



Algerian Women Between Tradition and Resistance: A Historical Study of Their Role in the Struggles from French Colonization to Post-Independence

النساء الجزائريات بين التقاليد والمقاومة: دراسة تاريخية لدورهن من الاستعمار الفرنسي إلى مرحلة ما بعد الاستقلال.

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Abstract: This research examines the role of Algerian women between tradition and resistance, from French colonization to post-independence. It focuses on the historical development of their status under colonial rule and the challenges they faced after independence in securing their social and political rights, despite their key role in the struggle against colonization. The study aims to highlight their participation in the revolution and their impact on social change after independence. The results show that Algerian women were essential in both military and social fields. However, despite their sacrifices, they encountered significant challenges in obtaining full rights post-independence, reflecting a gap between expectations and reality.

Key words : Algerian woman; French colonization ; Independence ; Traditions.

الملخص: تناول البحث دور المرأة الجزائرية بين التقاليد والمقاومة منذ فترة الاستعمار الفرنسي حتى ما بعد الاستقلال. وقد ركزت الإشكالية على التطور التاريخي لوضع المرأة الجزائرية في ظل الاستعمار الفرنسي، مع تسليط الضوء على التحديات التي واجهتها بعد الاستقلال في تحقيق حقوقها الاجتماعية والسياسية، رغم مشاركتها البارزة في النضال ضد الاستعمار. هدف البحث إلى توضيح دور المرأة الجزائرية في الثورة الجزائرية وفي التغيير الاجتماعي بعد الاستقلال. أظهرت النتائج أن المرأة الجزائرية كانت عنصراً أساسياً في النضال، سواء في المجالات العسكرية أو الاجتماعية حيث شاركت في المقاومة بكل فعالية. ومع ذلك، ورغم تضحياتها، واجهت تحديات كبيرة في الحصول على حقوقها الكاملة بعد الاستقلال، مما يعكس الفجوة بين التوقعات والواقع في مرحلة ما بعد الاستقلال.

كلمات مفتاحية: المرأة الجزائرية؛ الاستعمار الفرنسي؛ الاستقلال؛ التقاليد.

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Introduction

The study of Algerian women's history offers a rich exploration of the dynamic interactions across different historical periods that Algeria has experienced. These periods include significant political, social, and cultural transformations that have contributed to shaping Algerian society over time. Algerian women were not mere passive recipients of these changes, but active participants in shaping events, leaving their clear marks on the various historical stages through which the nation passed. In this study, we argue that understanding the role of Algerian women is crucial not only for understanding the evolution of their social status but also for gaining a deeper insight into the national identity they helped to build through their sacrifices and struggles.

1 Methodological Framework

1.1 Problematic :

Algerian history is characterized by exceptional uniqueness due to the significant challenges faced by the country, starting from Ottoman rule, during which women endured deeply rooted social and political constraints, through French colonization, a dark period in which women nonetheless demonstrated heroic resistance, to the post-independence era, marked by continuous efforts to rebuild society on new foundations.

The study of Algerian women's history is a rich exploration of the interactions between various historical periods that Algeria has undergone, encompassing many political, social, and cultural transformations. In this study, we will highlight key backgrounds to understand the status of Algerian women at different historical stages, from the pre-colonial period, through the colonial occupation, to the post-independence era.

Therefore, the main issue addressed in this study is: **What is the historical evolution of the status of Algerian women under French colonial rule?** This question is crucial to understanding how major historical events, such as French colonization and military occupation, contributed to shaping the role of Algerian women in society. It not only concerns the status of women during specific periods but also extends to examining the profound influences of political events on the formation of women's social and cultural identity.

With the introduction of the main issue, the study raises several sub-questions that explore various aspects of the status of Algerian women throughout history. Through this main issue, we aim to answer the following questions:

1. What was the status of Algerian women before the outbreak of the Liberation Revolution?
2. What contributions did Algerian women make during the Liberation Revolution? Did these contributions lead to their emergence from their shell?
3. What was the status of Algerian women in the post-independence phase?



