Edward Said: An Emancipatory Narrative

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Abstract

This paper is about Said's normative engagement through the narrative praxis of Liberation in post-colonial condition. Said's political views are here brought to the fore through their juxtaposition with some contemporary European thinkers. At first, four of Said's works are presented as they relate to the question of power. Then, in the second section, his views on literary theory are compared with Paul Ricoeur and Michel Foucault. In next four sections the normative dimension of Said's thought are presented via comparative approach. It is finally concluded that Said can be regarded as a contemporary example of normative thinking.

Keywords: E. Said, Post-colonial condition, narrative, emancipation, normative

1- Introduction

In elaborating on post-colonial condition, the political metaphor of "the state of nature" can be used with implications different from its use in the history of western political thought. The post-colonial condition is a pre-given condition into which the colonized people find themselves "thrown." It is a "natural state" in which the inhabitants have at a certain point in their history become dissociated from themselves and an identity has been constructed for them. The historical ontology of the colonized reveals *thoroughness* in a pre-given condition in the construction of which s/he had no say. In this condition of thoroughness, the life-world of the colonised is a systematically distorted world by the imposition of the colonial "system" on the native world. As such this is a "state of nature" different from what Hobbes and Rousseau depicted for European world at the beginning point of the modern era.

Hobbes has defined "the state of nature" as an undesirable condition the exit from which seemed to be an imperative. For Rousseau, however, the modern civil institutions were regarded as the very causes of the modern European *problematique*. Their differences notwithstanding, both thinkers suggested a historical rapture from the existing situation. As such, the "social contract" of modern thought entailed disenchantment from the life-world of early modern Europe while envisioning a different "state" of affairs. This, however, was possible only through the establishment of an unprecedented relationship with the non-European world.

With the emergence of new conditions in early modern Europe, the European came to re-cognize himself as an *ego cogito* only in consequence of first becoming ego conquistadores. (Dussel 198: 4) Therefore, a historical simultaneity toke place through which post–medieval European condition was both a rapture from the European's own past and also a forceful attachment with the non- European's destiny. The new European identity and its future was therefore an outgrow of the simultaneity of modernity with "coloniality." For the non – European, however, a different historical simultaneity took place. The colonized/non-European found he/she as an "other" ruptured forcefully from his/her own self. Hence, unlike the European who exited from an historical "state of nature" and asserted a new identity, the colonized came to find itself in an imposed 'state of nature' dispossessed of an identity. The "natural state" of the colonized came to be a "state" not of "war of all against all", but a war of one, the colonizer, against the "other", the colonized. As such two histories merged into one path constructed by a peculiar historical type of domination; a domination which has been prolonged by distortion, destruction, and annihilation, to the extent that has never been experienced before in human history.

This *double simultaneity* is the central thread of Said's ingenious intellectual preoccupation manifested first in a discursive revelation of the power/knowledge of colonial narrative, and then a resistance/knowledge of the post-colonial narrative. In *Culture and Imperialism* Said uses, the notion of "discrepant experiences" to compares the writings of a colonizing French scholar with that of a colonized Egyptian scholar at the time of Napoleonic conquest. At this juncture, the two scholars viewed and understood "the situation" they were experiencing very differently. These "experiences" were formulated and expressed through two different textual genres, one exemplifying a "colonial discourse" and the other, "the discourse of the colonized". (Castle 2001: 30-43) According to Said, in the colonial discourse the non-European is portrayed as the "other" of the European civilization. As such, this discourse has been the product of the European "will to power" implemented in relation to the colonized by making it "the other" of itself. (Said 1978: 42).

The post-colonial discourse, on the other hand is a discourse emanating and exteriorizing a *double-disenchantment*, resulting from the colonial experience which goes further than European *disenchantment*. Max Weber has referred to *disenchantment* (*Entzauberung*) in the modern era as the European's sense of intellectual and cultural disassociation with its way of living and thinking. He has argued that such intellectual and cultural reorientation has had essential association with "calculative rationality" (*Zweckrationalitaet*) through which Modern European's conception of the world changed. Economy, politics, and culture were recreated by rationalization of life and life-world. Capitalist economy, bureaucratic system, and secular culture were the three fundamental dimensions of the new "disenchanted world."

