



DEDUCING EPISTEMOLOGIES FROM PRE-COLONIAL AFRICAN COHESIVENESS FOR CONTEMPORARY ACADEMIC, CITIZENSHIP RECOGNITION, AND SUSTAINABLE ALLOCATION

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Abstract:

The current paradigm shift in the world toward promoting reduction for civic purposes and sustainable development gravitates between philosophies of cultural revivalism and cultural relativism. The ancient axiological debate between universal eternal forms/ideas and dynamic modernity world view theories is immortal and inevitable given contemporary African knowledge-power-politics nexus favouring revitalisation of African indigenous knowledge systems for citizenship recognition, sustainable allocation and empowerment. Historically, citizenship, community empowerment, good governance, democracy, scientific inquiry, organised management and other developmental principles were regarded by some scholars of Western origins. History is constantly changing, new facts are found about old events, and old facts are reinterpreted. Revisiting ancient and contemporary texts using critical analysis in tandem with qualitative philosophical inquiry paradigms, this study questioned ethnocentrism, distorted perspectives and relativity of ancient pre-colonial African epistemologies implications in today's educational civic responsibilities. Research findings indicated applicability of ancient pre-colonial epistemologies today and in the future given the cumulative dialectic essence of knowledge. Pre-colonial epistemologies can play significant contributions in multiple education aims of responsible, self-reliant, productive participation and reflective citizenship. Given the infinitum potentiality of pre-colonial epistemology implications, this research recommended adaptation of pre-colonial pedagogies into worldwide formal contemporary education systems. However, mainstreaming ancient pre-colonial epistemologies will be a challenge without decolonising and deconstructing contemporary pro-Western teacher education systems.

Keywords: epistemologies; pre-colonial African cohesiveness; contemporary academic; citizenship recognition and sustainable allocation

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1. Introduction

Ancient philosophers debated the question of education as a reflection of universal truths, ideas and forms or beliefs of different contextual experiences particular to places and time demands. Those who argued that, the world does not change, it is mental and unchanging, made of permanent eternal non-tangible matter, universal values that are absolute, today are known as Idealists (Schiappa, 2003; May, 2000; Scott, 2000). According to Idealism thesis, the key to sustainable contemporary education and effectively addressing African problems lies in historical dialectical implications. While those who disagreed to the Idealists say the world is made up of physical ever-changing matter and experiences, reality is objective and exists independently of humans became known as Realists (Guttek, 2005; Bruell, 1999; Stauffer, 2001). In cognisance of Realism, Africa must forget about premodern past and plan for contemporary scientific and technological dynamics. In agreement with neither Idealism nor Realism some philosophers today (Hountondji, 1996; Gyekye, 1997, Ciaffa, 2008; Ornstein et al., 2011) discuss the implication of the oldest metaphysical debate by asking questions that reveal a conflict between two broad perspectives. These perspectives are: 'Universalism' in the sense that all humans have a historical background based on common human culture of values and norms, termed by some as, 'Cultural Revivalism' or Antimodernist or Premodern (Gyekye, 1997) in support of revitalisation of African cultural norms. Critics of Revivalism are 'Cultural Relativists' sometimes known as 'Modernists' (Hountondji, 1996; Null, 2003; Trifonas and Peters, 2004) who call for a clean break with the premodern past in support of contemporary scientific needs which differ from culture to culture and time to time.

These theories' implications are infinitum and immortal, relevant today in contemporary African education systems going through knowledge-power-politics deconstruction in favour of revitalising African indigenous knowledge systems. Their relevance become much alive when most Afrocentric scholars question the relevance of Westerncentric contemporary African education systems (Nasongo and Musungu, 2009), their responsibilities and contribution to social, economic and political sustainable development, cultivation of useful skills, citizenship recognition, and equity. Some Afrocentric scholars say African education and developmental challenges need a cultural revival approach (Senghor, 1995; Onyewuenyi, 1991; Owemomyela, 1991), while others say there is a need for modernization (Appiah, 1992; Hountondji, 1996; Levy-Bruhl, 1995). In this study both schools of thought given the mixed-breed nature of contemporary African education systems are seen as equally relevant to the research focus at hand. The relationship between tradition and modernity has been questioned in postcolonial African education analysis. Of much concern to this study given the debated relativity of Westernized African education systems is to question its adequacy and relevance in as far as self-identity, citizenship, communalism and actualisation is concerned since these are pillars of genuine sustainable education? Also to question if African education systems cannot learn by deducing epistemological

implications from their own world view, cultural heritage, and identity for meeting 21st century and beyond challenges? Also of relative concern is to question if African epistemologies are not dialectically in tandem with ever-changing educational paradigms and orientations?