1.2 The study Methodology :

precise application of the historical method, without neglecting social interaction and its various elements, to help us reveal the facts. Since the study addresses history, we have relied on the historical method to ensure accuracy, truth, and neutrality in both the results and the approach. The historical method is defined as follows: "The reporting of available data about an incident, process, or human or natural phenomenon that occurred in the past through reading, reflection, analysis, and critique" (Hichem, 2007, p. 50). This method enables us to examine the political and social transformations that took place in Algeria and their impact on the status of women. It allows us to trace the history of Algerian women during the colonial period, the influence of the Algerian revolution, and the post-independence phase. The historical method also enables us to interact with historical sources such as books, documents, and studies that reveal the role of women during these phases. In addition to the historical method, we also use the social method.

1.3 The Importance and Objectives of the Study:

The importance of this study lies in shedding light on the role of Algerian women during important historical periods, from the French colonization era to the post-independence period. This study aims to understand the social and legal status of Algerian women throughout history. We seek to clarify the role of women in building the Algerian national memory through their contributions to the liberation revolution and their role after independence in constructing the independent Algerian state.

Based on the above, this study will be divided into three main sections. In the first section, we will discuss the status of Algerian women before the outbreak of the glorious revolution. In the second section, we will examine their roles during the revolution and explore the various tasks they were entrusted with. Finally, in the third section, we will address their status after independence.

2. The role of Algerian women during the colonial period.

It is important to note that prior to French colonization, Algeria was under Ottoman rule, a period marked by significant political and social transformations that greatly impacted the status of Algerian women. Despite the challenges Algerian women faced during the Ottoman era, we cannot overlook their efforts to assert their presence, even amid the violence and oppression they experienced, both within the family and in the broader political sphere. Women were involved in various aspects of life, within the boundaries set by customs and traditions. Outside of this framework, "women endured social oppression and lived in ignorance and illiteracy, largely due to the public policies of the later years of Ottoman rule. These factors helped justify and paved the way for the French occupation of Algeria" . (Louanis, 2014/2015, p. 52)

During this time, women were subjected to strong social restrictions imposed by customs and traditions, in addition to the social oppression and lack of education that prevailed in that era. However, they managed to assert their presence and played important roles within the limits permitted by the cultural and social context. Despite these limitations, the public policies of the Ottoman rule, particularly in its later years, contributed to the deterioration of Algeria's social and economic situation, which directly affected women, who faced illiteracy and marginalization.



Algerian women during this period experienced two forms of violence and oppression: the first, internal, manifested within the family, where their freedom was confined to limited roles; the second, external, was reflected in the public policies of the Ottoman rule, which contributed to the decline of education and social awareness. This situation created the conditions that allowed the French occupation of Algeria to take place, as the colonizers exploited the weakness in the country's social and political structure to solidify their control.

2.1 The Status of Algerian Women Before the Outbreak of the Revolution :

Colonialism, across the world, strives to destroy existing societies in order to maintain control and ensure its dominance. It seeks to keep the population in ignorance, and this was evident in Algeria as well. However, the impact on Algerian women was particularly severe, as they were denied access to education. It is clear that the intellectual and cultural level of women has a significant influence on the broader society, starting from the family. This situation was common across all colonized regions, and it is a strategy relied upon by colonizing powers worldwide (Boukhari, 2010/2011, p. 92)

During the colonial period, women's environment was largely confined to the home, as explained by (Bouaziz, *The Algerian Woman and the Arab Feminist Reform Movement*, 2001, p. 23): "The greatest affliction that has affected Arab women in general, and Algerian women in particular, is ignorance and illiteracy, which were imposed on them and limited their roles to mere pleasure, childbirth, child-rearing, and cooking. This led to the paralysis of their educational role, their intellectual and mental stagnation, and the overall decline of the family and society, since women are the foundation of the family."

The condition of Algerian women remained poor for a long time, as they lived within a framework defined by outdated customs and traditions that imprisoned them under the guise of religion. There was no room for discussion or for pursuing aspirations. Once an issue was tied to religion, no further discussion was permitted. The situation reached such extremes that in some areas, mentioning a woman's name was considered inappropriate. "She was subjected to a suffocating social siege, and mentioning her name at any gathering was considered impolite. So when a man mentioned the word 'woman' or 'wife,' he would say to the person he was addressing, 'May God honor you' or 'Excuse me'" (Ben ichouba, 2008/2009, p. 49).

