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WOMEN AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: GLOBAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR GENDER-CONSCIOUS TRANSFORMATION IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

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ABSTRACT

The struggle for women's liberation from male domination transcends barriers related to social class, culture, race and nationality. Indeed, throughout the world, women in both industrialised and developing countries are working toward the elimination of social and economic inequalities. The universal issues facing women must be recognised and affirmed by social and political planners in the formulation of progressive development policies and programmes consistent with the challenges of the new century. This conceptual paper will explore critical issues related to the role of women in social development and highlight opportunities for gender system transformation associated with projected social and structural developments of the new millennium. The paper will begin with an overview of the status of women in the world, followed by a discussion of critical issues related to women in social development, and a review of strategies implemented by the world's women to achieve gender equality. A summary of selected approaches to gender-inclusive development policies and an outline of a multi-systemic approach to woman-centred development will be offered. The authors conclude by outlining global recommendations for progressive, woman-centred policies of social development.

STATUS OF THE WORLD'S WOMEN

Though at the dawn of the new millennium, the global community of women continues to grapple with issues related to education, health care, family planning, land ownership, access to credit and oppressive laws which restrict a woman's rights both within and outside the context of marriage (Logan, 1998). These issues are further complicated by the unprecedented changes brought about by economic growth and social development (Kabadaki, 1994). Stoez, Guzzetta and Lusk (1999) and Kabadaki (1994) suggest that, while African women have made significant contributions toward economic and social development, the apparent benefits of change upon their condition have been questionable. In fact, Stoez *et al.* (1999) assert that the early phases of the development process may actually have quite negative effects on the condition of women. For example, the authors note that as communities shift from more rural, agricultural economies to more urban-based, industrial service-based economies, women are most prone to become displaced or unemployed workers (Stoez *et al.*, 1999). Consequently, women are far less likely to reap the benefits of employment – including those associated with social insurance and retirement programmes.

There is an abundance of literature detailing the overall plight of the world's women. These discussions reflect their gender-bound oppression, which is illuminated by glaring disparities in earned income, literacy rates, labour force participation and poverty-related health conditions (Kabadaki, 1994; Pandey, 1998; Dlamini & Julia, 1993; Stoez *et al.*, 1999). Interestingly, even when the literature points to the apparent gains made by women over the last decade, these improvements are overshadowed by significant and sustained gaps along numerous socio-economic indicators. For example, Stoez *et al.* (1999) point out that while women's life

expectancy has steadily increased over time and there have been significant declines in maternal mortality rates, disparities between male and female income continue to grow, as do the numbers of women living in poverty. Jadowska (1985) asserts that while, “women and girls constitute about half of the world’s population, make up one-third of the labour force, and perform an estimated two-thirds of all hours worked, they receive one-tenth of the world’s income.”

Dlamini and Julia (1993) note that in addition to limited access to education, economic inequities, and development policies that fail to be woman-centred, the significant issues of gender, status and race cannot be discounted. The literature suggests that women are in a situation of multi-jeopardy that includes discrimination by race, class and gender. Additionally, women must also face constraints imposed by traditional cultural norms, reproductive roles, and political values and structures (Charlton, 1984).

Numerous authors have reflected upon the tremendous waste of human potential that has resulted not only from ignoring women’s contributions to social and economic growth, but from the basic failure of society to ensure that women are full and equal participants in every sector of society (Wilson & Whitmore, 1994; Pandey, 1998; Dlamini & Julia, 1993). As Boserup (1984) argues, women are at risk along a number of domains and this limits their potential as major participants in planning, implementing, and reaping the benefits of social development strategies.

CRITICAL ISSUES RELATED TO THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Among the critical issues related to the role of women in social development are poverty, gender division of labour, evolving gender roles, sexuality and procreation, socio-political issues, labour force participation, education, health, legal rights within and outside marriage and laws, and practices related to contraception and abortion. The authors will discuss three central issues related to the role of women in social development: poverty, gender division of labour, and education.