2. Theoretical Framework

This study is motivated by the importance and rationality of history or historical dialectics. Many people directly or indirectly apply history theories in everyday living. According to (Brenton et al., 1984; Adler, 1996) *“Insofar as people are ignorant of their past, they are also ignorant of much of their present, for the one grows directly out of the other”* Often quoted cliché ‘History repeats itself’ is clear nonsense if taken literally. History does not literally repeat itself exactly, and the difference in details is always important. But history does exhibit general patterns, major themes dictated by common human needs and desires throughout human life span. The purpose of history is to explain how human beings came to be as what they are; why they find themselves in their present predicaments, how they achieved present triumphs or failure and where and how they are likely to be in the future. History changes by virtue of its existence. History also changes by virtue of the dynamics of its discipline. New facts are found about old events, new documents discovered. Old facts are reinterpreted, their meaning changed, both by the simple passage of time and discovery of new facts. Even though history is important this study doesn’t suggest people to become slaves of history either should they be divorced from their own culture and historical backgrounds. Rediscovering of oneself in terms of being literate in one’s culture doesn’t mean one should be illiterate or ignorant of modernism or other cultures. Hence, I argued in the introduction that both theories of Revivalism and Pre-modernism will be treated equally significant.

The study of Cultural Revivalism and Cultural Relativism dialectics as theories of educational philosophy is based on the relativity and implications of understanding history. Most of educational philosophy’s theories are based on the thoughts of people who lived in the past and could be argued as part and parcel of both Western or African philosophy history, because one can historically argue that in the beginning there was one and one gave birth to other or others. Historically, the later was denied as nonexistence by some Westerncentric scholars like Levy-Bruhl, Hume, Kant, Nietzsche, and Hegel, and others (Audi, 1999; Duignan, 2010; James, 2009). History has changed, new facts about and on African philosophy-indigenous knowledge systems have been discovered, old distorted and racially biased thoughts on the potentialities of pre-colonial epistemologies are reinterpreted and resurrected. The historical dimension of understanding the present and future requires a reflective mental orientation commensurate with critical analysis, not mere digging of past relics. Colonialism, European domination, exploitation, cultural devastation and imperialism, ethnocentrism rationalized under the guise of so called “civilizing mission” because of time dynamics, discovery of new facts and rational criticism is today being questioned?

True to the canons of history, today the historian writes quite differently of ancient Africa than historians did a hundred years ago, in part because society now permits open and rational criticism of epistemologies. This study seek to look at historical facts on African epistemologies and their implications today in contemporary academic, citizenship recognition and sustainable allocation based on the justification that universal truths, forms, and ideas are eternal. Also, on the fact that knowledge is cumulative, new discoveries and innovations are but an improvement of already existing epistemologies or a reinterpretation of nature.

3. Discussion

3.1 Universalism/Cultural Revivalism

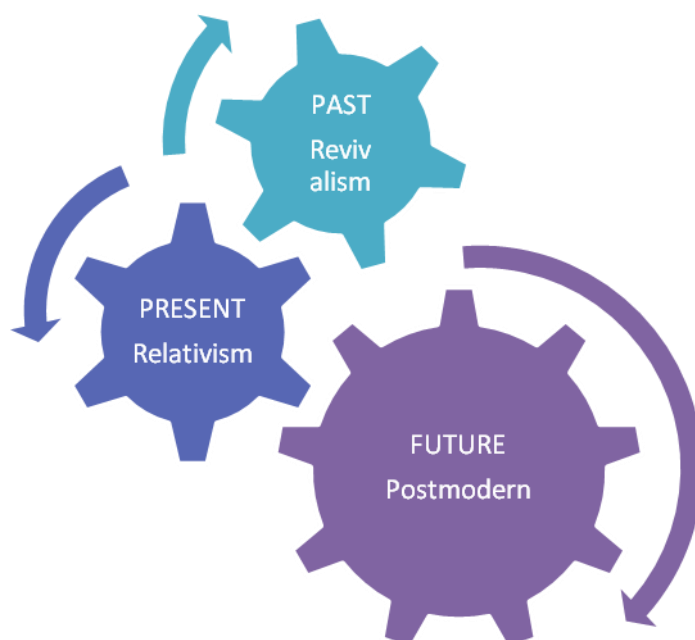


Figure 1: Illustrating the intertwined Universal dialectical relationship of the present to the past and the future

