this view are Arthur Lewis, Ragnar Nurkse, Rostow, Paul Rosenstein-Rodan, Colin Clark, Michael Buchanan, Simon Kuznets, Henry Bruton, and others.

According to this group, the foundation of development is economic growth, and the goal is to achieve the level of advanced industrial countries. Generally, the characteristics they attribute to underdeveloped countries include the following: a large portion of the population living in rural areas; a significant share of income spent on food; low incomes leading to small and limited markets and consequently low levels of specialization; scarcity of capital; low per capita production and productivity; limited infrastructure; significant disparities between urban

and rural areas; low life expectancy; inadequate education, healthcare, and medical services; widespread illiteracy; underdeveloped economic and social institutions; and the use of outdated, traditional technologies. Additionally, birth and death rates are typically higher than in developed countries, and population growth often exceeds optimal levels. Each of these factors can be both a cause and a consequence of others, creating a vicious cycle that results in a persistent state of underdevelopment. According to economists of this perspective, this cycle must somehow be broken. Growth-oriented approaches, rooted in classical and neoclassical economics, emphasize economic growth at the expense of social justice, poverty reduction, and inequality (Latifi, 2009: 75).

Modernization Perspective (Modernism)

Modernization approaches, influenced by evolutionary sociological schools, advocate structural transformation aimed at converting traditional societies into modern ones, encompassing political, cultural, social, and economic changes. After its emergence in the 1950s, this theory faced continuous criticism from competing perspectives for about two decades. However, since the 1980s, modernization theory has experienced a revival. Events such as the collapse of the Soviet Union and the disintegration of the Eastern Bloc contributed to this resurgence. Nevertheless, the theory has undergone revisions and modifications in its newer form. In contrast to earlier formulations, tradition and modernity are no longer viewed as inherently opposed concepts. Not everything traditional is considered negative; in some cases, the positive and constructive aspects of tradition are acknowledged. Therefore, instead of relying on abstract, universal laws, these approaches emphasize case-based studies across countries to formulate development models. As a result, multiple and diverse paths to development are recognized. Furthermore, while earlier versions largely ignored external factors, the revised modernization perspective gives them some consideration. However, internal factors remain the primary variables shaping development (Akhtar Shahr, 2007: 75).

Marxist and Leftist (Radical) Perspectives

The Marxist and leftist approach to development encompasses a range of old and new Marxist perspectives, from the revolutionary transition to a socialist society to the non-capitalist path of growth and dependency theory, and contemporary critical sociological readings (the Frankfurt School). There are many diverse and even conflicting views within this perspective. There may be many differences among development scholars of this perspective in terms of philosophy, economic worldview, and other areas, but the basis of their views is as follows: In their view, development is a process that eliminates colonization and exploitation, raises society's standard of living, and reduces disparities. The difference between social groups, between individuals, between men and women, between intellectual work and manual work, between the north of the city and the south of the city, between the city and the countryside, and so on. It is a process that not only tries to raise the level of specialization, but also makes it possible for everyone. It raises per capita income, per capita production, and labor productivity, but not at the cost of a division of labor and excessive specialization that keep the masses in the same bad situation as before. Universal and accessible education and healthcare must be developed in a way that can raise the standard of living of the entire society. Economic growth is desirable, but the priority is the fair and equitable redistribution of wealth and income,

meeting the basic needs of the majority of the population, and combating absolute poverty. If there is no choice between these two, growth must give way to meeting basic needs. The radical perspective sees economic development as being linked to the political and social structure of societies. In this perspective, the main obstacles to the development of societies are colonization, neo-colonization, dependent capitalism, dependent commercial bourgeoisie, and the like. The well-known development scholars of this perspective are: Paul Baran, Maurice Dobb, André Gunder Frank, Celso Forte da, dos Santos, Jeffrey Curry, Samira Min, Cardoso, and... (Latifi, 2009: 80). Mainly, this theory is based on four assumptions:

- The economy and society in much of the developing world are largely shaped by the fact that these countries have been integrated into the global economy primarily as producers of raw materials and consumers of industrial products.
- The economic and political power of the developed world has perpetuated this division of labor.
- This persistent integration into the global economy leads to serious distortions in the domestic economies of the Third World.
- The consequences of this economic problem extend into the social and political spheres as well (Naraq, 1991: 178–183; Giddens, 1991: 570–571; Abercrombie et al., 1988: 111–112; Nasiri, 2000: 32).