Poverty

Despite years of global efforts to implement more woman-sensitive development strategies, the majority of African women continue to live in poverty (Kabadaki, 1994). This truism is further supported by Grown and Sebstad (1993), who note that, although the women’s decade was celebrated in the 1970s, and the United Nations World Conference has been searching for solutions to the problem of women and poverty since its 1980 declaration, current evidence continues to suggest that half of the people in developing countries are poor and are women. Also, according to Kabadaki (1994), women are getting poorer – many are suffering from malnutrition and are vulnerable to acquiring other health-related conditions including HIV/AIDS. They are struggling to secure adequate housing and struggling to gain access to adequate medical facilities.

Wilson and Whitmore (1994) assert that contrary to the intent, international aid and development programmes have not only faltered in efforts to improve the conditions of the poor (half of whom are women), but that such programmes have witnessed the growth of the poor in “both absolute and proportional terms” (55). The authors attribute the failure of such programmes in part to what Eisler (1987:179) asserts is the world’s systematic failure to attend to “those human issues which are still called ‘women’s issues’...[as a consequence]

millions.... are deprived of their birthright: the chance to lead healthy, productive, and rewarding lives”.

In their work Goldberg and Kremaen (1990) begin with the assumption that women world-wide suffer from economic inequality and that the “feminisation of poverty” is universal. In defining the “feminisation of poverty”, these authors “...refer to both the factual results where women who support themselves or their families, are becoming the majority of the poor and the recognition of female poverty, which includes women who would be poor if they had to support themselves” (1990:2). Goldberg and Kremaen surveyed seven industrial countries – five capitalist: U.S., Canada, Japan, Sweden and France; two socialist: USSR and Poland. A four-factor framework was utilised in the cross-national analysis and one of the major findings indicated that “patriarchy” is seen as a common denominator in capitalist and socialist countries which prevents the achievement of economic equality for women around the world.

The absolute poverty of so many of the world’s women is indicative of persistent structural mechanisms and processes whereby women – the majority of whom live in developing countries – are precluded from full participation in the formal sectors of economies, denied access to capital, and have limited opportunities for land ownership. In essence, millions of the world’s women are shut out of the economic mainstream and relegated to lives of poverty.

Gender division of labour and labour force participation

According to the historical literature, in South Africa prior to colonisation (up to the nineteenth century) women were once a dynamic force of economically independent people who assumed responsibility for food production for the family (Tinker, 1984). Meer (1987) emphasises that “women possessed land, livestock and controlled products of their labour... Women were no more dependent on men than men were on women”.

In traditional African society, women held a more central position than they do today. This is reflected in their economic conditions, their socialization processes, and their participation in social development activities. Traditionally, African women formed an anchor, a rock for their family and for society as a whole. Today, African women are in double jeopardy because of their status as African people and as women (Dlamini & Julia, 1993:341).

However, current literature suggests that “As a group that has faced decades of oppression, African women have struggled to maintain strength and independence. The problems of women in South Africa result from structural mechanisms and processes, and women’s socioeconomic status is a direct result of constrictive and oppressive policies” (Dlamini & Julia, 1993:345).

Winter (1993:44) states that “...throughout the history of South Africa, women of all races and classes have played important roles.” But none has been as crucial as that which might be undertaken by women at the current turning point in South Africa’s political and economic development”. Charlton (1984:344) asserts that “In addition to the elements of limited education, economic inequities, poorly conceived development strategies, and political imbalance, studies of women in the twentieth century also consider the discrimination against women that derives from the issues of gender, status and race.” Studies indicate that women suffer from a multi-jeopardy that includes discrimination by race, class, and gender and also from the constraints of traditional cultural norms, productive roles, political values and structures. Kissman (1998:34) writes “income, education, work, leisure, and feelings of competence are factors associated with the well-being of women globally. The unique

characteristics of women's ecology range from occupational segregation, resulting in lower income, to verbal interaction patterns that impact upon perceptions of competence".

As Boserup (1984) argues, women are at risk and this limits their potential as major participants in planning and implementing social development strategies. It is true that women world-wide face daily struggles to achieve the equality so optimistically outlined in the 1968 Swedish report to the United Nations. Also, South Africa presents some of the most glaring evidence of multi-jeopardy faced by contemporary women (and significant opportunities for women to become active participants in a progressive plan of social development).