Greek philosophers borrowing from an Afrocentric perception, today called Ubuntu, of the unified world (James, 2009; Marah, 2006; Nicolaides, 2012) debated the question of whether education should reflect universal truths or reflect the beliefs of different peoples living at particular places and times. Plato argued that truth was unchanging. He debated and disagreed with Sophists who considered everything relative to time and circumstances. The issue is debated today by Afrocentric scholars (Wiredu, 2004) who think it is important for African schools to instil everlasting humanistic values, needs, common human characteristics and for learners to know who they are and where they come from. Universal truth and cultural relativism discourse is relevant in questioning contemporary African education ideological orientation such as: should contemporary African education trajectory be based on deducing

epistemologies from the past or on beliefs and values as they relate to different cultures, experiences, needs at different times and places.

According to several philosophy theories of education (Perennialism, Essentialism, Functionalism and Interactionism) in agreement to the universal school of thought, they argue that (Ornstein et al, 2011), there are ideas that make the essence of any existence everlasting and unchanging. As humans search for truth and beauty their quest according to Universalists will bring them to the same Platonic general idea and value *'...what is true and virtuous in the world is true and good in all places and at all times.'* *Public opinion polls, according to the Universal thesis, do not make nor change the truth. Universalists further suggest that although different races, ethnics and language groups see themselves as different people, they are members of the human family and thus share common hopes, humanistic values and rights"* (Audi, 1999, Stauffer, 2001; Bruell, 1999) embedded in the United Nations developmental programme vision 2030 agenda for sustainable development formulated in 2000 by 189 countries of the world.

According to the Universal thesis as Socrates, Plato and some conservative philosophers could argue that, relevant education should engage students in seeking answers to the great eternal and enduring answers to the great questions such as, 'what is true, good, and beautiful?' Education through Universal lenses always evolves out of historical and cultural contexts. Education is perceived as a bridge between the past, present and the future and as means by which the best of the heritage is transmitted to the new generation for its further progression. They further argue that, the natural and human worlds' forms at their most essential level do not change. In consideration of the universal thesis, teaching unchanging principles of existence is critical. All humans are rational beings and their minds need to be developed. Thus the cultivation of the intellect is the highest priority in a worthwhile education. Therefore, relevant curriculum at all times should focus on attaining cultural literacy, stressing student's growth in enduring disciplines. The loftiest accomplishments of humankind should be emphasized, dignity, honesty, hard work and handwork, useful skills, contribution to society, honesty, empathy, sympathy, the great works of literature and art, the laws or principles of science, should be the pinnacle foundation at all educational levels. The core of the curriculum is essential knowledge and skills and academic rigour complemented by character development. Schooling should be both practical and abstract, preparing students to become valuable reasoning members of society. There is no doubt and debate whether this kind of education proposed by Universalism is relevant or not, the key challenges today for African societies in achieving Universalism educational trajectories are, how to Universalise education, make it affordable and accessible by all, come up with dovetailed curriculum that caters for society's needs, address societal challenges, empower citizens to become contributive members, produce functional literate scholars compared to the criticised reading and writing examination-oriented bookish literacy. There is also the challenge of making sure that what is taught becomes practiced, in relation to vast qualitative and quantitative challenges.

