

DEVELOPMENT POLICIES IN AFRICA

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THE HUNGARIAN CHARITY SERVICE OF THE ORDER OF MALTA

The lack of development in developing countries and the examination of the underlying societal problems that are in close causal relation have been providing fertile ground for research to present an extensive historical background. Economic challenges, the backwardness in growth or modernization, and the disorders of society and democratization are collective research subjects for multiple disciplines. Within this multidisciplinary field, the system of international development and aid is an important branch which has grown into a set of independent research and policy standards. Among the classical sectors, it is considered relatively new, barely seventy years of age; however, it has developed with remarkable speed: it has been viewed as the only true path of closing up as well as the misleading track of the crossroads of irreconcilable interests. This paper, somewhat unconventionally, considers the principle resultants that define the character of the system and the manner of operation, and raises critical questions as well. It aims to explain the historical and human context that shaped development policy and could serve as key background elements for the sometimes seemingly irresolvable contradictions that affect even these days.

Introduction

Just as the Middle East is synonymous with an unending war or crisis in the eyes of the public and, in general, for the majority of the developed world's population, so is Africa, or primarily its sub-Saharan region, associated with poverty and privation. This unilateral and extremely simplified picture of Africa suggests perhaps one additional comment: the well-known fact of the steady stream of aid and assistance; the support of the "hungry and thirsty Africans" and the adopted poor orphan children is often the only synonym associated with the ancient source of our humanity. And it is indeed true: it is nearly impossible to estimate the amount of individual, corporate, ecclesiastical or state dollars, euro, yuan, pounds, dirham or yen – mentioning only the largest donors – which have found new owners in the form of aid in Africa. While the positive changes they made are indisputable, their effectiveness and extent and the proportionate measure of disbursements are strongly questionable. Lay donors committed to helping individual countries and development professionals too are more and more frequently asking the question that may not be politically correct but is all the more adequate: "Where is the flaw in the system?"

The current study, distancing itself from the present, concisely introduces the span that the system of international development has encompassed during the past half century. My aim is to highlight its determined fate, resulting from its inception, which hinders the realization of good will, field-level implementation – and the deeper understanding of the difficulties of others and their differing life situations.

In the labyrinth of perceptions

“Bottomless sack”, “a drop in the ocean”, “wasted money”, “endless process” – just a few individual opinions that passers-by in Budapest told the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta during its informative but poorly comprehensive street campaign¹; this is how they responded to the question inquiring about their opinion on providing continuous aid to distant “poor” countries. It is no coincidence that the organization posed this question, as the year 2015 was designated the European Year for Development, which had among its main goals to focus on this subject area, to showcase the achievements accomplished by the EU, and to sensitize the increasingly skeptical general public. Furthermore, the European Union’s campaign goal was nothing less than to make 2015 the boundary of an era in the history of development. In the background of this ambitious statement was in fact the intent to close an era, as this was “the year when the appointed deadline of the accomplishment of the future millennium development goals accepted by the countries of the world expired and when the international community had to develop a global framework for their future efforts concerning the elimination of poverty and the promotion of sustainable development goals.” (European Year for Development, 2015) We will later examine to what extent were these goals fulfilled and what such definitions as ‘specified deadline’ really mean. The message of the proprietors of the idea of the designated year also included encouraging more and more citizens to participate (European Year for Development, 2015) in the European Union’s battle dedicated to end worldwide poverty. This is, indeed, a battlefield; it is not even questionable for professionals working within this discipline. However, the interest and awareness of the European Union’s population towards distant and overseas countries, in general, could in no way be called uniform, it is difficult to formulate general statements and define common objectives to be achieved. The “outward” openness of countries active in the international scene, speaking world languages, perhaps having a colonial past, such as France or the United Kingdom, or other welfare societies with global powers, such as Germany or the Scandinavian states, is not comparable with that of the Hungarian population. Thus, the “spirit of participation”, the intention to donate, phrases often echoed in the EU, differ greatly across countries. This is what the national research project entitled “The Level of Solidarity of the Hungarians” examined, based on the Publicus Institute’s data supported by the Foundation for Development of Democratic Rights, V4Aid, and the EU. (Publicus, 2015) The analysis dissected the interest towards international public affairs, the inclination towards giving and lending a helping hand, and, in general, the commitment towards global solidarity. The research data validates the supposition according to which Hungary

is a country less open towards the problems of the world and is generally inward-turning. While the public affairs of the country are of special interest to the local population, with a ratio of roughly 8 out of 10 people, foreign events are less likely to grab our attention, approximately 5 out of 10 people are interested. (DemNet, 2015)

