Youth Restiveness and Violence in Nigeria: A Case Study of Youth Unrest in Ebiraland

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Abstract: The youth in Nigeria are involved and in most cases are in the vanguard of violent conflicts that have occurred in different parts of the country. The study specifically examined the role of the youth in the intermittent bursts of violent conflicts that erupts in Ebira land North Central Nigeria. The study suggested possible remedies to this growing tendency. This descriptive research was carried out essentially through an analysis of relevant texts, documents and Research and Government Reports on the subject matter. The position in the study was that the abrogation of the traditional authority of the Clans as an instrument of social control contributed significantly to recurring violence in Ebira land. The study argued further that among other factors the Nigerian education system as operated presently place too little emphasis on skill acquisition with serious implications for employment opportunities as most graduates of the various educational institutions are not able to secure employment in the various sectors of the economy.

Key words: Conflict, violence, traditional authority, clan, state, youth

INTRODUCTION

The title of this study suggests that the marked deviant behavior among the youth is unacceptable for healthy community living. The consequences of violence unleashed on society, in which the youth play a significant role has dire consequences for State viability the quest for stability and development. In addition, safety of human lives and property has been significantly threatened. Worse still Bako (1994) said community relationships are being systematically and progressively destroyed. The intermittent violent crises in different parts of Nigeria in which the youth are largely involved have brought to fore the level of moral depravity among the youth.

The Marxian theory on Political Economy posit that violence associated with revolutionary movements is inevitable for social change, violence as has occurred in Ebira land for example has neither ideological focus nor clear political direction. The absence of a well-articulated alternative vision for society firmly anchored on a well directed agenda on human emancipation accounts for the largely sporadic nature of the crises. This result in the futility of the different crises as nothing is achieved other than wanting loss and destruction of human lives and property. Specifically, while the Bakassi boys in South Nigeria are directing their energy at containing the incidences of crimes in their community and the Egbesu and Ogoni youths in the oil producing areas of the country are fighting for the control of resources found in

their locality, the IDOJI, Idozumi, Ozuwaya and Ahache boys kill and maim Ebira men and women, set ablaze and loot public property and disrupt social and community life. The cherished cultural heritage of the land has been abused and debased and the possibility of the future occurrence of such violence sends a chill down the spines of citizens. There is therefore, the urgent need to address this problem and chart a course for the reorientation of the youth in the area for purposeful living.

Prevailing explanations often used to explain the violent behavior among the youth include the relative deprivation, rising expectations and frustration aggression hypothesis (Anifowose, 1982). The argument here is that aggression and violence among the youth is the result of some gap in their felt needs that are not filled overtime. Stretched further the elite manipulation and mobilization thesis conclude that the elite find frustrated youths as willing instruments for perpetuating violence in the pursuit of their group or individual interests.

The elite manipulation and mobilization thesis also, found support among some respondents, who argued that the local elites more often than not manipulate and mobilize ethnic and sub ethnic identity such as the clan of to achieve selfish ends. The elite, who constitute a small group and who more often than not are aspirants to and competitors for power and privileges are the primary users of sub-ethnic sentiments as a mask to defend vested class interest. The process of democratization provides a fertile ground for the unleashing of primordial sentiments. The process associated with democratization such as party

system and elections provide a congenial atmosphere for the negative manipulation and mobilization of the youth and clannish identities. These identities become a tool of competition for the elites for scarce public goods such as contracts, employments, political appointments, scholarship and access to land as well as opportunities for lucrative trade and commerce.

Another position adduced for the negative role of youth during crisis situation is the massive economic decline, which became more pronounced since the mid-eighties. The various policies of adjustment pursued by subsequent Nigerian Governments except for the short break during the Abacha regime acerbated economic decline. Egwu (2001), argued that adjustment programmes entailed rolling back the State and cutting down on public expenditure. This has drastically reduced support for essential social services for the vast majority of the people. The women and the youth have been the most vulnerable group under these developments. Under such conditions, the youth are prone to violence as a means of expressing their disaffection. Numerous cases of violence in the country in the last two decades are strongly associated with the Adjustment project.