Despite these oppressive conditions, some Algerian reformists attempted to improve the status of women and guide them out of the darkness of ignorance. The situation began to evolve in the 1940s, marking a period between 1936 and 1945, when the Algerian people sought the right path. During this period, national and reformist movements emerged, and calls for liberation from the chains of slavery and exploitation were raised. As a result, the issue of women began to gain attention, being discussed in various conferences and newspapers. In this context, Ibn Badis emphasized the importance of educating women, provided that it was grounded in religion, nationalism, and ethical values. His argument was that this education would help women escape illiteracy. He wrote in *Al-Chaab* magazine: "The Algerian Woman, with Her Religion, Language, and Nationalism, Must Understand These Realities so That She Can Raise Children Who Will Preserve the Legacy of Past Generations for Future Ones, and Never Deny Their Nation, Nor Be Denied by the People" (Berket, 1985, p. 20).



Abdelhamid Ben Badis recognized the importance of women as pillars of society, so he established girls' education sections at the School of Education and Instruction in Constantine, as well as in all the schools of the Algerian Muslim Scholars Association (Bouaziz, *The Algerian Woman and the Arab Feminist Reform Movement*, 2001, p. 4).

Ben Badis did not stop at this stage but sought to continue women's education through educational missions. Just as male students continued their studies at various Arab universities such as Al-Zaytouna and Al-Azhar, Ben Badis aimed to offer the same opportunities for female students. He sent the first group of female graduates from the Algerian Muslim Scholars Association Schools to continue their studies abroad. "When the first female cohort graduated from the School of Education and Instruction in Constantine in 1938, preparations were made to send them to the School of Literature in Damascus to continue their secondary studies in 1939 and 1940. However, the outbreak of World War II and his death in April 1940 disrupted and canceled the project" (Bouaziz, *The Algerian Woman and the Arab Feminist Reform Movement*, 2001, p. 4).

However, the efforts of the scholar were not in vain. Thanks to the educational cohorts, notable figures emerged in Algerian history as activists and freedom fighters, many of whom were among Ben Badis's students (Boukhari, 2010/2011, p. 93)

According to the publications of the National Center for Studies and Research on the National Movement and the November 1, 1954 Revolution (Quadid, 2007, p. 98): "In addition to education, Algerian girls benefited from social services initiated by the reformist movement after its establishment of charitable associations in the 1930s. These associations opened their doors to women with the aim of integrating them further into society. As a result, women began to participate in providing medical services, feeding the poor and needy, and offering lunch to students, particularly those from underprivileged backgrounds. They were also given the opportunity to engage in handicrafts, including embroidery and sewing."

It seems that the development of political life in Algeria, with the establishment of associations, clubs, and political parties, had a clear impact on activating women's participation in public life, especially after the end of World War II. The need for women to be part of the transformation that emerged in society became evident, leading to their inclusion in the movement of change and their integration into civil society structures and organizations. What further expanded this new approach was the awareness gained by Algerian girls through their attendance at free schools, which opened wider doors for them, in addition to what they received in French schools (Nassima, 2014/2015, p. 57).

Historical records confirm that throughout decades of resistance, women have always been present. From the moment the colonizers set foot in Algeria, Algerian women have resisted in one way or another, sparking patriotism in the hearts of people and undertaking various challenging and important roles. In our history, there are many famous examples of resistance, such as the wife of Emir Abdelkader, who organized and coordinated the resistance efforts behind the scenes for her husband. One of the most famous bases of this resistance was "Zamala," which became known for organizing mobile hospitals. This base was considered one of the logistical centers in Emir Abdelkader's resistance (Terchene, 2007, p. 138).

Other notable Algerian women include the famous resistance fighter Fatma N'Soumer (1830-1863), who led the fighters and Muslims in the 1857 revolution against French colonization. She was an iconic example of the resistant Algerian woman (Terchene, 2007, p. 138).



Her actions reflected a strong character who rejected oppression and all forms of subjugation, beginning with the social environment in which she lived. The resistance in the Jbel Gherja region defeated a large number of French officers and generals, such as MacMahon, Bousquet, Camus, Randon, and Billy, in the 1850s (Bouaziz, *The Algerian Woman and the Arab Feminist Reform Movement*, 2001, p. 25).