Indeed, as societies shift from an agricultural base to a more industrialised one, women appear to bear the brunt of development fallout – as employment opportunities shift to the urban centres, women are left behind by their husbands, who must move to the cities to work. A global view suggests that women continue to exist in a universal state of economic and social inequality, regardless of the stage of the development of their homeland (Stoez *et al.*, 1999; Gulati, 1994).

Lynch (1998:47) suggests "...the collective experience of women, whether it is a person with an overabundance of education, the abandoned farm wife in rural Minnesota, USA, or the African woman who struggles with her double duty at work and home, is one of economic marginality".

Education

The African woman produces 70% of the food grown on the continent, according to the United Nations. She works longer and harder and has more responsibilities than her husband. She is the economic backbone of the rural community, the maker of the family decisions, the initiator of social change, the harvester of crops. She is the hub around which the spokes of society turn (Lamb, 1987:38).

The literature is replete with statistics evidencing the inability of a large number of the world's women to read and write (Kabadaki, 1994; Dlamini & Julia, 1998). Given the multiple burdens African women must bear and the traditional constraints which militate against their formal education, it should not be surprising that literacy rates and rates of educational enrolment are significantly lower for women than for men in a number of African nations (Stoez *et al.*, 1999). Stoez *et al.* (1999) further report that across the African continent half of the girls enrolling in primary school drop out by Form Four, while only 10% of girls go on to complete secondary education. For example, Kabadaki (1994) reports that in rural Sudan, one third of girls attend primary school, while only 15% of them go on to attend secondary school. Kabadaki (1994) links the poor educational attainment of girls in African nations to two major factors: a traditional preference for educating male children, who may represent the very real potential to earn more than their female counterparts, and early marriage. Other factors which may serve as barriers to the education of African girls include limited access to schools in the rural areas where 70% to 90% of all African people live, and the lack of access to funds to pay for school fees, uniforms and books.

As Kabadaki (1994:30) further states, "...restricted education and illiteracy limit ...women's ability to participate fully in development...but also their ability to benefit from that development".

REVIEW OF STRATEGIES IMPLEMENTED BY THE WORLD TO ELIMINATE GENDER INEQUALITY

Historically, women have implemented a number of strategies in their struggles to eliminate gender inequality. In their struggles against gender subordination, women have organised themselves in various ways – including women’s organisations, sustained women’s movements, and revolts. Outlined below are two of the primary mechanisms employed by women in their struggles for gender equality: women’s organisations and mass movements.

Women’s organisations

Women’s organisations have played a vital role in the struggle for gender equality across the centuries and throughout the world. Winter (1993) notes that one of the central achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women was the galvanising of women’s organisations across the African continent. According to Turok (1990:136), these organisations assume five basic forms:

1. Progressive women’s organisations which challenge the subordinate position of women, sometimes working underground;
2. Liberal women’s organisations which concentrate on the achievement of legal equality;
3. Conservative women’s organisations which are opposed to women’s liberation and concerned with the propagation of traditional beliefs and practices;
4. Women’s organisations that have developed spontaneously in response to a crisis or around single issues;
5. Women’s organisations formed in response to international aid agencies or NGO's seeking to promote development, which is inclusive of women.

There are numerous examples of women’s organisations across Africa – many of which maintain considerable political power and have made significant achievements toward the reduction of barriers which limit women’s opportunities to be full participants in their communities (Logan, 1998; Winter, 1993; Adeyeri, 1994).

Logan (1998) cites the 31st December Women’s Organisation of Ghana, which was established for the purpose of improving the welfare of women and their children through income-producing activities. The organisation brings together women from across the country to work co-operatively to improve the quality of life for themselves and their children. The organisation is novel in part because it consists of women from a variety of socio-economic strata who work collectively to solve the problems they face as women. Logan (1998) notes two of their most recent initiatives – the building of day-care centres and schools in their local communities, which addresses some of the needs women face in the places in which they live.

Winter (1994:44) states that “In recent years, there has been a proliferation of women’s organisations and women’s divisions of political organisations in South Africa. Some are highly political; others avoid political involvement but, by their very existence, are challenging the status quo”. Winter cites a number of women’s organisations, such as Women for Peace, which was very active in the struggle against apartheid, and Women’s Legal Status Committee, which have redirected their attention toward post-apartheid issues which concern women (Winter, 1994).

