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URBAN SLUM SETTLEMENTS: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE PHENOMENON

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Abstract
The study reviews various literature on how African cities developed by illuminating the historical relationships between colonialism, urban development and the effects on slum formation in Africa and aims to help in formulating policies to mitigate slum formation. The study reveals that historically urbanization in Africa coincided with the beginning of formal colonial rule, disrupting traditional settlement systems that had created harmony between people and the environment. Also, dual settlements policy where Europeans lived-in well-planned areas alongside native settlements that lacked facilities laid the foundation for many present-day slum settlements. Resettling Africans from rural areas to urban settlements without providing amenities solidified slums as a recurring problem. These slums became areas with lowest living standards of living characterized by poverty, high crime and low literacy rates, poor sanitation, high child morbidity and mortality with estimates of 50% of children under five years dying from preventable diseases. Holistic plans that involve understanding how slums have evolved through time is important for implementing better plans to solve the situation. Also use of traditional African materials such as bamboos, raffia, wood and red earth that are abundant and less expensive as building materials by Africans before the advent of Europeans be incorporated in any plan geared towards tackling the menace of slums is recommended by this study.
Keywords: Colonialism, urban development, slum.

INTRODUCTION

Africa as a continent has a unique history as a continent that is severely impacted by the effects of colonialism. Among the challenges afflicting Africa is the persistence of informal and slum settlements in urban centres. Slums in many African cities continue to expand creating alternative lifestyles detrimental to mainstream urban life. As governments try to contend with slum settlements and providing lasting solutions, it is imperative to understand the historical issues associated with their growth and development in Africa. This is important because informal settlements and slums have become intractable in shaping cities while affecting the physical and socioeconomic conditions of many in Africa.

This review delves into the historical development of slums by exposing the relationship between European colonialism in Africa, early urban development and slum formation. It provides a historical context on how informal settlements and slums became part of urban spatial patterns to understand the roles played by colonialism. Also it aims to allow urban scientists and administrators to have critical insights into how colonialism affected the continent, and the fact that slums present serious problems in cities so as to ensure correct plans for solving the problem. This study starts by explaining the conceptual definitions of key terms that are important for laying the foundation for the study. This is followed by reviewing colonialism and urban development in Africa, colonialism and slum settlements in Africa, summary of findings and conclusion.

CONCEPTUAL DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS

Colonialism

Colonialism is accepted as a political and socioeconomic phenomenon that occurs when a particular country, race or kingdom overcomes another mostly through the force of arms. This is done with the intention of group to subjugate another and depriving them of their rights to freedom and use of their resources. It is against all the norms of civilized living as the colonized peoples often face inhuman treatments during the

period of subjugation. Horvath (1972 p. 47) succinctly states that " it seems generally, if not universally agreed that colonialism is a form of domination, the control by individuals or groups over territory and/or behaviour of other individuals or groups". Colonialism often involves subjugating a race, people or country to the will of another either through a false ideology of superiority in culture, religion or political creed.

Many examples are shown of the inhuman treatment is associated with colonization. Countries such as the Congo, Kenya and South Africa are a few of the countries that went through some of the most horrible experiences meted out to native population during their periods of colonization. Classical examples as to the treatment of Africans is that of the Congo at the hands of the Belgian occupiers during the period before independence. This was possible because often colonialists see native population not as humans but entities to be exploited and demeaned in the most vicious way if they stood against their colonial interests. To understand the concept better we use explanations offered by Butt (2013) to explain colonialism which states that it has three characteristics that include, domination, cultural imposition and exploitation. He explained that domination involves the subjugation of a people especially through the force of arms. This is so because no group or race is ever willing to freely submit themselves to another without some form of coercion. This domination can be institutional which involve denial of rights and self-determination and the imposition of rule rooted in a separate political jurisdiction (Butt, 2013).

Cultural imposition involves policies that actively relegate or destroy local culture while supplanting foreign values of the colonizing nation. The policy is as a result of some form of racial superiority beliefs that the colonized people's culture and religion are barbaric and inferior to the colonizer's own ways of life and therefore should be eradicated. However the driving force for a race or country to want to subjugate another is to have the ability to exploit the subjugated people either for their human or material resources. According to Butt (2013) such exploitation can be through slavery, misappropriation of cultural property and natural resources, exploitation of trade relations as well as the forcible introduction of capitalist forms of production to the benefit of the colonizing country. Colonialism is a despicable act that significantly altered the ways of life and development of many people especially in Africa. It also affected the perception of Africans of themselves, their future, hindering physical, social and economic development.