This Hungarian work, willingly or not, fits into the international wave, which specifically examined the population's and individuals' interests and opinion with regard to foreign aid (Czaplińska, 2007), in opposition to the motivation of states (Lumsdaine, 1993), like the United Kingdom's Department for International Development did over a decade ago in its documents entitled the White Paper, then in its later studies as well. (Lindstrom, 2011) Its motivation was no chance coincidence: increasingly greater parts of the population are critical of the aid pouring into far away countries, more and more people are questioning its usefulness. Many are those who outright urge the halting of international aid, saying that it only disappears in the labyrinth of local powers, corrupt leaders, and bureaucratic systems, and those truly in need experience nothing of its effects – mentioning only the most negative voices. The United Kingdom's Independent Party has not stated less either during its notorious 2015 general elections campaign. In their election manifesto – although they acknowledged the importance of overseas aid and the welfare societies' responsibility towards the world's poor – they pointed out: too much relief funds flow into countries that “have their own space programs and nuclear weapons, and into the pockets of dictators.” (UKIP, 2015) So they reduced grants from the gross national income by 9 billion pounds, from 0.7% to 0.2%; what is more, they considered shutting down the government agency responsible for the sector.

Critical voices

Long was the journey from the practice of the early colonists to the aid that rests upon modern principles and is controlled by national standards. These early types of cooperation were not always painless for the collaborating parties. Often autocratic and unilateral relationships were formed that exploited the capacities of others. Like others, the Ugandan politician, President Yower Museveni, a prominent of the

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“new African generation” stated that “The absence of ideological independence is a significant destabilizing factor. (...) The main problem was that our leaders were being besieged from time to time, by newer and newer recommendations, threats, at times by the West, other times by the East. (...) We can borrow principles, but nobody forces us to build them into our lives if those aren’t compatible with our own systems.” (Museveni, 1990, 241-244) In every age, the political and economic interests have fundamentally determined the direction and the functioning of the cooperation within international development. So, as long as unilateral relationships, which strengthen one side exclusively, exist, other cases are being built on concrete reciprocity, as Parag Khanna Indian economist said, “China (...) isn’t subduing Africa but makes growth possible for her and helps her become more attractive for the global investors, among those for China as well.” (Khanna, 2016, 119)

Within the major part of international cooperation, the uneven relation between parties is apparent, which stems from their differences (in advocacy and economic strength). An aid situation, however, could enlarge an eventual subordination, situational disadvantages, and any handicaps in power. What in peacetime is merely a dissimilarity, in an aid situation could very well become a critical factor. The aided recipient is always vulnerable, dependent on the one providing the aid. With an analogy: as on the individual level, the most vulnerable is always the infirm, who, in nearly all aspects, depends on the healing institution’s staff and technical capacities. The beneficiary always depends on the donor: he receives his conditioned sources from it, he has to be accountable toward it, prepare reports, and meet visual and other expectations. This is indeed a vulnerability, a dependent situation.

The critical questioning of the international development aid system and its functional anomalies is not a new concept. Robert Cassen, Economics Professor at Oxford University has already posed the “million-dollar question” in the title of his book “Does Aid Work?”, which has since become a classic on the topic. In his book (Cassen, 1994), Cassen examined the topic from the perspective of the so-called North-South phenomenon, in other words, the effectiveness of the aid provided by the wealthy North to the economically disadvantaged countries of the South. He critically pointed out that the majority of aid streaming into the world’s poorest countries do not work adequately, it does not fulfill its desired role. Does aid work? – Cassen’s former query is still being asked by subject-matter experts and those caring about the future of developing countries: for example, in Angus Maddison’s famous research (Maddison Historical, n. d.), in which he compared GDP values across countries. Looking at his results, it is visible that in the majority of sub-Saharan countries the per capita income has not increased significantly; what is more, in some cases, it has actually decreased, despite the aid that has been streaming in during the past decades. Where do we really stand then? Could it be that the critics are merely “dissatisfied western voices”, as the former directors of the development agency of the South African University refer to it in their textbooks? (De Beer and Swanepoel, 2014) We could endlessly quote writings of those who judge, and their opponents, those who support and are on the side of the current practice of aid. Where is the