(Weber 1979: 105, 221) He, however, did not say anything about the forced geo-cultural extension of the phenomenon of *disenchantment*. In fact, in a unique historical conjuncture, the experience of *disenchantment* was imposed on the non-western world. Whereas in Europe "calculative rationality" replaced whatever had been disassociated with through *disenchantment*, the phenomenon of acculturation and self-dispossession resulted in a *double-disenchantment* as the experience of simultaneously being *disenchanted* and becoming a disenchanted *being*. Being *disenchanted* means to disassociate *oneself* from what belongs to one as her/his believes and way of living. Becoming a disenchanted *being*, on the other hand, is a loss of *one's self*; it is withdrawing from one's own selfhood and becoming an absence, a lack, a void. This happens when one is negated and is deprived of any original identity. This experience seems to be the predicament of the colonized world and, as such, one of the most fundamental preoccupations of Said's post-colonial thought.

The notion of "power" has pivotal significance for Said as a founding figure of post-colonial thought. The discursive entanglement of power with colonial intentions in colonial narrative is the cornerstone of his literary analysis. As a literary critic, Said detects a colonial will to dominate in *Orientalism*. Then, in *the World, the Text and the Critic,* he suggests a methodological undertaking for literary criticism which would free it from its current disciplinary confinements and from its practical alienation. Then, in *Culture and Imperialism* he elaborates on post-colonial narrative as a narrative with a will to liberate. As such, Said's normative insights can contribute substantially to the field of comparative political theory.

2. Narrative, Empire and Resistance

In *Orientalism* Said has thrown light on a discursive effort of an academic apparatus which constructed an object of theoretical fabrication suited for the colonial undertakings. There, he has demonstrated "how power operates in knowledge," (Ashcraft et. al 1999: 8) and reveals the fundamental historical reality of how "European culture was able to manage- and even produce – the Orient." (Dallmayr 1999: 57) As such, Orientalist discourse is

> *[A] power-knowledge device that converts cultures and their territories into objects for imperial conquest and consumption .....*[it] *is a disciplinary regime of knowledge production that has very real power effects, power effects that in turn authorize more of its knowledge production and more of its own power gathering and consolidating....* (Mendieta 2005: 6)

In *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, Said introduces *secular criticism* as an approach for textual analysis. As a literary critic, Said contests the confined specialization of academic discourse and considers the literary text as something which has connection with political, social, cultural aspect of the world. (Ashcraft 1999: 7-39) By this approach*,* in which *worldliness* of the work "as the essentially political nature of texts" is the focus, he "takes criticism out of the professional domain of the literary criticism and discovers its 'transformative possibilities'. The main feature of the text's worldliness is *affiliation* which above all is the political dimension in which all literature, all texts can be found. As such, therefore, criticism for Said is an act of political and social engagement and its function is "to change things". (Said 1983: 4) Therefore the notion of *worldliness* has both methodological and epistemological implications. Methodologically, it signifies the recognition of the impact of the forces in the author's world. Epistemologically, it spells a normative preoccupation in literary work, namely its praxiological dimension of justifying or resisting power and domination.

In *Culture and Imperialism,* Said claims that without the power of culture, the institutional, political and economic operations of imperialism would remain in dark. In this book, Said has undertaken a double decoding, first between literary imagination and political justification of imperial domination. Here, he analyses the 'general worldwide pattern of imperial culture' that develops to both justify and reinforce the establishment and exploitation of empire. Then, the relationship between literary imagination and 'the historical experience of resistance against empire' is analysed. Here Said concentrates on novels as a cultural form which "were immensely important in the formation of imperial attitudes, references, and experiences" of the nineteen and twentieth century Western Empires (Said 1994: xii).