3.2 Cultural Relativism

In reaction to the Universalists, Cultural relativists sometimes in agreement to Deconstructionism, Postcolonialism, Postmodernism, Progressivists and Existentialists (Ornstein et al., 2011) agree by questioning what is 'true, good and beautiful' by arguing that 'truth' is really a tentative knowledge claim that is relative to various groups living in particular places at different times. They further respond by saying society, culture, what is right or wrong is relative and ever-changing. Therefore human behaviour need to be flexible to adopt to social, economic, political and technological dynamics. Their views are based on the opinion that see education as a pragmatic process and tool involving both personal and societal considerations which are constantly affected and influenced by constant changes like dialectics, technological inventions, new discoveries about the world, politics, revolutions and evolutions. Relevant education following the ever-changing nature of the world should emphasize new ways of learning to prepare people to be efficient users of new technologies, invent newly needed medicines and come up with solutions to developing problems of the world. To Relativists it is more important for contemporary students to be modern than to ponder on questions about the true, the good and the beautiful that depend on individual taste and unanswerable. Therefore given the line of thought schooling today should be based on people's contemporary needs assumable, different from ancient or past societies, likely to be different from time to time and culture to culture.

In analysing both schools of thought this study agrees to both by arguing that, some human life essentials such as physiological needs especially looking at spiritual or non-material needs do not radically change. A human being from different cultures will never exist in a vacuum, all human beings are not at the top of the food chain they need to work and invent, change the environment to suit their needs even if those needs may differ through time, society even though made of diverse human interests, and life-styles, it is made of fundamental structures that need to be in co-ordination and collaboration for normalcy, human beings have same responsibilities throughout the world despite their facial, figurative and complexion differences or approaches and means to achieve development. However, some generation gaps may paint an artificial picture of human differences and needs, for example someone can argue that years ago computers were not invented. True may it be but computer utility and what consist of a computer concept, the need for technology itself including its purpose can never change. All societies whether ancient or contemporary needed and still need technological inventions to assist humans to enjoy living and being alive from the time the first human picked up a stone and turned it into a hammer and later on attached a handle to it. In other words education is needed by all human generations and its macro purpose will never change, however its access and supportive infrastructure may change. All societies need empowered and useful, skilful citizens, but how to achieve that for all citizen is a challenged today given the commercialised approach in contemporary education structures which were not in existence in pre-colonial societies. The burden today to most African education systems is how to provide adequate and

quality education for national building, inclusion, equity, integrating multi-cultural traditions, address cultural imperialism (Owuor, 2007; Mosley, 2000) in order for all to become responsible, participatory, reflective, and contributive to democracy, social, political and economic sustainable development. It is the burden of education at all schooling levels to address these universal human needs that cuts across generations and time.

Given the debated nature of the influence of education orientation between the Universalists and Relativists, the key question in this study is to examine and deduce how various periods of history created sustainable educational opportunities for good citizenship and limited education discrimination? Of much significant concern to this study is also to question, whether contemporary African education systems could deduce lessons from Universalism or Relativism to address current education systems challenges of productive citizenship. The researcher intends to answer these questions by revisiting pre-colonial education system principles in order to have a factual judgement on whether contemporary education systems cannot deduce significant epistemologies for sustainable citizenship recognition.

3.3 Pre-colonial Education System Principles

It is a general notion held by most Western or Westernized scholars that European adventures to Africa brought civilisation, development and modernity. This study in agreement to other Afrocentric scholars (Shizha, 2013; James, 2009; Maweu, 2011) disagrees to the general notion by arguing that prior to European filtration into Africa, Africans were socialised and educated in both formal and informal education structures, pre-colonial education systems emphasized arts, technology and invention, medicine, mining, food processing, agriculture, veterinary studies, textiles, architecture, construction and many other disciplines that are today found in modern formal education systems. With the advent of colonialism, pre-colonial formal and non-formal institutions of knowledge started disappearing due to deliberate cultural imperialism, repression, misinterpretation, devaluation and exclusion in Westernised education structures (Louw, 1926; Brubacher, 1929; Hughes and Velsen, 1955; Gelfand, 1956). Unfortunately for most African people, they came to believe their language, complexion, philosophies, clothing, food, natural (green) medicines, worldview of good citizenship, education systems, definitions of an educated person and democracy were 'inferior, pagan and evil'. Slowly they began to abandon their various philosophies, various ceremonies, customs, values, and assumed Western civilizations (Odhiambo, 2002; Woolman, 2001). Even today the process of mental colonisation after political independence still prevails in most African people's rationality and perceptions of the world. Lost pride, self-clear-identity, confidence and self-actualisation-esteem is today still not depicted in most African education systems' curricula structures.