Closely related to the preceding position is the failure of the State over the years to pursue genuine development of the society. Efforts to achieve development must transcend the limit of economic growth to embrace such features of social justice as equality of opportunity, full employment, generally available social services, equitable distribution of income and basic political freedom. The massive corruption of State officials, the misery associated with Adjustment and the anemic state of social services with its attendant consequences has robbed the State of its God-like character thus provoking varied reactions (Egwu, 2001). Specifically, the ability to create full employment opportunities for her citizens has eluded the Nigerian state.

Another well canvassed position is that the desperate desire to access scarce State resources has serious implications for youth involvement in violence. This situation is accentuated because of the fact that the State in post-colonial Nigeria plays a leading role in the development process; economic resources are therefore largely controlled by the State. This has the extended implication of making the state a coveted price to be won at all cost by the various class fractions that create division in society to attain their goal (Jega, 1999). The youth are thus, used when required during intra class struggle for State control.

This position appears plausible given the sophisticated weapons used in crises situations by the youth who ordinarily cannot afford them and the fact that certain individuals seek to manipulate justice in favor of arrested culprits.

However, much as the manipulation thesis sheds some light on the negative mobilization of youths for violence, a lot more needs to be explained. For example, it does not answer the question of why the Ebira people and especially the youth became susceptible to elite manipulation. The Marxian philosophical approach posits that the economy is the determining factor of the non-economic factors. For the Ebira community there is no gainsaying that there has been a drastic change in the process of production and distribution in the society. This has affected the political culture, social organization, family pattern and community life in Ebira land. Over the years, the cherished customs and culture of Ebira people have been debased and abused. One major custom that has been abused is the authority of the clan as the custodian of the culture and tradition of Ebira land.

A salient cause of violence in Ebiraland can be attributed to the disconnect in governance processes arising from the political structure introduced by colonial rule. Prior to colonial rule, the Ebira community was republican and had a political system that revolved around the clan as the symbol of authority and the instrument of social control. The traditional political system recognized the authority of elders of the clan and religious priests who then served as the custodians of the people's tradition and culture and guarded societal norms, rules and regulations. Clans, which were made up of related family units provided the required arrangement for subjecting individual family members to community control. Under the system the clan played a key role as an institution of social control, resource mobilization and distribution. The clan heads thus played a key role in governance. Contemporary governance at the local level allows for marginal role for the clan heads as they were stripped of all formal powers. The system of administration presently instituted at the Local level has failed in its responsibility to institute a system of social control that is as effective as that of the traditional political system.

The cumulative implication of this development is that while, the elite easily manipulate the clan identity to mobilize support when they have need to do so, there are no instruments to check the abuse to clan identities where, negatively mobilized. Violent conflicts between clan groups in Ebira land have therefore been very common. The clan system, which has now been put to negative use by the political class suggests that the traditional political system must be reexamined and incorporated into contemporary governance processes.

DISCUSSION

Nigeria in recent times has witnessed a massive resurgence in ethnic and religious identities, which has constituted themselves into primary forms of identity and consciousness. Examples include the Egbe Omo-Oduaa in the South-West of Nigeria, the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) and its youth forum, National Youth Council of Ogoni People (NYCOP), Supreme Egbesu Assembly also known as Egbesu Boys, Ijaw Youth Council, Bayelsa Youth Federation, Federated Niger Delta Ijaw communities and Niger Delta Volunteers Force all in Niger Delta Area of the country and the Arewa Peoples Congress (APC) in the North. As the names suggest, these ethnic based associations have their youth wings who seek to advance the specific interest they seek to promote. Some religious groups are linked to particular ethnic groups. For example NKST, among the Tiv and the dominance of COCIN and ECWA in many local places in Plateau and Kaduna states. These identities have been known to serve as platforms for religious and ethnic crisis to defend certain vested interests. Some of these Ethno-religious conflicts have been made a focus of study by researchers. The role of the youths in these conflict situations has been highlighted. These studies include the study of the crisis between the Ugep and Idomi of Cross River State in 1992. Obono (1991) reported the involvement of 14 years old youngsters in the brutal Mkapni war, with emphasizes on the prominent role played by group of seething, frustrated and restless army of unemployed youth in the war between the Ugep and Idomi Communities. Sophisticated modern military equipment and methods and ancient occult traditions were employed by youth during the war which was essentially over ownership of land in the area. The educational system was disrupted in the area due to the involvement of students in the crisis.