Adeyeri (1994) describes the National Council of Women's Societies (NCWS) of Nigeria, which is a grassroots organisation encompassing all of the women's organisations in the country, including the Association of University Women and the Society of Women Accountants. The NCWS acts as an umbrella organisation and provides a vehicle through which women may share their collective struggles.

Women's mass movements

At different points in history within specific cultural contexts, women have staged mass movements in opposition to gender inequality. Examples of women's mass movements abound. For example, the Women's Suffrage Movement of the United States was an extended campaign lead and organised by women which ultimately led to their gaining the right to vote through constitutional amendment. In India women led a massive campaign against rape. In Chile women united to demand the resignation of former Junta General Pinochet. Across the globe women are mobilising themselves against oppression. The organisation of such large movements is not without its challenges; as Gladys Mutukwa, leader of a current mass movement of South African women, points out:

"The strength of the women's movement to face the challenges of the up coming millennium requires us to be better managed, to network more, to be more democratic, to reassess our commitment and to rebuild our skills" (Mutukwa, 1998:18).

Drawing strength from the accomplishments of South African-based organisations, women are moving ahead with a contemporary women's mass movement. Women are mobilising themselves to prepare for this millennium and rallying themselves against the structural and cultural mechanisms which may limit the ability of South African women to be full participants in the South African economy. Women are mobilising themselves into large networks to examine issues of common importance and strategise ways in they may influence the government and international aid agencies to develop a gender-sensitive approach to development.

The number of women's mass movements and the extent of their success in realising meaningful social change consistent with gender-conscious goals of social development suggest that women will continue to use this mechanism in their struggles against gender inequality in this century.

APPROACHES TO GENDER-RELEVANT DEVELOPMENT

Wilson and Whitmore (1994) examine three competing perspectives on gender and development: Women In Development (WID), Women And Development (WAD) and Gender And Development (GAD), and offer actions needed to address the issues identified (see Table 1).

Women In Development –WID

The WID approach is referred to as the "modernisation" or "growth/trickle down" approach. Wilson and Whitmore (1994:58) note that the WID approach emphasises addressing issues of equality, poverty and efficiency on the basis that, in order for development to be effective, both women and men must be involved. However, these authors further note that "...this model has focused on women or gender as a unit of analysis without acknowledging divisions and relations of exploitation among women, and tends to be a historical, overlooking race, class, and gender" (1994:59). An important facet of women's lives, that of reproduction, is ignored in this model and the focus tends to be on the productive aspects of women's work.

Rathgeber (1989) identifies the central problem of the WID perspective as women being left out of the development process. Bandarage (1984:497) suggests that “WID, in general, has not made Third World Women the architects of its programs. WID is about poor women in the Third World; it is not a force of those women themselves”.

Critics of WID note that the projects that have grown out of this model tend to suffer from “top-down”, “modernisation” planning and that the effect of its adoption by major international development agencies such as the World Bank has been to promote strategies that incorporate women on exploitative terms into the formal sector. As a result, firms tend to benefit from relaxed minimum wages, the absence of trade unions, and the weak or non-existent health and safety legislation (Plewes & Stuart, 1991:118-119). Wilson and Whitmore (1994:59) note that WID has made the important contribution of documenting and bringing to wide attention the negative effects of the dominant model of development on women. However, it fails to take account of the sources of women’s oppression in the nature of the development model itself.

TABLE 1
PERSPECTIVES ON ISSUES OF GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT

	Women In Development (WID)	Women And Development (WAD)	Gender and Development with Acompañamiento (GAD-A)
Development Model	Growth/trickle-down (modernization) theory	Draws on both dependency theory and Marxist analysis	Draws on dependency theory, class analysis, & popular education methods
Feminist stream	Liberal feminism	(Vulgar) Marxist* feminism	Socialist feminism
Definition of the problem	Women are left out of the development process (excluded from equal participation in education, employment, etc.).	Unjust international structures	Development programs have been <i>about</i> not <i>of</i> marginalized women in developing countries.
Action orientation	Integrates women into ongoing development initiatives. Ends discrimination against women; reduces their disadvantages in the productive sector. Does not question development strategies, structural sources/nature of women’s subordination, or historical class & race divisions among women.	Assumes women’s position will improve when structures become just and equitable. As with WID, focuses on productive sector and ignores reproductive side of women’s work/lives. Fails to address relationship between patriarchy, modes of production and oppression of women.	Builds on the empowerment experiences of women in developing countries through self-organization in grass roots groups, to develop strategies to address not only immediate situations but also structures that oppress women; address social construction of production and reproduction as the basis of women’s oppression.