Urban development

Urban development involves transforming an area that was not urban into one that is urban. The American Planning Association (2019) sees it a process of creating and maintaining vibrant, livable and sustainable urban environments. It also involves the planning and management of both the physical and social infrastructure for enhanced social and economic sustainability for all within the planning space. There is investment in infrastructure that involves improving of the quality of life for all residents (UN-Habitat, 2016), irrespective of social, economic and ethnic status.

Urban development is characterized by zone regulations, tenure with efficient management of space that helps in the upgrading of the physical, social, economic and environmental infrastructure for improved quality of life for all citizens within the development area. Several theories and models have been postulated to explain urban development and include modernization theory, dependency theory and model of sustainable urban development. Thus modernization theory according to Rostow (1960) is a linear process that follows a sequence of stages, that is, from the traditional to more modern ways of living intended to achieve development of people and the environment for improved standard of living.

The dependency theory relates purely how developed countries affect urban development in developing countries. Reviewing this theory Frank (1966) argues that urban development and how it is achieved is often shaped by the level of dependency developing countries have to developed countries arguing that urban development in developing countries is often hindered by how integrated they are to decisions and machinations of developed countries.

Using the sustainability urban development model, the UN-Habitat (2019) emphasized the need for urban development in achieving its goals to be sustainable, equitable and environmentally friendly. It is a concept that draws on natural justice for everyone to be included in the development process that shapes the environment in such a way that the best is extracted from it while maintaining the integrity of the environment for as long as possible to the benefit of all.

Slum

The United Nations Human Settlement (UN-Habitat, 2016) conceptualizes slums as a phenomenon involving the physical, social and economic deprivation affecting households characterized by people living in informal settlements and lacking essential services for improved living. These people according WHO (2018) lack the specified minimum space of three square metres per person which means that they are characterized by high population densities in inadequate living spaces. Essential services are generally lacking in slums such as adequate waste management systems, clean water and proper sanitation, poor quality housing, lack of maintenance and inadequate protection from the elements, facing marginalization, stigma and social and economic exclusion (UN-Habitat, 2016).

The International Labour Organization (ILO) in a 2018 study characterize slum settlements as having high levels of unemployment with preponderance of informal economic activities that are not integrated into mainstream economy. This generally contribute to their inability to withstand economic shocks and disasters that are far too often characteristic of economics of many developing countries living residents in this settlements facing severe poverty. Poverty in slums specifically influences the increased rates of low accessibility to WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) (World Bank in 2019).

COLONIALISM AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

European intervention had profound influence in Africa's development and are still being felt today. Africa's socioeconomic and political trajectory is greatly shaped by the legacies of this event. However one of the greatest legacies of colonial influences is how cities and towns developed in Africa. The fact that many present day towns and cities were a result of the activities of colonialists who were only interested in exploiting the human and natural resources of the continent underscores the potential of the unintended consequences associated with urban development. Urban development was a by-product of European influence in African affairs as Coquetry-Vidrovitch (2005) outline in a study of urbanization in the African continent, claiming that historically urbanization coincided with the beginning of formal colonial rule as the colonialists struggled to create systems that would help achieve their goals. This situation started from the 1800s and continued all the way to the 1960s.

Most African countries and their boundaries owe their existence to colonial influences and cities were products of these machinations intended to promote dominance and exploitation. Africa's urban development often had little or no inputs from the natives who were seen as commodities to be exploited and according to Hochschild (1998) King Leopold of Belgium treated the Congo, a vast region with millions of people of different tribes as his personal property.

Table 1: Cities and countries' created by Europeans, their purpose and dates of creation.