“truth” then? Towards which direction should one turn in the endless labyrinth of theories, proofs, and contradictions, where the guiding signs and arrows often point back to themselves? In this fast-changing world, in the labyrinth of concepts that question the existence and functional mechanism of aid, one can pose the question: in the light of the reality of life situations, can such a writing be composed, can such a statement be expressed at all, which holds its ground and can be viewed as essentially valid by the actors involved? Or everything could only be viewed in the given momentary situation, in connection with the concrete context. Would it, perhaps, lose its validity as a result of a current political change or a new economic concept?

Before we continue the topic’s critical examination, let us set the boundaries of the frequently mentioned target area of our subject, the circle of beneficiaries, and let us review briefly the progress curve of international development aid and some of its important stages. Through this brief examination, our goal is to point out the root of the twofold nature of the system of international aid, the seemingly unresolvable contradictions, and the historical resultants of the above-mentioned occurrences. My train of thought might seem removed from the realities of fieldwork, perhaps being even too theoretical. However, my purpose goes far beyond presenting just a brief outline of the background of the subject. It highlights a particular conceptual premise, which is continually being handed down by the individual systems and which determines to this day the relationship of the parties involved in the development aid cooperation.

So many countries, so many kinds of aid

The system of international development aid is not an isolated discipline. Economic challenges, shortfalls in growth and modernization, social and democratic anomalies are the collective research subjects of several sciences: traditionally, primarily of political science and of economics, too, which examines the different economic systems. Today, along with this classic division, sociology, anthropology, religious studies, even history, and security studies have legitimate existence in the field as they serve the deeper understanding of social structures and state institutions. More conservative professionals often find these “scissors” opened too wide, as they mainly view problems economic in nature and their proposed solutions are drawn solely from the “ivory tower” of economics. Although it is indisputable that the analysis of macroeconomic processes, the unveiling of structural deficiencies, and the re-thinking of the state administrative system is not primarily a theological question. However, let us observe: African and Middle Eastern, and, to some extent, Asian states are ab ovo organized on religious, tribal, and ethnic grounds, often even in our days. The operational mechanisms and logics that derive from their inseparable history and identity have an effect even on our present times. Generally, these complex structures are based on religious ideologies and traditional principles. Let us think, for instance, of the nearly 350-370 million souls (UNDP, 2012) of the Arab world (N. Rózsa, 2015: 19-24) from Morocco to the Iraqi-Iranian border, from the Mediterranean Sea to the Sahara and the Indian Ocean, where the question of character is

very closely linked to the sense of social cohesion of the “Arab identity”. (UNDP, 2012) “This is the ‘Arab identity,’ which is the basis of the Arab nations’ concept of individuality which excludes others. Arabs have viewed the world in the Arab-Ajam (refers to non-Arabs in general) division since the beginning of their history and recollection. And the Islam joining the Arab character in the 7th century further colored this world view.” (N. Rózsa, 2015: 19-21) Primarily, the Sharia, the Islamic judicial system and substantive law, melts state and religious principles into one system. This is true also for the partially separated Arab population of the extremely heterogeneously inhabited countries of East Africa. Their identity is not equivalent to that of the animist or of today’s Christian population, who can be considered the continent’s indigenous inhabitants, nor is it identical to that of Africa’s thousands of ethnic and tribal groups. Universal recipes hardly exist, every situation and community is unique, different in their own aspects. Let us think of the Bengali famine of 1943, during which nearly 3 million people lost their lives, and the similar events happened in 1973 and during the early 1980s in Ethiopia: the practice used in India could not be transferred directly to Africa, even though “simply” food shortage had to be addressed in both situations.

Thus, if we speak of international development and interactions based on multi-lateral relations, the individual situations will necessarily have to be viewed in their complexity and in their own intricate reality. In the following, I deal with the deficit and the necessity of this perspective, a vision that is sensitive to others’ difficulties and diversities.