Shedrack *et al.* (1999) also documented the involvement of youth in the Tiv-Jukun conflict in Taraba State. The Jukun youths were said to have masterminded a campaign tagged operation Patswen designed to dislodge the Tiv from Jukun territory. The youth organization provided the militant support for the leadership of the elite and elders in the conflicts.

Albert (1999) observed that the youth who played prominent role in the Ife-Modakeke crisis are mostly unemployed and had poor knowledge of the history of the conflicts but partook in setting ablaze the properties of perceived opponents. They have no genuine reason for engaging in the conflicts.

Akintoye (1999) also recorded the involvements of the youths in the Zangon-Kataf crisis of 1992. The uncontrollable violent action of the Ayap and Hausa youths after February 1992 conflicts between the two ethnic groups resulted in the violent crisis of May 1992. Most of the youths were said to be unemployed.

According to Imomoh (2002), unemployed youths are mostly in the vanguard of the crisis that often erupt in the oil producing areas between oil producing companies and their host communities. The youths often hold oil company workers hostage because, they feel the oil companies must provide solutions to all their problems.

The Almajirai and the Yandaba group who are largely unemployed are in the vanguard in the execution of violence in the recurring ethnic/religious violence in Kano (Bako, 1994). Bako (1994) argued that the root of violence among the youth can be located in the unprecedented poverty as well as the massive unemployment hunger and deprivation among the youths thus providing avenue for their involvement in the ethno religious conflicts across the country. The nature of violence in the Ebiraland cannot be said to fall within the ethnic/religious categorization.

There is paucity of collated data on the various crises and attendant loss of lives and property in Ebiraland. Among several others, those crises that were significant in terms of capturing national attention include the violent conflict between members of the defunct National Party of Nigeria and the Unity Party of Nigeria between 1979 and 1983. The gruesome murder of women who had parts of their bodies removed created another dimension to violence in Ebira land in 1986. Another round of violence erupted in the mid-nineties, when a sect of Islamic religious group launched an attack on traditional practices in Ebira land. Violent conflicts in Ebira land assumed a terrifying dimension with the unset of democratization in 1999. The killing and destruction of properties among members of rival political parties has been very common, so has violent clashes among clan groups assumed alarming proportions. In some cases, armed conflicts resulting in massive destruction of lives and properties between security operatives drafted to quell restive youths have been recorded. In January 2001 conflict erupted between youths of two streets, Idoji and Idozumi. Conflict between youths of the two streets has been reoccurring intermittently since then. Violent conflicts had resulted in the sacking of a whole community as witnessed in the aftermath of the crisis between the Ohowan and Emani clans in Okehi Local Government Area in 2006. As a result of the conflict Ihima town was virtually sacked as most residents of the town fled from their homes. Most occupants of Idoji and Ozuwaya streets in Okene Local Government Area have had to vacate their homes since the breakout of hostilities in the

aftermath of the violence that erupted after the Gubernatorial elections in April 2007. The crises has since degenerated into violent clashes between two clans, the Oziogu and Oziomoye.

Some opinion leader and reports from the local media point to the fact that consequences of the intermittent break down of law and order in Ebira land included the killing and maiming of innocent people security operatives inclusive, possession and use of dangerous and sophisticated weapons by the youth, the use of poisonous substances cocaine inclusive, gun running, burning and looting of public institutions, markets houses and stalls.

The fact that violence in the land involving the youths is often ignited by minor episodes suggests some underlying but latent tension and antagonism, which must be unearthed before meaningful solution can be proffered. The involvement of the youth who are expected to shoulder the responsibility of society in the future makes the situation worrisome, it therefore deserve the attention of the state leaders of thought in the society and a problem for scholarly research.

A vivid example can be discerned from available statistics on unemployed person by educational level and age group between 2001 and 2004 for urban and rural Nigeria as shown in Table 1.

The figure indicates that unemployment is higher among secondary school leavers who are between the ages of 15-24. The active age to which the unemployed belong has several implications for the society. The youth are not only easily mobilized in period of crisis, the increase in crime rates, armed robbery and other social vices is found among these groups. Specifically in Ebiraland there exists prevalent poverty and unemployment among the able bodied youth. They therefore became ready tools that are used in crisis situations. A study conducted (Tenuche, 2003) established that most of the youth including those that have been arrested in connection with political thuggery either dropped out of school or/and are unemployed. The perpetrators are mostly unemployed youth who are hungry and out of desperation constitute themselves into groups referred to as Aduvusu (I'm ready to die or Ozomateyisu (one cannot hide from death). They tend to be more violent in conflict situations (Tenuche, 2003).