Liberal and Neoliberal Perspectives

Liberal and neoliberal approaches that advocate human-centered development emphasize environmental protection and are mainly presented as advocating human development and sustainable development (Zahedi, 2007: 110). Economic liberals believed in the subordination of politics to economics, both in theory and in practice. Smith believed that markets automatically tend to expand and satisfy human needs. His central beliefs were based on the individual ideological actor as the basic unit of political economy analysis, the belief in the possibility of progress, and the assumption of mutual benefit and the positive-sum game. He presented the market as the main source of progress and cooperation. Ricardo paid attention to the mechanisms at work in this self-organizing market and formulated the law of comparative advantage. In simple terms, the law of comparative advantage proposes that everyone should produce and trade goods in which they have a comparative advantage over others. Ricardo argued that if this law were followed, free trade would benefit everyone. In this situation, free trade makes specialization possible and increases efficiency (Frieden and Lake, 2002: 118). Liberals paint a picture of a free market in which everyone, including producers and consumers, benefits. Exchanges in this market are voluntary and free, so there is no conflict, and as a result, no need for government intervention. Liberals extend this model to the international level and relations between states and consider cooperation between them possible.

According to the neoliberal perspective, the economy—based on market mechanisms and the principles of liberalism, and driven by technological advances arising from competition and innovation in the free market—is moving toward a global economy. An important point of neoliberalism is that the globalization of the economy will lead to improvements and increased welfare worldwide, including in poor countries.

Integrated Development Model

The integrated development model refers to the outcome of a continuous, comprehensive process across all dimensions, encompassing and coordinating the economic, social, political, and cultural aspects of a society. This type of development is technically and environmentally appropriate, economically and politically justifiable, and socially and culturally desirable (Lahsaiizadeh, 2008: 89).

The expanding core model of capitalism contains a set of values and beliefs regarding the nature of economic development and the desirability and feasibility of its implementation, emphasizing the fundamental role of increasing savings and investment levels in the process of economic growth and the necessity of changing class distribution over resources, which determines savings as a factor in national income growth.

Neo-Marxists have examined the harms of global capitalism and, beyond the economy, have addressed inequalities in society. They have proposed a model based on the idea that economic underdevelopment is a process resulting from the continuous transfer of economic surplus from peripheral countries to the economies of developed capitalist countries. As a result, the average per capita income of poor countries decreases, their capital accumulation declines, and the reinvestment of surplus resources at the national level is reduced. These unequal relations, initially imposed by force, hinder the development of these countries and eliminate the incentive to invest in them.

The Maoist model is based on self-reliance, decentralization, opposition to bureaucracy and elitism, discipline, collective goals, extraordinary motivations, and mass participation in all aspects of economic and social activities.

The neoclassical development model is based on the belief that economic inequality is a source of motivation for economic activity and is of great importance, while also valuing political and economic freedom and asserting that the market mechanism is more effective than government planning in allocating resources efficiently (Hamzepour, 2010: 83–84).

Critique of Development Theories

Modernization School

The modernization school is the product of several historical events: the emergence of the United States as a superpower, the expansion of the global communist movement, and the experience of dividing the colonies of European imperial powers in the Third World into multiple countries. In other words, the modernization school was formed with the support of the United States to strengthen Third World countries through its means and consequences, enabling them to stand against communism (Badie, 1994: p. 56). The modernization school is the product of two theories: first, evolutionism, which holds that development and evolution are inevitable, that progress is positive and valuable, and that social change is gradual rather than revolutionary.