In the *Representation of the Intellectuals* Said speaks of "the need for the intellectual work to recover its connections with the political realities of the society in which it occurs". (Ashcraf 1999: 15) In a way it is reminiscent of Horkheimer on the idea of Critical theory versus traditional Theory, when Said speaks about Critical Intellectuals versus Traditional Intellectuals. According to him, it has become a function of traditional intellectuals to legitimate dominant cultural and political ideologies. Said instead invites intellectuals to exercise their critical consciousness, not simply to reject imperial discourse but to intervene critically 'within the intrinsic conditions on which knowledge is made possible' (Said 1983: 182). Accordingly he calls upon the intellectuals of the colonial world to speak "the truth to power". To him:

> *Speaking the truth to power is no panglossian idealism: it is carefully weighing the alternatives, picking the right one, and then intelligently representing it where it can do the most good and cause the right change.* (Said 1994a: 75)

3-Beyond the Structural "world" and Post-structural "discourse": Said contra Ricoeur and Foucault

In his *secular criticism,* Said introduces methodological insights which are different from hermeneutics of Ricoeur and genealogy of Foucault. Said considers texts ontologically as socio-historical beings. In each text meaning, intention and real forces of the world are at play. Each text has both an interior and an exterior world of its own and as such is a *topos* of manifestation of text's worldliness mediated by the author's creativity. The author mediates the kind of relationship that the text has with its world, both by justification and by solidification of domination, as is the case with the colonial narrative. Alternatively, with deconstruction and normative reorientation, as is the case with postcolonial narrative. Said's notion of *worldliness* of the text can be compared to Ricoeur's "world of text", and his notion of author's creativity stands contra post-structural notion of "the death of the author". Accordingly, he detects a different relationship between power and knowledge compared to that argued by Foucault.

Said rejects Ricoeurian assumption that "the circumstantial reality is exclusively the property of speech". Instead he insists that, text "are in the world, and hence [are] 'worldly'. (Said 1983, 35) In other words, according to the principle of *worldliness*, said proposes that a text

> *has a material presence, a cultural and social history, a political and even an economic being as well as a range of implicit connections to other texts.* (Ashcraft 1999: 21)

Said, therefore, is unhappy with lack of "political commitment within [Foucault's] work, and within post- structuralist discourse in general". He rather "allows for authorial creativity" in his textual analysis while making distinction between colonial and post-colonial discourse according to the relationship between knowledge and power. He, however, argues that both discourses pertain to illocutionary acts, once with oppressive intention and the other time with emancipatory intention.
Said argues that

> *post-structuralists virtually reject the world and allow no sense of the material worldliness of people who write texts and read them, cutting off the possibility of political action in their theory.* (ibid: 69)

Instead, he interprets literary works in a way similar to Quentin Skinner's contextual-pragmatics hermeneutics. According to Skinner, the meaning of a political thought should be sought in the intention of the author expressed by an illocutionary act through which the author does something like, challenging, convincing and normativising. Indeed, Skinner argues,

> *[T]he understanding of texts presupposes the grasp of both what they were intended to mean, and how this meaning was intended to be taken.* [What the author] *intended to address, could in practice have been intending to communicate by the utterance of this given utterance. It follows that the essential aim, in any attempt to understand the utterances themselves, must be to recover this complex intention on the part of the author.* [To] *be able to characterize a work in such a way, in terms of its intended illocutionary force, [then] is equivalent to understanding what the writer may have meant by writing in that particular way.* (Skinner 1988: 63, 76)

Using a similar method, Said detects the illocutionary act of normativization of the imperial domination in the works of Jane Austen, Josef Conrad, and john Kipling, on the one hand, and the illocutionary act of resistance to power in the works of Fanon and Aime Cesaire on the other.

4- Post-colonial versus Colonial narrative: Fanon contra Conrad

One can speak of *discrepant discourses* by comparing post-colonial discourse with that of colonial discourse. Colonial intrusion in the other parts of the world has dual orientalistic function of de-struction of colonized identity and re-construction of an identity for the colonized native. From the moment of colonization, a "contestatory discourse of resistance" was activated. Said has undertaken the "examination of both the operation of imperialism within European culture and the operation of resistance in colonised societies." (Ashcraft 1999: 87)

4-1 Power in Narrative

Said maintains that in Conrad's work, narrative "is the representation of power, and its teleology is associated with the global role of the West." In his tales, Conrad "re-enact the imperial gesture of pulling in virtually the entire world".