Another example of resistance is that of Zahra, who supported the resistance of Muhammad bin Abdullah and assisted Emir Abdelkader's efforts. Zahra emerged during the same period and supported the great fighter Muhammad bin Abdullah and his wife Mariam. She mobilized fighters and resistance members in Touggourt, Ouargla, and El Rouissat, providing them with propaganda and supplies. She also shared her views on women with Emir Abdelkader in her response to the French officer Alexandre Dumas. (Boukhari, 2010/2011, p. 94) .

If we were to count the Algerian women who have written their names in the pages of history forever, we would not be able to list them all in this space. Notable names like Lady Khadija, after whom the highest mountain peak in Algeria is named, come to mind. Even if we briefly glance at the regions in Algeria named after women who influenced the country's history, we would still not be able to list them all.

This serves as evidence that Algerian women were never submissive. Instead, they tried, in every way, to break the chains of the restrictions imposed on them, despite various justifications. "Despite the many hardships, Algerian women never gave up. They did not fail, did not stop working, and exerted great effort. They endured the suffering of outdated traditions and adapted to the circumstances, especially in rural areas, where they worked alongside men in all jobs and professions, fought with them, and resisted the occupying army in the fields of awareness for over seventy years, from 1830 to 1900." (Boukhari, 2010/2011, p. 94) .

2.2 The Algerian Woman and Her Participation in the Liberation Revolution :

The Algerian woman played a significant role in the War of Independence, starting with its launch on November 1, 1954. This participation included women from all walks of life, across various social classes, and from both rural and urban areas. As the guardian of family unity and values, the Algerian woman remained steadfast in preserving the identity of the Algerian people despite colonial efforts to undermine it. (Mince, 1980, p. 111)

The involvement of women in the armed struggle alongside men led to a major shift in the prevailing perceptions of them. The women mujahidat were welcomed with pride and respect, treated with honor and recognition. They undertook the most demanding responsibilities, proving their presence in the country's struggle and becoming an important, effective, and positive force. The 1956 Souman Conference Charter, the first political document of the Algerian revolution, stated: "The women's movement has immense potential that grows and expands with support and appreciation. We admire and recognize the role they played in the revolutionary courage of girls, women, wives, and mothers." (Berket, 1985, p. 20).

It is also stated: "The liberation revolution has gone beyond the mere demand for the liberation of both women and men as a whole; it has granted women a role and function" (Quadid, 2007, p. 124). The Algerian woman, who had been relegated to a marginalized position under colonial rule, and had been mentally and morally disheartened within the family, underwent a remarkable transformation



during the revolution. One of the most unexpected outcomes of the revolution was the ease with which the Algerian woman shifted from being a socially isolated and confined figure within the home to becoming an active social participant. During the War of Liberation, an important socio-psychological phenomenon occurred: the complete abandonment of submission to patriarchal authority and the conscious defiance of it—something that was not anticipated due to the prevalent backwardness, ignorance, and traditions within society at the time, especially among women. However, the call for jihad and liberation motivated both women and men to fight side by side for freedom.

This does not mean that the Algerian woman did not participate in the revolution before this date. On the contrary, she joined the November 1st Revolution, engaging in various tasks such as medicine and nursing. This was due to the political awareness she had gained through her involvement in political activities within reformist movements and her participation in the national political movement. "The Algerian woman benefited greatly from the political work of the Algerian national movement over half a century, which elevated her intellectual level and political awareness." (Boukhari, 2010/2011, p. 95)

The Algerian woman engaged in a variety of activities across different social classes and levels. Some of them joined the army in the armed forces, while others took on roles such as caring for secret medical centers, ensuring communication between the freedom fighters' factions, guarding their camps, providing supplies, transporting weapons and ammunition, and establishing connections with the families of the fighters. (Tahraoui, 2008/2009, p. 44). Additionally, women in the cities contributed both inside and outside the home. They prepared medicines, sewed military uniforms, worked in media and documentation, typing secret reports and war leaflets, made bombs and landmines, maintained and cleaned weapons, transported them, and organized demonstrations in the cities, among many other forms of resistance and sacrifice (Berket, 1985, p. 23)