The strong link between unemployment and youth violence is supported by the views of many respondents (Tenuche, 2003) who submitted that violent conflicts in Ebira land were at their lowest ebbs between 1980-1985, when installation of machines and equipment at the Ajaokuta steel project was at its peak and provided employment to a large number of youths from Ebira land.

Table 1: Unemployed person by educational level, age group and sex as at december for rural and urban nigeria combined (2001-2004)

Level	2001	2002	2003	2004
All level	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
No schooling	14.0	16.6	11.0	14.9
Primary	21.0	16.1	18.3	15.8
Secondary	55.2	57.4	59.7	52.8
Post-secondary	9.7	9.9	11.0	16.5
Age group				
All groups (15-59)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
15-24	59.9	49.6	54.8	52.9
25-44	34.2	35.9	35.5	41.1
45-59	4.2	5.2	3.9	2.7
60-64	4.7	9.2	6.8	3.4
Both sex	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Male	56.4	59.8	55.5	58.3
Female	43.6	40.2	44.5	41.7

Annual abstract of statistics (1995, 2002)

Violent crimes among unemployed youth often become the means not only for expressing the crisis of youth identity, but also for accessing political power and societal relevance. The phenomenon of unemployment has been worsened by the negative impact of the adjustment programmes. However, not to be ignored is the increasing polarization between the elders and the youth in Ebira land, with the latter blaming the woes of the land on the former and insisting on having a greater say in leadership arrangement of the society. In the view of one of the persons interviewed (Tenuche, 2003), there is a growing discontent among the youths on the role of elders in the society, who the youths blame for the lack of basic infrastructural facilities and employment opportunities in the area. The youth insist on taking over power from the politicians by getting their candidates fielded to contest elections into public office.

The ability to display raw courage and inflict punishment on opponents has also created access to positions of authority and even employment for the youth as fierce youth gangs often get engaged to provide security for top Government officials, secure contracts and scholarships in a few cases to pursue higher education. In return they are guaranteed uninterrupted access to acquisition of arms and ammunition, in addition to protection from arrest and detention by security operatives.

The system of Education currently in use in Nigeria appears to have compounded the problem of unemployment among many able bodied youth. The National Policy on Education 1977, which was revised in 1981, made conscious efforts to give a boost to non-academic education to encourage school leavers engage in some form of gainful employment. The aim of secondary education within the overall national objectives should be the preparation of the young ones for secondary education. The 6-3-3-4 system of education was adopted.

The first 3 years of secondary education was to develop skills among the young ones so that those who eventually do not proceed for higher education would have acquired certain basic skills to make them useful members of the society. Laudable as the objectives of the 6-3-3-4 systems were, the implementation of the programme cannot be adjudged to be successful. The fact that the 6-3-3-4 system has failed to achieve its objective is obvious to all. The reasons for the failure of the system include the extensive reliance on the importation of foreign equipment for the teaching of science and other technical subjects which could not be sustained, science teachers were not readily available to teach science and technical related subjects and there were inadequate teaching and learning materials, like science laboratories and equipment, workshops and tools and functional libraries among others. The immediate outcome of this development was the failure of the 6-3-3-4 system to turn out fairly skilled hands after the junior secondary school. A high percentage of students who enroll into J.S.S. one precedes to the senior secondary classes. In Kogi State, Ebira land inclusive the transition rate from J.S.S. 111 to S.S.S. 1 is 85% most of these students are not able to proceed for higher education either because of the limited spaces available in the institutions or the inability of students to make the required grades. Okau at test to this when he observed that many young people of Kogi State origin do not have their dreams of attaining university education realized. He noted that while 13,666 Kogi State indigenes applied for admission into the university through the University Matriculation Examination (UME) and direct entry only 2,019 candidates were successful in 1996/97 academic session. In the same year 5,144 Kogi indigenes sought admission into the polytechnics in Nigeria, of this figure only 1500 secured admission. In 1997/98 session, 11, 857 candidates of Kogi State origin sought university admission and only 2,031 were successful, 4,083 sought polytechnic admission during this period from Kogi State and 1,190 were admitted.