City	Country	Purpose	Colonizer	Date founded
Nairobi	Kenya	Transport/Railway depot	Britain	1899
Dakar	Senegal	Colonial post	France	1857
Freetown	Sierra Leone	Settlement for freed slaves	Britain	1887
Swapkopmund	Namibia	Port town	Germany	1892
Accra	Ghana	Colonial capital	Britain	1877

Lagos	Nigeria	Port city close to the Atlantic	Portuguese	1472
Dares el Salam	Tanzania	Trading post	Germany	1865
Kisumu (formerly Port Florence)	Kenya	Port town	Britain	1901
Harare (Salisbury)	Zimbabwe	Mining town	Britain	1890
Johannesburg	South Africa	Mining town	Britain	1890
Malabo	Equatorial Guinea	Colonial administration	Spain	1827
Cape town	South Africa	As a refueling station for ships traveling between Europe and Asia	Netherlands	1652
Brazzaville	Republic of Congo	Colonial capital	France	1827
Kinshasa	Democratic Republic of Congo	Mineral town	Belgium	1881
Maputo	Mozambique	A harbor town	Portugal	1781
Luanda	Angola	Port town	Portugal	1575

Compiled by author from "The Cambridge History of Africa (1975)" by J. D Fage, Roland Oliver and from "Africa: A Biography of the Continent (1998)" by John Reader.

From Table 1, it is observed that many early towns were either located close to mineral deposits or were strategic places meant for colonial capitals and ports for efficient exploitation of Africa's resources. These locations were important to Europeans in so far as they provided the means for enhancing the political and economic life of their home countries without regards to the needs of the native population. For efficient management of these towns, colonialists trained and introduced a new artisanal class and local administrators to work in mines, process and transport raw materials and help in day to day administration. This instigated population movement to these locations changing the landscapes of once small settlements to major economic and administrative centres. As population and economic activities grew, the spatial configuration and status of these new locations grew to become leading towns and cities in the continent.

Further development of these locations drew more Africans away from agriculture and other traditional occupations from rural areas to these areas increasing their population and expanding the new settlements in size and population. Unfortunately the newcomers and their families ended up concentrating in and around specific settlements that lacked basic amenities meant for natives. This created an urban pattern characterized by informal settlements mostly inhabited by Africans and well planned areas dedicated to Europeans.

In specifically analyzing the impacts of colonialism on urban settlement development, Freund (2018) explained that the imposition of European-style urban planning that disregarded the existing traditional settlement patterns negatively affected future urban development in Africa. For one the grid iron pattern was the common mode of building towns and cities in Europe and this was wholly transferred for developing towns in Africa (Home, 2013). The grid iron involved laying out streets in wide, straight and rectangular blocks irrespective of the natural features and landscape, unlike African settlements that were closely situated amidst family units. King (2016) criticized this imposition of the colonialists' style without developing models consistent with the new environment, as the method disregarded local settlement patterns and tradition living arrangements to the detriment of local population.

Throughout the colonial period, urban planning and development prioritized the needs of European settlers to the detriment of the native population. Mabogunje's 1990 publication argued that this led to the formation of mostly dual settlements types in many towns that was characterized by well-planned

neighbourhoods with adequate facilities and services for Europeans alongside overcrowded neighbourhoods that lack essential facilities for Africans. The European quarters consisted of wide boulevards, luscious trees and flowers with modern architecture that were comfortable while native settlements were relegated to the periphery characterized by unhealthy living conditions for its inhabitants. This legacy of inequality of facilities and poorly planned neighbourhoods according to the UN-Habitat (2016) contributed to the neighbourhood patterns currently being experienced in many African cities where there are well planned areas served with good facilities and others without adequate facilities existing side by side.

Human labour was essential for achieving the objectives of the colonialists at minimal costs and was appropriated through threats and intimidation as many natives were forcibly relocated to the urban settlements to provide needed manpower. Mamdani (1996) explained that many were forced to move from their ancestral lands to new townships by colonialists often without proper shelter leading to the concentration of people in makeshift settlements that were squalid and not conducive for humans. In other were cases natives were forcibly evicted from prime locations and fertile agricultural lands without compensatory or proper arrangements for landowners in terms of commensurate land holdings. This situation contributed to displacing people into settlements that were not productive and led many Africans to make do with makeshift squalid settlements.