Smelser viewed modernization in terms of structural differentiation between modern and non-modern societies; for example, the family operates traditionally in one and formally and complexly in the other. The resolution of this structural differentiation is possible through the integration and harmonization of the two; however, this integration and harmonization is not always properly achieved due to factors such as value conflicts, and therefore social

disturbances such as political violence and guerrilla warfare occur.

According to Rostow, in the process of growth from a traditional society to a mass-consumption society, there are five major stages: traditional society, preconditions for take-off, such as political revolution and capital accumulation; take-off; movement toward maturity; and the age of mass consumption.

From Coleman's perspective, the rules of modernization consist of structures such as the differentiation of political competition from the executive structure, the secularization of political culture and political equality, and the enhancement of the political system's capabilities, such as efficiency and political participation. In this case, a less developed society can overcome crises of national identity, political legitimacy, lack of influence, social participation, lack of cohesion, and economic distribution (Robertson, 2001: p. 251).

The most important early studies of modernization include:

McClelland states that progress results from strong motivation. This motivation can be measured through projections at the national and general levels. Those who possess stronger motivation achieve greater development. The motivation for achievement is rooted in family upbringing and must be extended to managers, employers, and politicians.

Inkeles believes that development requires modern individuals who possess characteristics such as openness to new experiences, independence of judgment and action, belief in science, mobility orientation, use of long-term planning, and participation in civil politics. According to him, the formation of modern individuals depends on formal education (such as schools) and informal education (such as factories).

Bellah, in his studies, sought to determine the existence or absence of a relationship between religion and progress in Japan. He found that despite Japan's religious plurality, they share a single essence: a Japanese spirit. This religious spirit has influenced economic growth in three ways: directly, through the sanctification of effort and emphasis on asceticism; indirectly, through the political system, such as emphasis on self-sufficiency, discipline, and unity; rejection of laziness; condemnation of extravagance; and strengthening of loyalty.

In response to the relationship between democracy and economic growth, Lipset argues that democracy contributes to economic growth in various ways; for example, it leads to development, expands education, strengthens solidarity, prevents extremism, and contributes to a more equitable distribution of wealth and industrial development. Political development takes shape accordingly.

Criticisms of the Modernization School

Why must Third World countries necessarily follow the path of Western countries to achieve development? These critics oppose the superiority of Western values over those of the Third World. Emphasizing that the only development path is following the West eliminates the possibility of exploring alternative paths. All modernization models are optimistic; however, after several decades of Third World countries following Western models, they have all become poorer. There is not always a contradiction between tradition and modernity, and sometimes traditions even facilitate the entry of modern values. The research of modernization

scholars is general and abstract, and their assumptions go beyond time and place. From the perspective of neo-Marxists, the modernization school is nothing more than a Cold War ideology. Thus, it has become a justification for United States interventions in the Third World. The modernization school has been criticized for neglecting the important factor of external domination in underdevelopment.

Following the growing seriousness of these criticisms among Western modernization theorists, new modernization studies emerged that, despite their similarities, differ significantly from earlier modernization theories. The most important new schools in modernization theory include:

Wang (Kinship in Management): Early modernization researchers viewed economic growth in China as conditional on Chinese families abandoning traditional values; however, Yang argues that the negative effects of traditional values on China's economy have been exaggerated. Yang demonstrates that paternalistic management, familial recruitment, and family ownership have had positive effects on economic development in Hong Kong. All of these are referred to as kinship, which has three main characteristics: centralization in decision-making, high self-sufficiency and independence, and high flexibility for change.

Davis (Revisiting Japanese Religion): According to Davis, modernization theorists have made several mistakes in explaining the relationship between religion and development. Religion is a protective force with positive effects across different sectors. Civilization leads to universal secularization, and Japanese culture is a factor in that country's development. By rejecting these three assumptions, Davis proposes a new theory, "barriers," which holds that traditional societies, in the face of the overwhelming advance of capitalist values, construct barriers to protect themselves from disorder and to achieve progress.