*Vulgar Marxism refers to a mechanistic, reductionist perversion of Marxist analysis.

This table was adapted from Wilson, M.G. & Whitmore, E. (1994). Gender and international development praxis. **Social Development**, 16(1):57.

Women And Development –WAD

The WAD approach embraces Dependency and Marxist theory and was developed in the late 1970s as a response to the limitations of the WID/modernisation theory. This theory "...incorporates a recognition of the importance of dependency and class relationships, which are found to be absent in the WID approach" (Wilson & Whitmore, 1994:60).

Problems identified with this model include:

- Failure "...to undertake a full-scale analysis of the relationship between patriarchy, differing modes of production and women's subordination and oppression" (Rathgeber, 1989:9). It assumes that, when international structures become more equal, the position of women will improve;
- A focus on the productive region of the lives of women and not the reproductive side;
- Strategies that "...are concentrated on the development of income-generating activities, ignoring the time burdens on women, with private domain work implicitly seen as outside the purview of development projects" (Wilson and Whitmore, 1994:60).

Gender And Development (GAD)

The GAD approach was developed to address the unmet needs of the WID and WAD approaches, and incorporates the experiences of women in underdeveloped countries to gain empowerment through organising themselves into grassroots groups. Molyneux (1986:281) describes GAD as an "...approach with theoretical roots in socialist feminism, which recognizes the need to distinguish between the position (strategic interests) and condition (practical needs) of women, and to incorporate both strategic and practical considerations in development work". There is a recognition that gender issues must be articulated into and subordinated to a wider strategy of economic development.

"This approach attempts to understand why and how women have been systematically assigned to inferior and secondary roles" Plewes and Stuart (1991:126). The social construction of reproduction and production are identified as the basis of women's oppression and this relationship is factored into the analysis of patriarchy and class/dependency.

These authors further contend that "...this alternative analysis of their relationship between women's issues and development issues centers on the relations between women and men as the focus of analysis, rather than on women alone"(1991:126). Additionally, Plewes and Stuart (1991:127) suggest that the GAD approach calls for an "...alternative paradigm, which seeks to transform radically, rather than merely reform current social, political, economic and gender relationships".

Wilson and Whitmore (1994:63) suggest that the GAD perspective offers a more progressive, egalitarian style for increased participation of women in the development of their own programmes. These authors further note the urgent need for a radical restructuring of development strategies which are derived from a feminist critique of the failed growth-oriented approaches of the past decades.

MULTI-SYSTEMIC APPROACH TO THE TRANSFORMATION OF GENDER RELATIONS

The authors would like to suggest that the Gender And Development (GAD) approach be linked with person-centred, empowering approaches that emphasise equality, process, participation and the valuing of life experiences. It is crucial that development strategies be

restructured and include Wilson and Whitmore's (1994:63) concept of "*Acompañamiento*", a process of "...applying principles inherent in progressive feminism to the concept of partnership in international collaboration which is accompanied by a sense of shared struggle and destiny – solidarity".

George (1990:64) suggests the key elements needed for arriving at democratic, collaborative, development programmes must include "...structure (how structured inequalities influence the situation of women); ideology (in influencing policies and practices specifically related to women's lives); power relationships (and the empowerment of women); and the social construction of people's perception of reality".

The authors offer the "Gender And Development with Acompañamiento" (GAD-A), perspective to guide partnerships in international collaborative projects for women. Utilising this perspective, the authors advocate Logan's (1998) concept of resource centres which are designed to foster empowering environments.

Logan (1998:133) suggests that women throughout the world are experiencing change in many facets of their lives, including alterations in both personal and socio-political spheres. She offers the concept of "resource centres" as a creative problem-solving approach to meeting women's gender-specific development needs. The author further describes women's resource centres as providing support to women in developing countries. These resource centres would serve as vehicles through which women could assume proactive roles in addressing major issues of concern which they have identified and prioritised.