There was also the disruption African traditional systems that were in place for centuries and had created harmony between people and their environment as new systems were forced on to the detriment of the native population. This disrupted traditional economies and native governance structures changing the way towns ultimately developed. It had the effect of displacing people from one location and concentrating them in far places different from their original areas and changing the way they related to each other and the new environment (Salm and Falola, 2005). Thus this situation coupled with mass migration created situations for colonial towns to be difficult places to live in compared to rural areas where Africans migrated from. Many people found it difficult to lead productive lives due to the fact that they were not prepared to function properly in their new neighbourhoods that were purposely starved of adequate amenities. This situation affected how present day towns and cities evolved especially in the spread of informal and slum settlements.

COLONIALISM AND SLUM SETTLEMENTS IN AFRICA

The African Union's 2018 publication titled, "The Impact of Colonialism on Urban Development in Africa", revealed that in post-colonial Africa, urban challenges associated with the colonial era persist as many cities struggle to meet the needs of the colonial arrangements left by Europeans. The fact that informal settlements and slums with colonial past persists shows that governments are yet to achieve livable cities is a stark reminder of the implication of Africa's colonial past. Slums are still prevalence in many cities continue to retarding Africa's growth and development.

Table 2: Names of existing slum settlements in Africa and their origins.

Slum settlements	Country	Origin
Kibera, Nairobi.	Kenya	Regarded as the largest slum in the African continent. It originated as a resettlement area for Nubian soldiers who fought for the British colonial government (Amis, 2004)
Mathara, Nairobi.	Kenya	This area was established in the 1940s for the resettlement of African workers who were forcibly relocated from rural areas to work in the colonial economy (Hurchzermeyer, 2011).
Katwe and Kisenyi, Kampala.	Uganda	Established as a settlement for African workers and traders (Kalema, 2012).

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Ajegunle, Lagos.	Nigeria	Regarded as one of the largest slums in Lagos with its origin dating back as a resettlement by the colonial government for African workers (Akinola, 2013).
Abomey-Calavi and Godomey, Cotonou.	Benin Republic	Established as a resettlement for African workers and traders (Njoh, 2017).
Khayelitsha, Cape town.	South Africa	Established as a settlement for African workers (Seekings, 2002).
Makokoba, Bulawayo.	Zimbabwe	Regarded as one of the oldest townships in Bulawayo dating back to the colonial era and was established as a settlement for African workers (Rakodi, 1995).
Sidi Muomen and Hay Mohammadi, Casablanca.	Morocco	Established by the colonial government as a settlement for African workers and traders (Davis, 2006).
Bab El Oued and Belcourt, Algiers.	Algeria	A settlement established during colonial era for African workers and traders (Bourdieu, 1962).

Compiled by Author (2025).

Concentration of native people in locations especially as workers in towns was imperative for efficient exploitation of human and natural resources. Often colonialists pursued policies that encouraged concentration of people without recourse to future impacts of these concentration. Towns were designated for different purposes such as administrative centres, port towns or mineral towns and these meant that effective man-power was needed to meet the objectives of the colonial administrations. This concentration was essential to meet colonial targets to the detriment of the countries' future. This concentration transformed different small settlements and uninhabited areas into towns and cities in a short time without adequate facilities that led to settlement dysfunctions creating slum conditions in areas generally inhabited by natives. There are those who believe this development was to blame for the functional retardation of many African cities.

Freund (2007) contended that African cities were diminished in terms of character and status compared to European ones when viewed from the perspective of their usefulness to the colonialists. This is because development was only geared towards the maximization of the objectives set by Europeans. African cities were therefore graded as either port/warehouse towns for processing and export of natural resources, mineral towns for mining and sorting of natural minerals, transport hubs for transportation of local resources to different parts of the colony in preparation for exports. Freund (2007) also revealed that these activities were not integrated into any long term development plan that could have benefitted the natives in the future. African towns and cities where not sites that organically evolved into entities that would drive future development aspirations of native people and transformed into engines of growth after the colonialists left.