The burden of African postcolonial education systems is to reclaim indigenous voices (Asante, 1987; Ciaffa, 2008; Mazrui, 1993; Maweu, 2011) through formal schooling deconstruction, internationalisation and advertisement of African inventions

and epistemologies through research and academic dialogue collaborations. However, collaborations can never be successful at global level if the ordinary citizen is not decolonised and empowered through formal education systems to rediscover the truth of self-identity and restoration of identity pride. Formalising African indigenous epistemologies can not only be seen as restating the former glory of African indigenous intelligence but as a process of community building and promoting confidence in all citizen to look into themselves as the determinants of sustainable development not consumers of imported civilisations. Formalising African indigenous epistemologies will also cultivate an exporting culture in Africans, they will see themselves as potential contributors to global politics, culture and civilisation, for most global trends today (conserving nature, going green, renewable energy, sustainable consumption, usage of non-toxic industrial materials and textiles, bio-degradable materials, organic farming, conserving water resources, renewable and environmentally friendly construction materials and many other fields) have in the past been practiced in African pre-colonial societies. These tasks were taught in pre-colonial education curricula and involved a greater degree of responsibility and a well organised education system. They were not taught as knowledge to gain employability but as a necessity for the survival and well-being of the community and preservation of the environment that sustained all living organisms.

3.4 The Goals and Principles of Pre-Colonial Education

Indigenous education systems were not only concerned with the integrated socialisation of the young people into the norms, religious, axiologies, moral beliefs and collective opinions of society, but also laid a very strong foundational emphasis on teaching and learning practical and useful skills. There was a pragmatic orientation on the acquisition of useful epistemologies, for individual and communal consequences. In all teaching there was greater emphasis on utilitarian skills like hunting, agriculture, constructing, mining, trading, gathering, blacksmithing, curving, and breeding, textile processing, designing and manufacturing different necessities.

In both worlds, Western and African, in all pre-literate societies it was and today it still is one of the main purposes of schooling to transmit attitudes, values, norms, social knowledge and customs to understand life and living. Education at all times does place emphasis on participatory observation pedagogies, the vital link between epistemology and experience, however, done to a lesser extent today compared to pre-colonial societies. Even though pre-colonial societies placed much emphasis on practical skills development, indigenous knowledge systems did not undervalue the relevance of intellectual critical thinking and reasoning development. One could soundly argue that both indigenous and Western forms of education did and still appreciate that knowledge could be gained through experience, dialogical discourse and reasoning. The major difference between the two worldviews is perhaps what happens after knowledge has been gained. Pre-colonial education approaches lacked extensive documentation of invented and discovered technologies and epistemologies. While

Western education culture relied heavily on documenting and internationalising epistemologies. Today there is a need for African researchers to systematize and internationalise through published documentation African indigenous knowledge systems in diverse areas. Once documented and systematised it there from becomes easier to be embraced within formal education structures and applied by all who access the written documents.

4. Findings

Both theories of Cultural Revivalism and Cultural Relativism could be applicable in addressing contemporary African education challenges. There is a need for Africans to deduce epistemologies from the historical past that could contribute to modern and postmodern living and development. One of those historical lessons that stand the test of time is the concept of inventing and being self-reliant in technologies and food production. However, learning from the propositions of Cultural Relativism Africans should complement their inherited ancient intellectual advances with Western and Eastern modern world civilisations and technologies in order to be competent internationally. In other words the relevance of both theories for modern and postmodern African sustainable citizenship, recognition and participation should not be under estimated, undervalued and above all excluded in contemporary education systems.

Pre-colonial education systems were underpinned by five principles: communalism, pragmatism, functionalism, perennialism, and holism. The philosophy of communalism or group cohesion has mistakenly been thought to inhibit individual originality of thought and difference of opinion, however, not true. Dialogical discourse, individual thought or expression was democratically accepted in ancient civilisations provided it did give solutions for societal benefits. In other words knowledge was not for 'knowledge sack' either was knowledge for certification, employability but for empowering citizenship participation and recognition, solving individual, family and societal challenges and survival to improve a sustainable way of living. In pre-colonial African societies education was not an end to itself but a process and a product for social, political and economic development and sustainability.