Figure for the 1998/99 university admission indicate that 9,088 candidates of Kogi State origin applied for admission but only 1986 were successful. This situation cannot be said to have improved despite the establishment of a State University in the State in 1999. Poor counseling and poverty are also contributory factors to the inability of students to secure admission for higher education. Since, this category of youth lack the necessary skill for employment, they add to the pool of the unemployed in the society.

There is a growing concern that the education curricula are still geared towards foreign concepts which alienate children further from their culture. According to Abdullahi (1992) although the number of post primary institutions increased from 7-37 (500% increase) between 1979 and 1982 in Ebiraland ostensibly to give more opportunities for access to quality education, this objective has not being achieved. Presently there are 41 secondary schools in Ebira land. The curricular in this institution has only had the sum effect of graduating large number of citizens whose needs and desires are discordant with the way of living their community.

The informal method of education has also suffered the same fate as that of the formal education already discussed. Informal education consists of teaching activities that are generally unstructured and this largely results in unconscious and unorganized learning. The pre-colonial education system in Nigeria followed this pattern. Children learnt skills and acquired knowledge by watching, imitation and instruction given by parents and adults in the society. Specifically, the female children were engaged in weaving, while the male children learnt the rudiments of agriculture, smiting and smelting etcetera. The nature of education currently adopted and the other socio-economic problems already highlighted has de-emphasized informal education.

The future prospects for textile production among Ebira women is bleak, among the reasons advanced for this is the fact that women who acquire western education hardly find time to weave and as such the higher the number of women that acquire western education the duller the prospect for the future survival of the industry as a home-stead craft. This should not be the case. One major international covenant on basic education to which Nigeria was signatory is the Jomtem Declaration and Framework for Action on Education for all (1990). One of the recommendations of Jomtem Declaration is that basic education should be designed to meet the evolutionary development needs of every society. Those activities and knowledge that develop the society must therefore, be protected.

Third, the increased violence among the youth, which is also attributable to the State is derived from the fact that the State has not been able to elevate itself to the position of an objective force standing above the contending interests in the society. Due to its nature as a post-colonial State, it assumes certain characteristics. One implication of this is that the State is directly immersed in the contradictions of the society, which are defined largely, but not exclusively in terms of ethnic cleavages.

The State far from being an objective force is partisan in times of crisis. The general perception is that in Kogi State, the State and local state apparatuses are controlled and operated on behalf of certain ethnic interests and this severely limits the confidence of the vast majority of the people in the State. And as has been proved over and over again State response at all levels (including the police, the courts and key functionaries of the government in power) to crisis situation has in built biases and preferences. During the January 2001 crisis in Ebira land the youth unleashed terror as if law enforcement agents do not exist and immediate government response was not adjudged to be responsive and adequate. The aftermath of the April 2007 Gubernatorial elections was the same, as seething groups of youth gangs engaged in setting ablaze homes of perceived enemies of Ebira land who opted to vote for a non-Ebira as Governor without any immediate response from the State and Local authorities. Sporadic gun shooting and destruction of property has now become a permanent feature of the community.

POLICY IMPLICATION

First and foremost the nature of formal education needs to be addressed. The Nigerian educational system should emphasize skill acquisition and development. The 6-3-3-4 system of education currently in use has not been able to develop basic necessary skills to create self-employment among secondary school leavers who constitute majority of the unemployed. Presently there is too much emphasis on conventional secondary education. Technical, Agricultural and vocational institutions are still too few to be in a position to effectively develop skills among the youth. Figures available from Ministry of Education Lokoja in 2001 indicates that whereas there are 222 conventional secondary Schools presently operating in Kogi State with an enrolment figure of 196,296 the total population enrollment in the science technology and technical schools is 18,344. Of this figure secondary school enrollment in Adavi, Ajaokuta, Okehi, Okene, Ogori Magongo is 26,320. The total enrollment in technical school is 874 from Okehi, Adavi, Ajaokuta, Okene. Ogori Magongo recorded nil enrolment. Only one technical school is located in Ebiraland. Even the few technical and science schools in the State face some serious problems among which are gross shortage of teachers in sciences most especially, physics, chemistry and mathematics. The total number of teaching staff in these three subjects in