In terms locations of colonial towns, a UN-Habitat (2008) analysis explained that most towns were specifically sited around coasts and natural transportation routes that were important for conveying human and material resources. It generally did not consider the environmental risks associated with such locations as far as they provided efficient means of exploiting human and natural resources. This skewed the physical development of many countries as many sites without the potential of natural resources or strategic location were never included in any development agenda of the colonizers no matter the size of the population. This meant that urban development was carried out in locations purely for strategic economic reasons and neglecting environmental risks to sensitive natural landscapes. This encouraged the buildup of population that later created problems for efficient management of cities. Cities like Lagos being along the coast with many

lakes and canals is observed to be facing unprecedented environmental challenges as more and more waterways are continuously being sand filled to create space for more population.

In terms of laws, it is observed that planning originally meant for urban development during this period were initiated by colonizers. However, in many countries like Nigeria, these laws are still being used to guide urban development. For example, the Town and Country Planning Law of 1946 which was a colonial era law intended to guide urban development is still in use in many states of the country, even when there is a subsisting Urban and Regional Law in Nigeria which many states have failed to domesticate. Njoh in his 2003 work calls attention to this and how it negatively effects in present day urban planning and development practices. These colonial laws are no longer adequate in meeting contemporary issues such as high urban migration, environmental degradation and growing poverty in African cities.

As earlier stated, spatial planning in colonial Africa encouraged segregated settlement systems that characterized urban development for Europeans and Africans. This typified the pattern many towns and cities have come to be known structurally with its accompanying negative impacts. Back then there were policies for creating and enforcing zones for different races, meaning people could only live and work in certain places according to their racial or socioeconomic backgrounds. Early Europeans especially in countries like South Africa maintained this policy through the use violence within black townships that were only recently was abolished after the fall of apartheid. This transcended a reality for both whites and blacks in their separate neighbourhoods as white neighbourhoods have continued to remain posh, orderly and well served with modern facilities as opposed to black townships that continue to be squalid, poor and crime infested. Data from the South African Police Service (2020/2021) reveal that townships such as Khayelitsha and South West Townships (SOWETO) have higher rates of property crimes such as burglary and theft and violent crimes that include murder, assault and robbery. Also, the South African Institute of Race Relations in a 2020 survey indicate that 64% of whites felt safe in their neighbourhoods compared to only 34% of blacks in their neighbourhoods.

The segregation of neighbourhoods in many postcolonial African countries led to former European quarters to be converted to Government Reserved Areas (GRAs) like in Nigeria and were taken over by the new African political elite. Unfortunately, it is observed that this neo elites continued with the policies of seeing these neighbourhoods as places that should be neglected. This development has worsened former native settlements that have grown with the addition of more people especially those facing economic depravity and zones of exclusion for many people.

Colonial policies were instrumental in provision of infrastructure in towns and the connection of different settlements through the provision of roads as long as it helped in achieving the goals of the colonialists. Unfortunately, if only a single location in an entire country was deemed strategic to achieving the goals of the colonialists, then only that location would be given any attention for development. This inevitably led to situations where only one city/town was developed by the colonialists, creating situations where these cities became the capitals of new independent African states which left many African countries with only one city especially the capitals becoming primate cities (city of only its kind in terms of development and status). Cities like Bangui and Nairobi were primate towns in the Central African Republic and Kenya as there were no notable towns in terms of status compared to them. Its effect on urbanization was that as migration from rural areas continued this led to overcrowded in these cities with pressure on infrastructure leading meaning that many people would not be able to be served by available facilities such as housing and sanitation leading to the formation of slums.

In reviewing the evolution of urbanization in Africa, Bryceson (2006) revealed that early urban growth in Africa lacked proper long term economic and industrial development plans and the process based on the ‘pull’ and ‘push’ of perceptions. The ‘pull’ perception occurred without actual opportunities but due to the

development instituted by the colonialists in these locations. The 'push' factor that encouraged migration was due to rural landlessness, involution, poverty and a chronic lack of employment in rural areas that encouraged migration to towns and cities. This resulted in large numbers of rural poor moving to cities that were ultimately transformed into a class of poor people known as "the urban poor". This created a culture of poverty as these colonial era slums are not just still in existence but have grown exponentially with deprivation associated with them affecting a large number of people.