Education in pre-colonial African societies in their diversity was utilitarian and was for both immediate and future utility induction into society and a preparation for survival of all. Teaching and learning was holistic, it embraced spiritual and materialistic ways of living including self-reliance, communal development participation and more importantly work oriented. The question that comes immediate after appreciating that pre-colonial education systems were multi-dimensional in their educational exit skills production, is wondering if post-colonial education systems are equal to pre-colonial education orientations. Given the failure by most African education systems to produce useful graduates who can contribute intellectual solutions to vast challenges haunting African countries (lack of functional literacy,

unemployment, economic challenges, failure to produce for both domestic and export consumption, corruption, mismanagement, political instability) one could argue that contemporary education systems can deduce several epistemologies relevant for today utility from precolonial philosophy of life.

Contemporary education systems could deduce many insights about instruction and learning from pre-colonial pedagogy. Today education pedagogy can be gleaned from the practice of pre-colonial philosophy of education. Learning was holistic, diversely accomplished by observation, imitation, demonstration and practical activities. All skills including applied, understanding, and abstract knowledge were stressed throughout the learning process. Advanced trades and other occupations were transmitted by forms of apprenticeship. Infusing pre-colonial African cohesive epistemologies today would provide valuable alternative pedagogy to the bookish, chalk-talk-note taking, copy and paste syndrome education orientation.

In contrast to pre-colonial education, the challenge faced by African countries if not the majority poor in the world is to universalise and make education like in the pre-colonial times free and compulsory for all citizens. The major argument given the commercialisation and unaffordability of education today is whether contemporary education can be accessed by all as an agent of sustainable development for all. One could argue that education and its challenges to be equally accessed limits citizenship recognition and participation by all. In other words contemporary education systems contribute to furthering inequalities, education competition and high-stakes testing which encourages memorization for examinations more than understanding, acquisition of useful skills, critical and creative reasoning.

5. Conclusion

Discerning from this discussion, there is no doubt that contemporary education systems has challenges that can be mitigated by deducing epistemologies from pre-colonial pedagogy. One of those major deductions are based on the universal opinion of seeing education or formal schooling as having a potential in developing citizenship recognition and participation among African nations in the post-colonial era. Since pre-colonial African education orientation was holistic there is also evidence to the fact that citizenship recognition and democratic participation is not a new dialectical concept to the pre-colonial African education orientation and discourse circles. Another equally important lesson that can be learnt from pre-colonial epistemologies is that indigenous recognition in contemporary education is not only essential to fulfil the definition of what an African is or not but to construct and develop an education system that that can contribute to sustainable living, create a productive working culture, national and universal human essential developmental needs. Above all, deliberate consideration and adopting pre-colonial African epistemologies and pedagogy could mitigate one of Africa's enormous challenge of unemployment and lack of technological invention. One major lesson that can be deduced from pre-colonial epistemologies as far as lack of

technology invention and Western designs consumption syndrome is concerned is the fact that pre-colonial African education ideologies aimed at teaching its recipients to be self-reliant and be able to produce everything that is needed compared to the capitalistic mentality of picking and paying at a chain store or expecting to write a curriculum vitae to seek employment. Implications of pre-colonial epistemologies are antidote to problems experienced by all African countries in the rise of unemployment influencing crime, violence, and other social problems hindering sustainable development and democratic governance. Unlike pre-colonial Africa there was no unemployment, poverty, and lack of skills which inhibited economic growth.

This study considering the theory of Universalism argued that true and virtuous human needs can only be cultivated by a sound reflective and dialectical education orientation. Also, despite the test of time do not change therefore all education systems should focus on those fundamentals that are essential, perennial but progressive for empowering human needs, recognition and participation in sustainable growth and development. The study by considering both pre-colonial and post-colonial-Cultural Revivalism and Cultural Revitalism education pedagogy structures, implications and orientations reached a conclusion that contemporary education systems have more imperfections in contrast to its predecessor who was more pragmatic therefore requiring a need to deduce epistemological lessons for reconstruction and deconstruction. Modern African education systems can deduce the humanistic character ethical orientation and a communalist philosophy from pre-colonial epistemologies that can serve as antidote to individualism, education for employability and Western technology and civilisations syndrome. However, these challenges experienced by African contemporary education systems cannot be overcome by change of an education paradigm shift only; there is need for training equally relevant teachers and writers to embrace that philosophical shift and adequate funding to meet the new shift.

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