the 20 science schools and colleges are 6, 14 and 27 respectively, there is also inadequate teaching and learning materials in these institutions, this situation has to change. Ebira land is endowed with several natural mineral resources which include iron-ore, gems and ornamented stones, kaolin, limestone/marble. Nigeria presently does not have the capacity to develop these resources without seeking International Capital and Technology. Even, where this foreign assistance is sought, there is need to have adequate skilled labor to work alongside foreign experts to develop local skill. People can easily understudy imported technology and improve on them as was done by countries like Japan, Korea and India. With the present Federal Government focus on Ajaokuta steel project, Ebira land cannot afford to work only as laborers and labor hands in the project when it takes off. The available mineral resources are not found on the earth surface. They need to be mined and processed into useful products for the community. The development of the steel and other related industries require adequate knowledge in all fields of Engineering, Metallurgy Construction Architecture and so on.

A good base especially in science technical education will help the youth participate meaningfully in the industrial sector.

Another area of importance is the development of skilled and knowledgeable hands for the agricultural sector. The death of Agricultural schools has to be reconsidered as majority of population in Ebira land are engaged in the agricultural sector. Technical vocational and agricultural schools are very crucial to the development of skills among the youth in the society and deserve government attention to create a support base for imported foreign technology in the development of resources located in the State. This will create employment opportunities for young school leavers.

Secondly, graduates of these institutions can effectively research in rural communities, producing and maintaining tools relevant to the local population.

Thirdly, the absorption of a large number of skilled workers into the productive sector generates wealth for the community and reduces unemployment and its attendant social problems.

An increase in employment of skilled youths who reside within the community will likely promote accepted norms and culture of the people.

While, technical/vocational schools thrived in the past graduates of these institution were not given the respect, they deserved in the like manner the community look down on those engage in the smiting

and smelting industries although they are the engine for technology development in the society. This attitude can be changed through adequate enlightenment and creation of employment opportunities for this category of youth.

In recent times, there has been increased emphasis on the promotion of community development programmes to forestall exclusive reliance on the state for social welfare facilities and the provision of basic infrastructure. Community Development (CD) suggests the mobilization of members to a given community to identify their area of need, proffer solution and partake in their implementation.

This directs the energy of all members of the community towards the development of their community. By working closely together, the youth are purposefully utilized. They can act as pressure groups on government to satisfy their basic needs. Genuine community based development put on check those elites who seek to whip up primordial settlement to satisfy selfish ends. A positive mobilization of clan groups can assist CD efforts; elected representatives will be put on their toes using such approach.

Thirdly, the traditional institution should be positioned to play a dominant role in the mobilization of people for development purposes and provide a father figure in crisis situation.

Traditional rulers should foster their glorious roles as religious leaders who set moral and social standards for their communities to follow. They would then be in a position to command the respect to prevail on their communities not to engage in activities that could disrupt community living and social life. They could serve as spokesmen for the community. There is however the need to assign constitutional roles to the traditional authority while repositioning the clan as a key player in governance at the local level.

Lastly, the must potent weapon against violence and social unrest perpetuated by the youth is good governance at all levels of government. Good governance considerably reduces the opportunities of appeal to violence in order to have access to basic needs of life.

CONCLUSION

This study highlighted the negative consequences of the increasing involvement of the youths in the intermittent eruption of violence in Nigeria, with particular reference to Ebiraland, in which they are active participants.

The study argues that the declining ability of the State to meet its obligations to its citizens is one major reason among others for this development. Specifically, the study submits that the high rate of unemployment among the able bodied young men makes them vulnerable for elite mobilization for violence especially in a democratic setting. The study predicates the high level of unemployment among the youth on the failure of the 6-3-3-4 system of education in Nigeria to promote skill acquisition and development.

The study recommends an increase in emphasis on technical and vocational training to enhance skill acquisition. The study suggests an increase in the number for well equipped and functional, Technical and Agricultural Colleges to develop skills for the industrial and agricultural sector of the economy.

The study in conclusion advocates that the traditional political system which recognized the clan as an institution of social control should be incorporated into contemporary governance at the Local Government level.

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