Changing perspectives

International development aid is a relatively new discipline. In colonial times, improving the living conditions of the local population was not a priority. Neither empathy towards their problems and struggles nor the respect-based approach, social integration, and, in general, the idea of strengthening-developing were in the focus, at least not on a general level. The model did not use the concept of value and interest in a neutral sense, and lacked a needs-based perspective and commitment towards the local populations. At the same time, we cannot say that, in colonial times, development did not take place in certain areas of Africa. On the contrary. Between 1880 and 1914, the period entitled as the ‘race’ or ‘pursuit’ for Africa, the competing European powers, with only a few exceptions, “annexed” Africa and divided most of the continent amongst themselves. (Fage, 2002: 276-298) In colonial times, Africa, the tropical areas in particular, became an important sphere of interest for European merchants and investors. French, German, and Portuguese colonies tried to catch up with the development that had begun in the largest

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British colonial territories along the downstream parts of the Niger and the delta regions, in Lagos, Sierra Leone, or Togo, on the Gold Coast, along the coastlines, and in the inner areas as well. During these times such iconic development projects were realized as the railway network between Uganda's Lake Victoria and Kenya's Mombasa, the Djibouti railway leading to the Ethiopian Highlands, the partially built railway and telegraph network connecting Cairo and Cape Town, which is still symbolic today, and, in general, the construction of the "western" state administration, the adaptation of cultural organizations, metropolitan "agora", and the establishment of buildings and institutions. However, these developments were not in the interest of the local population: the priority was always the interest of the colonial state. One needs only to think of the British-Egyptian dispute over Sudan: the aim was the greatest possible control of the water catchment area of the river Nile, the possession of the extensive commercial and agricultural land, and the British response to Egypt's geopolitical aspirations, its absolute demand for the river. The new country became the combined colony of the two great powers; however, in reality, it was governed by the British. They established the provincial seat in Northern Khartoum, the administration was carried out by the Arabized and Islamized northern elite. Unlike the southern Christian and animistic population, they received certain privileges, including becoming involved in the modern education system organized by the English. While the North was developing, hardly any changes took place in the South. Over time, the gap between the two parts has widened, and a particular center-peripheral relationship has developed. But the phenomenon was also true in general: the aim was never to convert the standards of local societies to "western" ones. During these times Africans typically played a subordinate role. (Morgan, 2014) The great and widespread colonial expansion could only be carried out by the Europeans with the conviction that only they knew what was best for the continent.

This vision is decisive in our days as well as within the ideology of the relationship between the states and parties with economically differing capabilities. We shall revisit this in connection with the works of the Nobel Prize-winner Indian economist, Amartya Sen. I mention this (already) richly researched historical period, because the early systems and theories of international development aid actually developed from the former colonial era's sphere of interest and its intergovernmental relations, and the contemporary concepts and motivations, show many similarities.

The era of development aid

Underdeveloped areas, the third world, newly industrialized countries, emerging markets, emerging economies, developing countries, the fourth world, the "two-thirds world", the Global South are expressions handed down in the system of international relations. Their historic resultants, analogies demonstrate well the dichotomy that fundamentally characterizes our topic's substantive difficulty: the unequal relationship between the parties of development aid cooperation which are still in evidence today with regard to target areas and beneficiaries. The question may arise: is it possible that an appropriate and realistic aid scheme between two par-

ties, which is devoid of interests and is based on true solidarity, cannot be evolved? Does not such international relief exist where the donor would try to contribute to the advancement of others purely out of altruism? Could “equality” exist between donor and recipient? In the following, I investigate this question, which fundamentally determines the quality and the content of certain relations.