Historically slums' negative impacts on cities in African cities continue to be problematic and are yet to be properly addressed according to a UN-DESA 2015 report. The report revealed that urban population in Africa is projected to increase from 471million in 2015 to 1.3 billion by 2050, with large number of people living in slums. The number of slums in Africa continues to grow side by side with colonial era slums with high numbers of people living in slum conditions. This figure grew at an annual rate of 4.5% between 2000 and 2010 as attributed to figures from the UN-Habitat (2010) for sub-Saharan Africa. At this rate cities are not likely to develop properly with this number of people living in slums as it increases unemployment, poverty, poor sanitation and crime reducing standard of living. To understand the gravity of the effects of the situation, data from the World Bank (2020) reveals an average of 55% of urban dwellers in sub-Saharan Africa live in deprivation and in slum-like conditions affecting their growth and development and the problems associated with such situations.

Table 3: Percentage of slum dwellers in comparison to overall city residents in selected sub-Saharan African countries.

Countries	Percentage (%)	Source
Central African Republic	76.4	UN-Habitat 2016
Chad	79	UN-Habitat, 2016
Democratic Republic of Congo	59.2	UN-Habitat, 2016
Nigeria	61.7	UN-Habitat, 2016
Sudan	65.2	UN-Habitat, 2016
Kenya	55.7	KNB, 2019
Tanzania	53.6	NBS, 2019
Uganda	55.9	UBOS, 2019

Compiled by author (2025).

Problems of unemployment is high and endemic in slums as figures from the ILO (2018) estimates that youth unemployment is around 70% in African slums. This has the effect of perpetuating poverty, inequality and increasing the crime rates as is known to be generally associated with slum life. Also high mortality rates are persistent in African slums especially among minors, with UNICEF (2020) estimating that 50% of children under the age of five dying from preventable diseases, coupled with widespread malnutrition increases the prevalence of low immunity and an increase in morbidity rates. Estimates from the World Health Organization (2018) has it that 30% of children under the age of five living in slum conditions in Africa have feeding problems and are malnourished.

African slums also generate illiteracy with estimate of 30% of adults being illiterate according to UNESCO (2019). Also estimates from UNICEF (2020) reveal that 50% of the children growing up in slums do not have access to quality education while for some there is no education at all. This ultimately makes it difficult for them to be fully integrated into mainstream urban life increasing their chances of growing up poor in the future. As is observed this portends serious development problems for many African countries as these slums continue to create situations that manifestly retards Africa's growth and development. Therefore this knowledge is important for governments in trying to eradicate slum proliferation in the continent.

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SUMMARY

- Historically urbanization in Africa coincided with the beginning of formal colonial rule disrupting traditional settlement systems that had created harmony between Africans and their environment before colonization.
- The dual settlements' policy of having Europeans live in well planned areas as opposed to native settlements lacking basic facilities set the foundation for present day slums while the policy of resettling Africans from rural areas to new urban settlements without basic amenities solidified slums as a recurring problem.
- Some cities in Africa are still operating with obsolete colonial era planning laws that are not able to cope with present day urban challenges.
- Slums have persisted through the colonial era, metamorphosed into present day urban social problems that are intractable and having the lowest standards of living in the world.
- Without European intervention in Africa chances are the persistence of slums, the way they evolved and the problems associated with them would have been minimal if not nonexistent.

CONCLUSION

Many believe that slums are a result of current state of urban planning and economic mismanagement in Africa and are not aware of the historical attachments slum settlements have with European exploitation through colonialism. This work is able to bring to light the role that European influence played in perpetuating this phenomenon in the African continent.

Colonization contributed immensely to the functional retardation of Africa's socioeconomic progress. This review has been able to draw the links between colonialism, its approach to urban development and the persistence of slum settlements in cities today. Though slums persists, affecting millions of people in different parts of Africa, they cannot solely be blamed on the effects of colonialism. The truth Europeans in Africa for the exploitation of human and material resources retarded the growth and development of the continent in no small measure.

This study is able to show a clear link between colonialism, urban development pattern and the persistence of slums in African cities with its devastating consequence on the growth and development of her citizens. With this knowledge it is expected that governments at all levels are expected to be critical in their approach to tackling the problem of slum proliferation with a clear understanding of the history and evolution of slum settlements in the continent. Conclusively the problem should not be seen only as a contemporary occurrence of present-day urbanization processes but viewed from its historical context and background when pursuing policies and programmes to ameliorate the slum problem in African cities.

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