Dependency School

From the United States' perspective, the modernization school examines the phenomenon of development, whereas from the Third World's perspective, the dependency school examines development. This school emerged in Latin America as a reaction to the failure of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America program, known as "ECLA," in the early 1960s. The ECLA program led to increased poverty, the formation of authoritarian domestic governments, and greater external domination.

Prebisch, as one of the former heads of ECLA, proposed in a document known as the ECLA Declaration that government purchases of capital goods should accompany the process of industrialization in Latin American countries; however, Latin American governments showed reluctance toward it, and this led to the failure of the ECLA program and paved the way for the emergence of the dependency school. Another intellectual source of the dependency school is neo-Marxism, which was influenced by the victories of the Chinese and Cuban revolutions. This school differed from classical Marxism; among its differences were that the Third World is currently prepared for revolution, and that revolution is not carried out by workers but by guerrilla forces.

Frank initially criticized modernization theory and pointed out its weakness as an inward-looking development model for the Third World. According to Frank, Third World countries cannot follow the Western path because the West has no experience of colonialism. In contrast,

the main cause of underdevelopment in the Third World is colonialism. Colonial powers, by transferring the economic surplus of Third World countries, reversed the growth cycle in those countries. Frank also believed that the development of metropolitan centers is conditional upon their economic position. Satellites develop only if they maintain their ties with the metropole, and with the metropole's recovery from crisis, satellite development ceases. The most backward areas in the Third World are those most closely linked to the metropole (Pey, 1971: p. 53).

Critique of Traditional Dependency Studies

Methodology:

The dependency school has lost its scientific credibility by descending to mere rhetoric and slogan-making.

The dependency perspective is highly abstract, and the homogenization of all its proponents is problematic.

The analysis of dependency in Third World countries is incapable of precise spatial and temporal explanation.

On the concept of dependency:

With excessive emphasis on external factors, the role of internal driving forces—such as class struggles and the state—has been neglected, leading to an inaccurate image of passive, constrained peripheries. This reflects an exaggeration of external power, whereas in reality, all the system's driving forces do not originate solely from the center.

Features of Islamic Development

According to religious teachings, a person without a livelihood does not have the Hereafter. It appears that wealth, power, and worldly possessions (in other words, development), if not accompanied by divine intention and not considered as a means of attaining the Hereafter, will be regarded as evil and harmful; conversely, if they are used for reaching the Hereafter and proximity to God, they are good and desirable. Accordingly, the world and worldly possessions are not inherently good or bad; what matters is the individual's intention toward the world and material wealth.

The Supreme Leader stated on 27.08.2001 (Iranian calendar): “Of course, I believe that our economic sectors, if they want people to become religious, must provide people’s livelihood; because ‘one who has no livelihood has no Hereafter.’ If government economic sectors provide people’s livelihood, people will become religious” (Nouri, 2003: p. 75). Some have attributed religion to backwardness and secularism to progress and development. It can be said that the factor of development is the use of rationality or the lack of it. Religion itself flourishes through reason, and without it is incapable of fulfilling its mission as it should (Sahlabadi, 2008). “In his view (Shahid Motahhari), not every type of religion is compatible with development, just as not every meaning, concept, model, or development strategy is compatible with universal religion. According to him, a religion that considers a contradiction between the world and the afterlife, or sees science and religion, revelation and reason, as incompatible, can never lead to development. Likewise, a development that leads humans toward irreligiosity and forgetfulness

of God, and whose outcome is the marginalization of divine and revelatory teachings, cannot be compatible with any religion” (Asghari, 2006: p. 143).

Regarding the concept of development, two meanings can be considered: one refers to the external reality of development, and the other refers to the ideal state of development. The development imposed by Westerners on Third World countries is mostly superficial, whereas the ideal development we should pursue is deeper, or, in Qur’anic terms, growth and transcendence. Ideal development is that which raises the level of thinking and culture of individuals above their level of instrumental utility (Asghari, 2006: p. 143).