Ever since countries and nations, national and governmental formations have been in existence, they have been in continuous interaction with each other. Their relationships are determined by a myriad of circumstances: today, primarily, their political and economic power. In modern times, we speak only of equality among the parties – should such things exist in reality. In Renaissance Europe, and, in particular, during the preceding periods, if a ruler provided support to the other, he typically obtained authoritative and political influence as a result of his “help”. Later, in colonial times, this worked in an institutionalized form; the development of territories under the jurisdiction of the European powers became the standard practice. However, these “capacity expansions” were carried out according to the donor’s interests, since infrastructure modernization was necessary for colonial officials and, in general, travelers. In line with the terminology of the day, these were part of the so-called “civilization assistance”: modern healthcare, and education and administrative systems were developed, of which I briefly spoke earlier. These types of assistance can be viewed as the prefiguration of modern-day development assistance, although we can hardly speak of a practice that is free of interests and is aimed toward the advancement of the local population. Unequal distortions were formed according to the best interests of the donor, fundamentally shaking up the hundred-, occasionally thousand-year-old social structures and ethnic systems. Therefore, African countries, which became independent during the era of decolonization, could develop and operate their modern (though unjust and faulty) governmental social organizations with the help of European sovereignties. Modern functioning mechanisms were unknown to them, as their daily routine contained archaic elements. It is not negligible that in certain African countries, despite all their pains and difficulties, they speak French or English fluently, with which they could become actively involved in the everyday life of the western world.

Both the support of contemporary international development and the interstate relief system received their practical implementation model from the European Recovery Program, which is linked to US Minister of Foreign Affairs George C. Marshall; then the promises made during the inauguration speech of President Truman in 1949 provided new momentum to the system. The Organization for European Economic Cooperation, OEEC, was established as the program’s implementation and control body, which, in 1961, evolved into today’s Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD, which aims to harmonize the economic, commercial, and financial activities of its member states. The disbursement conditions of the proposed assistance within the framework of the Marshall Plan were that those must have been used for the purchase of goods and services delivered by American firms. Thus, the nearly 13-million-dollar liquidity transfer secured helped rebuild Western

European countries (those not belonging to the Soviet bloc), but many saw modern-day imperialism and conquest in its elements. The created multilateral institutions, such as the IMF, the OECD, or the World Bank developed their international practices from this intellectual tradition, which is viewed with suspicion by many recipient countries, saying that those did not serve the creation of circumstances necessary to enhance their own competitiveness, but rather they serve the donor's interests.

It is as if the former colonial advantage and logic were to repeat themselves, warning the professionals belonging to the so-called post-development flow. Approximately since the '70s and '80s, there has been strong criticism voiced that modern development practices do not serve the recipients and, in general, the interests of the developing world (properly). They allege that the character of the "supporting" scheme serving the donors' political and economic goals is overly powerful, which only recreates the dependence of former colonial countries, which existed prior to their independence. This paradox situation is indeed difficult to resolve. Especially when for the donor states' international relief is just a tool to further the interests of their own foreign policy. In addition, part of the relief funds is sourced from taxes. In other words, donors will spend it however they wish, so the question of how well the aid granted serves the recipient country's interests becomes devoid of purpose.

Above, I presented a brief overview of the historical and conceptual background and ideological framework of international development aid. In the past fifty-sixty years, significant material and human relief resources have been moved towards the direction of developing countries. Meanwhile, fundamental problems have remained unresolved and hundreds of millions of people are still struggling with difficulties that could long have been resolved

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with sincere efforts. The pivotal question still remains, “Could the schemes invented and orchestrated by the West function in the East even if Westerners are not able to or do not want to step out of their own perspectives and preferences?” Could it be that certain Western considerations are simply not compatible with Eastern systems? Could the problem be that concepts based on Western recipes cannot be applied in those areas where they were destined for? Could the cause of trouble be that such professionals are shaping the processes who unswervingly believe that all countries go through the same development process and thus the presently undeveloped ones must follow the already developed countries’ social, judicial, democratic, economic, and, in general, state structures. These were the considerations pointed out by Indian philosopher Amartya Sen as well, for which he was awarded the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences in 1998.