> *The startling purity of the imperial quest in Heart of Darkness…remains the overwhelming reality, a constitutive reality, in the culture of imperialism. In its impulsive power the gesture recalls actual explorers and imperialists such as Rhodes, Murchison, and Stanley. There is no minimizing the discrepant power established by imperialism and prolonged in the colonial encounter. Conrad underscores that actuality not just in the content but also in.. form... .* (Said 1994: 330,201)

4-2 Narrative Resistance to Power

According to Said, newly empowered voices demanding that their narratives be heard have existed for a long time. The deepest felt injuries inflicted on the native colonized by the European colonizer have been most elaborately expressed by Franz Fanon whose genre has then been extended by post-colonial discourse as a written response to colonial discourse. According to Said, Fanon

> *reverses the hitherto accepted paradigm by which Europe gave the colonies their modernity and argues instead that not only were 'the well being and the progress of Europe-built up with the sweat and the dead bodies of Negroes, Arabs, Indians and the yellow races' but Europe is literally the creation of the Third World'.* (Said 1994: 237)

5- The Narrative of Postcolonial Selfhood: Fanon contra Yeats

Post-colonial nationalism pertains to self affirmation through the negation of the colonial "other". Said, however, finds nationalist and nativist tendencies in the colonized world unable to break out of the historical predicament of the colonized people and coming short for the establishment of a new order in post-colonial situation. Instead, he envisions liberation as the authentic possibility for the colonized world He instead refers to Fanon and Cesaire as authors with an illocutionary act of Liberation as authentic praxis in post-colonial condition.

5-1 Nationalism and Post-colonial Paradigm

Said regards the attitude of *black authenticity* as a defensive attitude which is entangled in the framework constructed by Eurocentric conception and as such would remain short of bringing needed changes in the postcolonial world. In this relation, he refers to Chattarjee, Eqbal Ahamd and Naipaul who assert that

> *[B]y transforming nationalism into a new regional or state ideology, post-colonial countries subjected themselves to a global process of rationalization based on external norms, a process*

> *governed in the post-war years of modernization of and development by the logic of a world system whose type is global capitalism, commanded at the top by the handful of leading industrial countries.*

According to Say:

> *Chatterjee is correct to say that 'no matter how skillfully employed, modern statecraft and the application of modern technology cannot effectively suppress the very real tensions which remain unresolved'. The new pathology of power, in Eqbal Ahmad's phrase, gives rise to national security states, to dictatorships, oligarchies, and one-party systems. Naipaul's ideological point is that the triumph of nationalism in the Third World not only 'suppresses the very real tensions unresolved' in the post-colonial state, but also eliminates the last hope of resistance against it, as well as the last civilizing traces of Western influence.* (Said 1994: 320)

In distinction from this paradigm, Said looks into the paradigm of Liberation. Nationalism, according to him, has in fact been the degeneration of liberation movement. It has in fact been a self negating moment in the struggle against colonialism which out to be surpassed..

5-2 The Paradigm of Liberation

In his decoding of the relationship between literature and liberation Said reaches at a homologue with authors such as Fanon, Cesiar, and Neroda and speaks about liberation. Upholding Fanon's narrative as the authentic response to imperial discourse and domination, he refers to Fanon's emphasis that if national consciousness is not somehow changed into a social consciousness, the future will not witness liberation but becomes the extension of imperialism. Therefore, the postcolonial struggle must be sublimated to a new level of contest, namely to the synthesis of librating struggle which needs a post-nationalist culture. (Said 1994: 323) Hence, Said insists that there are

> *[A]lternatives to nativism where, although 'imperialism courses on ... opportunities for liberation are open'. Significantly, Said refers to Fanon in defining liberation as 'a transformation of social consciousness beyond national consciousness".* (Ashcraft 1999: 111)

Said conceives of liberation as the right norm. He finds such norm in Fanon's discourse of liberation in which liberation is "the second moment of decolonialization". In Fanon's discourse, the route to liberation is omnipresent in his theorizing and decolonization narrative. (Said 1994, 281) This is where in postcolonial narrative Fanon parts way from Yeats:

> *The drama of Yeats's accomplishment in restoring a suppressed history and rejoining the nation to it is expressed well by Fanon's description of the situation Yeats had to overcome: Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic it turns to the past of the people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it.* (Said 1994: 286)

In difference from Yeats, according to Said, Fanon is not merely "a theoretician of resistance and decolonisation but also one of liberation". According to Said:

> *Fanon's theoretical and perhaps even metaphysical narrative of anti-imperialist decolonization is marked throughout with the accent and inflections of liberation. It is far more than a reactive native defensiveness, whose main problem (as Soyinka analyzed it) is that it implicitly accepts, and does not go beyond, the basic European versus no-European oppositions. Fanon's is a discourse of that anticipated triumph, liberation, that marks the second moment of decolonization.* (Said 1994: 283)

Fanon's narrative of resistance to colonial domination is indicative of

> *The emergence of the narratives of opposition and their themes, which are related to alternative visions of history and integrative view of human community and liberation rather than a narrowly nationalistic one.* (Kennedy 2000: 86)

6- Liberation and Interculturality: Said meets Gadamer

According to hermeneutic philosophy, understanding (*verstehen*) is pre-structured in the world in which we live with others. From the Hermeneutic perspective these pre-structures make up one's being. The problem, however, is our alienation from what has made us up and is making us. It is like an alien (*atopan*) that is ignored. Hermeneutic tends towards familiarization of what has remained alien. Such familiarization is the result of *Andersverstehen*, "understanding differently". This understanding is not just consensus or repeating something after the other, but amounts to "a willingness to enter the border zone or interstices between self and other" (Dallmayr 1996: 47). In fact this understanding can be attained only at "the risk of self-critique and self-decentering" (ibid: 47). The result of this understanding, in Gadamer's view, is the intertwining of Difference and Identity: "Difference exists within Identity; otherwise, identity would not be identity". (ibid: 49)

As such, hermeneutics is:

> *[A] process of reciprocal questioning at the intersection between self and other, between familiarity and strangeness.* (Dallmayr 2000: 831)

This process of familiarization, however, can take place on the cultural level through a process of "double injection" referred to by Derrida". (Dallmayr 1996: 57) Derrida, on the one hand, rejects "cultural assimilation" and, on the other hand, warns of "cultural narcissism".

Difference, hence is kernel to a hermeneutics of cultural identity. For Derrida, "what is proper to a culture is to not be identical to itself." (ibid, 58). This differential hermeneutics of self identity is possible through the sphere of *in-between:*

> *Life-world is surely given, it is given to me and to us, but in such a way that it is co-given with whatsoever may be given at all.* (Waldenfels 1998: 73)

Similar to differential Hermeneutics of Gadamer and Derrida, Said has in his deliberations on liberation moved well beyond the confinements of cultural exclusionism. He believes that:

> *culture comes to be associated, often aggressively, with the nation or the state; this differentiates "us" from "them", almost always with some degree of xenophobia* (Said 1994: xiii) *[whereas] the essence of liberation and emancipation is a consciousness and recognition, of a universal self, which is a unification of the self and the other.* (Ashcraft 1999: 115)

Said conception of liberation, therefore, is centered on an interactionist self–awareness. This conception, he believes is contrary to the tendency of ignoring other societies. According to Said, we can now observe in the "decolonized" world a "dialectics of independence and liberation":

> *I do not think that the anti- imperialist challenge represented by Fanon and Cesaire or others like them has by any means been met: neither have we taken them seriously as models or representations of human effort in the contemporary world. In fact Fanon and Cesaire ... jab directly at the question of identity and of identitarian thought, that secret sharer of present anthropological reflection on 'otherness' and 'difference'. What Fanon and Cesaire required of their own partisans, even during the heat of struggle, was to abandon fixed ideas of settled identity and culturally authorized definition. Become different, they said, in order that your fate as colonized peoples can be different.* (Said 1989: 224-5, in Ashcraft: 111)

Henceforth, Said's views on post-colonial Liberation is a meeting point of Frantz Fanon with Derrida and Gadamer.