There are many significant examples of female fighters, and the Algerian woman became a symbol and role model for women worldwide. "She became a symbol and an example for women, both within Algeria and beyond, especially in the Arab world. Prominent female heroes gained fame around the world, such as the three courageous women: Boudiaf, Bouazza, Bobacha, Malika Qaed, Hasiba Ben Bouali, Fadila Saadan, Mariem Boutoura, Saadia Ben Slimane, and others." (Bouaziz, The Algerian Woman and the Arab Feminist Reform Movement, 2001, p. 24)

3. The status of Algerien Woman After independence

The Algerian liberation revolution had a profound impact on the status of women in society, providing them with an opportunity to improve their position, particularly in terms of their rights to education, work, and political participation. This shift in the social and economic status of Algerian women was supported by the Tripoli Program of 1962, which recognized the significant role of women in the post-independence reconstruction phase. However, despite these advancements, the reality after independence fell short of the expectations and aspirations that Algerian women had attached to national liberation.

After years of colonial rule, Algeria underwent a liberation revolution that led the country from colonialism to independence and freedom. In this context, Algerian women had high hopes for improving their status or gaining the rights that had been denied to them in the past. Women gained



significant ground during the revolution through their immense sacrifices, earning historical legitimacy and asserting their right to contribute to the nation's building and reconstruction phase. This right was affirmed in the Tripoli Program of 1962 (Tarchine, 2007, p. 150).

3.1 The Disappointment of Women After Independence :

Following independence, Algerian women hoped to achieve equality with men across various sectors, especially considering their significant sacrifices during the revolution. However, these expectations quickly turned to disappointment as their sacrifices did not translate into meaningful changes in their daily lives. Women remained marginalized, especially in political and social life.

Despite their central role in the War of Liberation, women were sidelined from many of the post-independence achievements. Female fighters who had given their lives for the country found themselves pushed to the background in public life. They were excluded from active participation in decision-making and the national transformation process. As one source noted, "The bitterness among women was immense when the female fighters of the War of Liberation, following the announcement of the war's results, were pushed into second place in public life and excluded from most of the new victories for freedom" (Matarji, 1982, p. 55). This highlights the profound sense of betrayal women felt, as those who had been national symbols during the revolution were marginalized after independence.

On the social front, many values temporarily adopted during the War of Liberation, such as women working outside the home, were quickly rejected after independence. Mustafa Boutefnouchet (Boutefnouchet, 1982, p. 2) stated, "The Algerian family only adopted such values and behaviors out of necessity imposed by the revolution and national duty." This indicates that women's roles were viewed as temporary, tied to the exceptional circumstances of the revolution, and once those circumstances ended, traditional gender roles were restored.

Although Algeria underwent political, economic, and ideological changes after independence, these transformations did not significantly affect women. They were still excluded from meaningful participation in building the new state, both politically and economically. While the revolution provided some opportunities for women to emerge in various fields, independence did not bring them the equality they had hoped for. Instead, their role remained largely confined to the domestic sphere. Despite their sacrifices, women did not receive the social and political recognition they anticipated after independence.

This situation can be understood in the broader context of societal norms in Algeria. While there were political and economic changes following independence, these were mostly confined to the formal structures of the state and did not permeate deeply into society, especially regarding gender roles. Algerian society, though engaged in nation-building, remained deeply entrenched in patriarchal norms, defining the role of women primarily within the family. The traditional view of women as the steadfast guardian of family unity was reinforced, rather than challenged.

In conclusion, the disappointment experienced by Algerian women after independence stemmed from their continued marginalization. Although the revolution showcased their capabilities and granted them a prominent role in society, after independence, they were politically and socially sidelined. Their opportunities to participate in decision-making remained limited, and despite progress in some areas, women did not achieve the equality they had hoped for. As Saima (Saima,



1997, p. 75) observed, "Traditions, customs, and the division of social roles between genders remained the measure and regulator of their behavior."

3.2 Challenges Faced by Algerian Women After Independence :

The challenges faced by Algerian women after independence were difficult on all fronts. Social pressures represented one of the major obstacles to the progress of women. While women had made significant sacrifices in the national struggle, independence did not translate into real gains for them. The dominant feature of Algerian society after independence was that men remained the decision-makers in most fields, whether political, economic, or even social, while women remained confined to roles dictated by traditional patriarchal norms.