About ethical development

The West has to abandon the approach assuming that the evolution of society follows the same path everywhere, and that the highest degree of development is the liberal state and liberal economy, the symbol and embodiment of which is democracy (see Fukuyama, 1992: 13-39; 55-71) – underlined Sen based on his progressive research during the end of the ‘90s. Examining primarily the Asian societies, he rebutted the generally accepted presumption that liberty and democratic elements (ultimately tolerance and social responsibility) are specifically and primarily Western values. His originality lies, among others, in the fact that as an economist he brought an ethical dimension to such areas that are typically defined by numbers and indicators. He established a new conceptual framework, which he thought was more suitable for developed countries to overcome inequality, the dramatic financial differences, society-wide unemployment, destitution, and hunger. Based primarily on his own experiences, he offered his model as an alternative to the developed West, as well as to the Arab world, Africa, and the long-suffering South America. He pointed out the erroneousness of the Western approach that believes that states with fundamentally different cultures are backward and are at the bottom steps of the stairs of evolution; but surely they are somehow problematic because they just cannot reach the Western level of development. He states that this is an unproven doctrine, from which international development professionals and international relations experts are incapable of prescinding. He writes that societies do not follow parallel paths, and during this process, they do not necessarily come to the same (or similar) conclusions. Thus, the conceptual perspective is unsustainable, which suggests that our models, ideas, and scales of value have to take root “overseas”, and if this does not happen, immediate intervention is required. We ought to notice, he warns, that not only our western type of democracy and social organizational systems exist, but there are also other approaches in the world; many of them are not viewed as legitimate, still, they do work within their own context. (Griffin and Knight, 1990) (About further sustainability-related issues see Tarrósy, 2010 and Vörös, 2010.)

Amartya Sen's (and others') ideas about "ethical development," the new conduct of relief, are widely known today. (Juhász, 2015) The latest theories accuse the former ones of not sufficiently taking into account the local circumstances and needs, but they place their own interests first instead, which results in their own goals prevailing and only replicating colonial logic. Looking at the previously demonstrated perspectives and field experiences, there is much truth to these assertions. As a result, beneficiaries of aid oftentimes view the schemes forced onto them only as a "civilizational intervention."

Though without precedent, this thought experiment is exciting: what if colonization did not happen, or at least European powers did not shake up the local ethnic and cultural systems? What if today's predominantly American-type mindset would not view the systems of the Arab and the African world as illegitimate and as a structure that "needs to be saved." Could we say that if certain powers had not destroyed early societies, today these would not have to be rebuilt? If foreign models and state systems had not been forced onto cultures different from ours, today's international relations would not suffer in the shackles of incompatibility. Could it be stated that the world would be more peaceful if we allowed those nations who, from our point of view, are less developed and less civilized (or merely "different") to walk their own ways? And along the systemic questions, we have not even considered the human and spiritual aspects. Let us just consider the seemingly bold parallel, which is not the least unfamiliar to our topic: what would have been the reaction, if the Soviet psychologists had offered mental hygienic support to the victims of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956? As the situation is often similar to this in certain parts of the developing world. Complex question, diversified answers. Especially as certain arguments and counterarguments oftentimes contain important elements of truth in the local context of values and perspectives as well. It cannot be said, even with the greatest tolerance and openness, that, for example, female genital mutilation, which still exists today, is not barbarism, or that it is right to send someone to a voodoo ritual when requiring life-saving intervention. As we also do not know (or at least it would be terrible to imagine) what would have been the outcome of the West African Ebola epidemic (or other similar infectious diseases) without western assistance. And it cannot be declared either, as we referenced before, that a country with a nuclear or space program (such as India or Pakistan) or, for that matter, the population of a country of which corrupt government embezzles millions of dollars, would not, despite all these, be in dire need of external assistance, that there would not be a need for international support.

What could be then the future of African development policy? Could its model be the developed Western society which is also searching for its identity and struggling with a moral crisis? Looking at the transformation of Africa, it is uncertain towards which direction this process leads. Both decision makers and the leaders of African countries need deep self-examination. The right direction of development has to be reconsidered by the Western world, while Africa, perhaps, should rethink it altogether. Africa can indeed be the continent of possibilities, so it is important

for us to realize that here certain nations live in countries in crisis, which cannot be compared to the crisis of the West. Thus, for the investors and decision makers of the developed world, local opportunities mean responsibility as well. It is not sufficient to view Africa only as the old-new grounds for their selfish business interests. And processes such as migration, regional conflicts, or the emergence of radical groups ought to be considered, and their own well-perceived interests should also correspond to an assistance that is just and lack of selfish interests. ☀

Note

- 1 “2015 was a special year for development. It was the first ever European Year to deal with the European Union’s external action and Europe’s role in the world.” (European Commission, 2015)

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