Religious, spiritual, and value-based development can constitute a part of development; indeed, in ideal development, which is our objective, the central axis of development is the spiritual and moral growth of human beings. Development that is not aligned with the order of creation and human existential structure, and that does not enhance human servitude and devotion to God, is not true or ideal development (Rafiipour, 1998: p. 7).

One indicator and criterion in the Islamic development model is increasing people’s intellectual capacity. The second and third are eliminating social inequality and increasing social cohesion. The fourth is avoiding authoritarianism of opinion (ibid.). If an Islamic government seeks to plan for human growth and perfection, it must primarily focus on the spiritual and moral dimensions of human existence and first remove obstacles that hinder spiritual transcendence toward God. One of these obstacles is material poverty. Therefore, first, eliminating material poverty is a secondary—not primary—goal, and second, its aim is achieving social justice rather than development.

The Holy Qur’an states: “But as for one who transgresses and prefers the life of this world, surely Hell will be his abode. But as for one who fears the greatness of his Lord and restrains the soul from desire, Paradise will be his refuge” (Al-Nazi’at: 35–40). It also states: “O you who believe, let not your wealth and your children divert you from the remembrance of God. And whoever does that, they are the losers” (Al-Munafiqun: 9).

CONCLUSION

The issue of development, as one of the most important topics widely discussed in planning institutions and centers of countries, is among the subjects extensively examined in many fields of sociology, in particular, and the social sciences in general. Development is not merely about material aspects such as income, unemployment, and inequality; rather, it is a multidimensional process capable of encompassing both material and spiritual domains. However, the material dimension can be considered a tool for achieving higher goals for human beings. The concept of development includes the progress and advancement of society in all dimensions of life. Therefore, in development literature, economic development, political development, social development, cultural development, and human development are discussed. Initially, it was assumed that societal progress depended solely on economic growth; however, later it was observed that alongside economic growth and development, societies also require other necessities such as fair income distribution, flourishing of human capacities and personality, physical and mental health, increased life expectancy, establishment of social equality, realization of freedom, formation of human relations free from domination, and ultimately the realization of a civil and humane society.

In the 1960s and 1970s, some sociologists realized that modernization approaches proposed by

development economists could not solve the problems of underdeveloped countries. Therefore, they sought an alternative solution and presented the dependency approach—which in fact represents a rejection of dependency itself—in the form of balanced development models, self-reliant development, dependent development, and new development models. The main belief of dependency theorists was that studying the development of Third World societies as an independent and separate subject has little value. Dependency theorists, by criticizing modernization theories, argued that underdeveloped societies are part of a broader global social system. They do not believe in development through successive stages and argue that these societies are not in a stage that today's developed countries once passed through. Underdevelopment is not the result of a society's internal economic, political, social, and cultural characteristics; rather, it is largely the historical outcome of past relations and ongoing economic interactions between developed and underdeveloped countries. Therefore, the main problems in underdeveloped countries are external rather than internal.

The dependency theory, in contrast to modernization theory, accepts an exogenous model of development. This model has an external origin and orientation and is an imitative model derived from developed countries. In this model, internal conditions and circumstances of society receive little attention, and development is pursued based on capitalist system models and by imitating Western development pathways. This school has also faced numerous criticisms, including the claim that it has lost its scientific status by descending into rhetoric, slogan-making, and excessive abstraction. It has also been criticized for overemphasizing external factors while neglecting internal driving forces such as class struggles and the role of the state, thereby presenting an inaccurate image of passive and constrained peripheries. Therefore, new dependency theories emerged, recognizing dependency as a harmful factor in the development process. However, unlike earlier studies, these newer approaches do not emphasize a general model of dependency, external determinants, the purely economic nature of dependency, or the one-sided nature of underdevelopment. In these newer interpretations, the state in the Third World is no longer considered a purely dependent and subordinate entity but rather an active actor that cooperates with both local and international capital.

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