6-The Culture of Peace versus the Culture of War: Said contra Huntington

The notion of the "clash of civilizations" is a declaration of cultural exclusionism and antagonism proclaimed by the latest orientalist theoretician, Samual Huntington. One of the main reasons for "clash of civilizations", according to him, is "cultural differences", which he believes are cause for disharmony amongst cultures. (Huntington 1993: 22-29) As such, "the clash of civilizations" is the ultimate outcome of the existing situation as seen by Huntington. Therefore, the notion of "clash" is the talk of the ultimate; the ultimate "clash" for the ultimate "result." As such, "the clash of civilizations" is an *ultimatum,* or a naming by a power-subject. Ultimatum is the kind of speech-act which is saturated with power and spoken by the subject of superiority in power relations. Therefore, the talk of "clash" is the ultimate word in the metaphysical language of will to power. Such language of threat and ultimatum is rooted in Hobbsian atomism and its monologic epistemology. In Hobbsian vision, everyone is threatened by others and is mediated to them by power. Such self-understanding is the extension of an atomistic and mechanical-empirical conception of the world. Therefore, man's self-understanding is affected by power. Huntington's "reasons", as regards the inevitability" of the clash among civilizations, are actually cases of behaviorist "reasoning" applied to the arena of intercultural relations. Indeed, the theory of "the clash of civilizations" is the new-global plane entered in by the behaviorist theory of Modernization. However, unlike its previous forms of speech-act, in which Modernization theory tended to prescribe to other (non-western) societies the way for "development", now it threatens other (non-western) civilizations to extinction.

Contrary to this cultural exclusionism and civilizational antagonism, Said turns his notion of "culture of resistance" into a culture of community and coexistence. His cultural theory of resistance and political theory of liberation leads to a horizon of mutuality and coexistence. As Bill Ashcraft and Pal Ahluwalia put it:

> *Said's strategy for resistance encapsulates a twofold process, which can be likened to the two phases of decolonisation he discusses in Culture and Imperialism. The first is the recovery of 'geographical territory', while the second is the 'changing of cultural territory'. Hence, primary resistance that involves 'fighting against outside intrusion' is succeeded by secondary resistance that entails ideological or cultural reconstitution. Resistance then: becomes a process 'in the rediscovery and repatriation of what had been suppressed in the natives' past by the processes of imperialism'.* (Ashcraft 1999: 107-108)

7- Conclusion: Said as a Political Thinker

In his writings Said has moved beyond the confines of literary criticism. The text and its "world" become Said's world wherein he emphatically gets engaged. By his critique, Said literally reaches at an intentional/illocutionary notion of "post-colonial liberation". By hermeneutic of liberation he extends his original study of power/knowledge relationship in *Orientalism*, to the point of elaborating on a new discourse of Liberation which, due to his untimely death remains unfinished. As such, his works can he considered as an example in the tradition of political thought, namely the thought of liberation in post-colonial condition the kernel of which lies in Said's peculiar conception of culture. Said has defined culture as two things in particular:

> *First of all it means all those practices, like the arts of description, communication, and representation, that have relative autonomy the economic, social, and political realms and that often exist in aesthetic forms, one of whose principal aims is pleasure. Included, of course, are both the popular stock of lore about distant parts of the world and specialized knowledge available in such learned disciplines as ethnography, historiography, philology, sociology, and literary history. ......Second....culture is s concept that includes a refininig and elevating element, each society's reservoir of the best that has been known and thought.* (Said 1994: xii-xiii)

Culture thus is simultaneously the arena of the "consolidation of empire", of the "resistance to power" and of the "post-colonial emancipation". By a   practical/normative conception of the culture, along with an emancipatory narrative and concern full critical intellectual activity, Said draws new disciplinary borders for both literary criticism and post-colonial discourse and thereby presents his political theory of post-colonial liberation. As such, he can be regarded as a political thinker with an emancipatory intention.

Said preferred to write in the essay form in order to "emphasize the personal while at the same time entailing a political dimension". He also is "polyphonic: that is, to articulate and develop his own views by deploying other thinkers." (Salusinszky, 134: in Ashcraft: 32)

In Said's writings, a discursive/normative reorientation in the post-colonial narrative of the colonized self-reassertion is suggested. He has provided narratives of liberation, hope, vision and a home in the world, so the colonized can find it in him "to carry on the work of the previous generations of anti-imperialists." As such, he proposes in his writings an illocutionary "act of political resistance to injustice, the refusal to submit to the reigning orthodoxies of our time." (Varma 2006: 1)

As such, Said finds a genre of libertarian, a paradigm of new culture, or, one could say, a revaluation of values, this time from the eye of the disposed in the subjugated world of the colonized in the work of a negated voice. As a contemporary thinker, Said has actually proven the liveliness of narratives of emancipation and has contested "the theoretical orthodoxy of post modernity by challenging Lyotard's view that the era of grand and enlightenment is at end." (Kennedy 2000: 116)

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