This negatively impacted women's political representation, as their presence in official institutions remained extremely weak. Despite the progress made in education, Algerian women still faced difficulty in accessing leadership positions and influencing decision-making processes. Despite the enormous sacrifices made by Algerian women in the struggle for independence, they did not find themselves equal to men after independence. Women had high hopes, but the societal reality after independence worsened their disappointment. While some progress was made in women's rights, social pressures and patriarchal values tied to customs and traditions prevented the realization of true equality between men and women.

Study Results:

After addressing the main questions raised in the study regarding the role of Algerian women in the liberation revolution and their status after independence, it was confirmed that Algerian women were a decisive element in the country's struggle against colonialism. Their participation was not limited to the military field but extended to social and political roles. It was also clarified that Algerian women faced significant challenges after independence, as they were unable to achieve full equality in society despite their immense sacrifices. This highlights the need for further efforts to achieve their full social and political empowerment. The following results were reached:

1. The study revealed that the status of Algerian women underwent significant development through various historical phases, starting from their traditional position under French colonial rule to their active participation in the Liberation Revolution. Algerian women were among the most prominent supporters of the struggle for independence and played crucial roles in multiple areas. Moreover, the Liberation Revolution played a decisive role in radically changing the structure of society, as it broke the constraints imposed by traditions and customs on women. The Algerian woman transitioned from a role confined to the home to an active role in various fields.
2. The study highlighted the vital role played by Algerian women in the liberation war, where they contributed to various areas such as nursing, transporting weapons, gathering intelligence, and revolutionary propaganda. The study also showed that women gained historical legitimacy through their active involvement in the revolution, which was reflected in their status in society after independence.
3. After independence, Algerian women encountered disappointment as patriarchal control continued to dominate various sectors, despite their significant sacrifices during the revolution. Although some progress was made in areas like education and employment,



women continued to face barriers in fully securing their rights due to the enduring impact of patriarchal structures and traditional societal norms."

4. One of the key findings of the study was that Algerian women were not limited to logistical support but increasingly emerged in political and educational work. They contributed to spreading national and political awareness among women and youth, with some participating in secret media work during the revolution. This reflects the political awareness of Algerian women and their close connection to the national cause.
5. The social roles of Algerian women saw significant changes after independence, where they began contributing effectively to public life, alongside their domestic responsibilities. This included their participation in social and economic work, whether through working in public institutions or in fields like education and health, highlighting the increasing status of women in society.
6. The Algerian feminist movement played a central role in raising awareness and changing traditional perceptions of women's roles. The reformist movements that emerged before independence helped promote the idea of women's education and participation in public life, contributing to the aspirations of future generations.
7. The study highlighted that Algerian women were a crucial component of nation-building, not only through their participation in the liberation struggle but also in the post-independence period. They played a vital role in shaping the modern Algerian state through their contributions across various sectors, including education and healthcare.

Conclusion

This study reveals that Algerian women have undergone significant transformations through various historical stages in Algeria. The changes in the status and roles of Algerian women were a result of fundamental shifts that affected Algerian society as a whole. Initially, during the French colonial period, women lived in a state of subjugation and inferiority. However, over time, these roles changed drastically. During the French occupation, women became heads of their households, assuming responsibility for family management while their husbands joined the resistance. Algerian women supported men in the armed struggle and participated in all areas of resistance against French colonialism.

The participation of Algerian women in the liberation struggle was crucial, and they played a significant role in achieving independence. Figures such as Lalla Fatma N'Soumer, Jamila Bouhired, Malika Kaïd, and many other brave resistance fighters were instrumental in this effort. Algerian women gained educational and employment opportunities that helped elevate their status both within society and the family. They began to share responsibilities with men across all spheres, facing the same burdens and challenges. During the liberation revolution, women worked alongside men in various resistance efforts and were integral to the fight for freedom. This earned them recognition at the Soummam Conference in 1956 as an effective political and military force. These women proved the Algerian woman's ability to create change and influence the nation's history.

This transformation continued after independence, despite the significant challenges, such as the influence of traditional systems and social legacies. However, the process of state-building created a strong demand for women's participation in all fields. The social and economic changes brought about by the revolution transformed the role of women within the family and society. This led to the collapse of traditional gender roles and divisions of labor, encouraging women to participate in work,



education, and community involvement. Algerian women were able to overcome many of the social barriers and traditions that once restricted them through education, training, and paid employment.

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