A major thrust of the resource centre model is to create nurturing and empowering environments, which positively promote women and are undergirded by the following assumptions:

- Efforts should be targeted at recruiting women who have limited skills, limited training and limited economic power;
- Most effective approaches to women's empowerment enlist the co-operative participation of men;
- Women's presence in the economic mainstream is critical to their empowerment.

While Logan (1998) notes that the resource centre model has been widely used throughout the United States, such a model has not been widely applied in developing countries. Through the implementation of the resource centre initiative in developing countries, Logan (1998) further suggests an expanded focus around three major areas:

- Provision of comprehensive direct services;
- Establishment of a political agenda and clear stance on critical, woman-centred issues;
- Establishment of an informational clearing-house.

The resource centre concept extends and supports the work being done by women's groups and organisations, which maintain historical and contemporary significance in working toward the empowerment of women throughout the world. Unlike many women's organisations, however, which are often segregated along socio-economic boundaries, the resource centre model promotes the unification of women from all socio-economic strata toward the liberation of all women.

This kind of approach is consistent with a community participation model which promotes self-help and positive change among the members of a given community (Pandey, 1998). Such an approach applied to African communities would provide rural and urban populations of women with a vehicle for becoming empowered by defining their own agendas and selecting their own strategies for achieving self-identified goals. Conceivably, such a centre could bring together market women, petty traders, farmers and professional workers with a conscious desire to become empowered and to empower each other.

The authors support the replication of the resource centre model to include at least the following:

- a major training component which would provide literacy education, vocational training, and skills development around resource development and entrepreneurship;
- a health education and health promotion component, which would augment family planning services and provide women with HIV/AIDS education, domestic violence awareness;
- a legal aid/legal assistance component which would provide women with current information regarding gender-related laws and policies such as inheritance laws, bride-price, divorce rights.

The resource centre model is only one approach to realising progressive change and meeting the needs of women in development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the current status of the world's women and the constellation of critical factors impacting upon their participation in social development, the authors submit the following recommendations:

Policies to promote labour market equality of women

Inclusion of women in the new world economy by assisting them in maintaining the economic and social gains achieved in this millennium by giving consideration to:

- the impact of layoffs;
- redistributive approaches, which include the selection of women for full-time jobs with pay equal to that of men.

Social welfare benefits/government income transfers

Family policies that include the restructuring of gender roles and expectations and recognition of women's dual role: "reproduction and production".

Status allocation and well-being

Develop and initiate policies and practices that are instrumental in protecting women inter-generationally and cross-culturally from exploitation of their labour, both at home and in paid occupations, and from relegation to subordinate status in their society.

CONCLUSION

The complexities surrounding the issue of women and social development cannot be captured in a single discussion. What the writers have attempted to do is stimulate discussion

surrounding woman-centred critical issues that will impact women's social development in this millennium. The paper began with an overview of the status of women in the world, which was followed by a discussion of critical issues related to women in social development, a review of strategies implemented by the world's women to achieve gender equality, a summary of selected approaches to gender-inclusive development policies and an outline of a multi-systemic approach to woman-centred development. The authors concluded by outlining global recommendations for progressive, woman-centred policies of social development.

The universal struggles of women are perhaps captured best by the images of women of Africa and her Diaspora who face the multiple jeopardy of being born into a world in which racism, classism and gender discrimination abound. In the faces of these young women are hopes for a brighter future for their sisters, mothers, aunts and female descendents. We suspect that they want what all women of Africa and her Diaspora want – to be empowered. These sentiments are so well articulated by Ogindipe-Leslie (1994:ii):

“What does empowerment mean to us as black women of Africa and her Diaspora? It means social recognition and dignity....It means space to speak, act, and live with joy and responsibility as it has always meant for our ever-so responsible foremothers wherever they were in history...We wish to have power which positively promotes Life in all its forms; power to remove from our path any thing, person, or structure which threatens to limit our potential for full human growth as the other half of Life's gendered reality...”

The universal issues facing women must be recognised and affirmed by social and political planners in the formulation of progressive policies and programmes consistent with the projected social and structural developments of the new century. Our charge in the new millennium is to become advocates for gender equality and gender-conscious global transformation.

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