

DEMOCRACY, GOOD
GOVERNANCE and
DEVELOPMENT
in AFRICA



EDITED BY
Munyaradzi Mawere
& Tendai R. Mwanaka

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Youths and Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Sino-Nigerian Countries: A Comparative and Transformative Approach

Lemuel Ekedegwa Odeh

Introduction

Ethno-religious conflict is one of the most recurring phenomena in Sino-Nigeria countries, while the youths occupy the productive segment of the society. The youths characterised with energy and vigour are always at the forefront of most the ethno-religious conflicts. Thus, the youth upsurge has continued to serve as a bane bedevilling the political and bi-lateral edifices of these countries. Ethno-religious problem has retarded effective nation building process and viable equal development. The problem has also resulted in high level of poverty situations in the northern parts of Nigeria and retarded economic growth and development in this region in comparison to other parts of Nigeria. This chapter reveals that minority problems in terms of marginalisation, ethnicity, religion as well as unequal development are the major causes of this snag. The chapter takes a historic-structural, analytical and comparative approach to examine the Sino-Nigeria ethno-religious conflicts. To this end, this chapter postulates that religion remains the domineering factor that propels this dismay. The chapter, however, concludes that rule of law coupled with bilateral peace processes are the needed measures to manage this scourge while creating an enabling atmosphere that will ensure sustainable economic growth and eradicate poverty from the populace.

China and Nigeria have certain similarities, namely both countries had independence on 1st October, one in 1949, while the other was in 1960. Both countries have the largest population

within their respective continents. China for instance is the most populous country in Asia, with four out of every Asian being Chinese, while Nigeria on the one hand has the largest population in Africa and it is believed that out of every ten African people in the world one is a Nigerian. Both countries also have the largest economies within their sub-continent. In the same vain, both countries are also prone to ethno-religious disturbances across different states of their country. These ethno-religious conflicts have assumed various coloration and dimensions which have often threatened their corporate existence. The youths also form the vanguard of these conflicts and more often than not are at the receiving end suffering more in terms of physical, psychological and economic deprivation amongst others. This chapter therefore look at some of the causes of this ethno-religious conflicts in China with particular reference to the Xinjiang Province where the conflicts seem more prevalent and Nigeria where the conflicts has completely eroded public thrust on governance. Religion is a force to be reckoned with universally because of her dogmas. Globally in countries like Nigeria, Libya, Syria and China it has caused a lot of havoc to humanity. These havocs are caused by religious adherents. In the name of religion, many have been mimed, killed, oppressed, lynched, rendered homeless as well as uprisings of ethno religious conflicts which have been necessitated as a result of *"false doctrinal belief."*

By way of definition, Religion "is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people." As opined by Marx. As far as Marx is concerned man made religion, religion did not make man therefore he asserted further that "the abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of what is this and where is it coming from?

*****people is the demand for their real happiness" In simple logic reasoning religion controls the soul of man in the way opium addiction controls the soul of the addict

The issue of Sufism as well as hidden beliefs have greatly contributed to religious uprising universally. The term religion is such a complex one that agreeing with one meaning is quite

difficult. Scholars like Taylor (2005) define religion "as a belief in spiritual beings". This central issue here is that Spirituality is far more inclusive than the term religion, because it more encompassing to individuals who do not affiliate with any particular religious organization such as a church, synagogue, temple, or mosque, however it is also an integral component of any religion in principle. Frazer (1990) on his part defines it thus "religion is the prostration or conciliation of powers superior to man, which are believed to direct and control the cause and nature and human life." This is anchored on the Totemism and Exogamy which he further examined as that totemism is both "a religion and a form of kinship classification that identifies individuals and groups as descendants of some common ancestor in mythic times."

Religion however, has to do with a particular religion. Thus we have religious beliefs, faith domination, religious education and religious instruction. Odeh (2007) on the other hand, has further defined it as a system of beliefs, rituals and practise or a code of moral conduct involving the recognition by man of superhuman power which is entitled to obedience, reverence and worship.

According to Mafeje (1997) religion is an ideologically loaded concept which is not a natural outcome of ethnic existence but it is a class interest, driven phenomenon. Conversely, Egwu (2001) opined that ethnicity is all about mobilization and politicisation of ethnic group identify drawing on those elements that mark out the group such as language, culture, territory, mode of dressing and sharing jokes. The bottom-line of this argument is that in Nigeria most issues both of national and state are seen from both ethnic and religious perceptive so much so that it becomes very difficult sometimes separating the one from the other or what causes which conflict.

Religion as defined by the English Dictionary, is "Belief in a divine or super human power or powers to be obeyed and worshipped as the creator and ruler of the universe or any specific system of belief and worship often involving a code of ethics and resembling suggestive, or likened to such a system of humanism as a religion." From the above expression, the important word is

“belief” in a particular creator, being or object. Ojoku in his book titled *West African Traditional Religion*, stated that, religion binds man to the unseen power and helps him form right relation with these non-human power; it also binds him to his fellow human beings.

At this juncture it becomes imperative to understand the meaning of ethno-religious. When we talk of ethnicity and religion, we mean ethno-religion. However, it is highly demanding to equally understand the meaning of conflicts. According to Henry George *et al*, (2014) crisis is any event that is or is expected to lead to an unstable and dangerous situation affecting an individual, group, community, or whole society. Conflicts are deemed to be the negative changes in the security, economic, political, societal or environmental affairs, especially when they occur abruptly, with little or no warning. More loosely, crisis on the one hand is a term meaning “a testing time” or an “emergency event”. Having understood the meaning of ethnicity, religion and crisis, it becomes pertinent to define ethno-religious crisis.

Ethno-religious conflicts means a situation in which the relationship between member of one ethnic or religious group and another (such group in a multi ethnic and multi religious society) is characterised by lack of cordiality and mutual understanding driven by suspicious fear and a tendency towards confrontation.

This chapter adopts a comparative analysis of ethno-religious crisis in Sino-Nigerian countries, using a comparative and transformation approach, it is imperative to discuss the causes of ethno-religious crises in these countries (Nigeria and China). Religiosity, ethnic differences, economic marginalisation, minority domination by the majority, colonial legacy, uneven mineral resources, ideological differences, government policies among others were responsible for the ugly situation in both countries under discuss.

However, the thrust of the chapter discuss the origin of ethno-religious crisis in China and Nigeria and also look at some mechanisms towards transformative process in Sino-Nigeria ethno religious conflict. There are many religions in the world but for the

purpose of this chapter the argument shall be persevered around the two popular ones in Nigeria, Islam and Christianity

Origin of Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Nigeria and China

Ethno-Religious Crisis in Nigeria

There is no gain saying that ethno-religious conflicts have been a re-current issue on the political edifice of Nigeria. The genesis of this phenomenon could be traced to the colonial period when the diverse multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-lingua separate people were amalgamated to form a single nation baptized 'Nigeria'. This in-turn has led to various conflicts arising from trust problems, fear, domination as well as religious differences. Notable amongst some of these conflicts was the 1964 national census conflicts, with West accusing the North of inflating their population figures, equally was ethnic marginalisation in terms of appointments and promotion in the nation's civil service. All these brought about distrust and suspicion which finally gave vent to ethnic conflict in 1966.

Indeed, religion plays an important role in the ethno-religious crisis in Nigeria. According to Odeh, (2007) 'religion is sensitive, powerful, contensive with life and controlling influence in human has been used to mar rather than make our nation Nigeria. Thus, religious faithful commit various violent crimes and acts in the name of their 'god' by slaughtering innocent souls and destroying property as observed Alamu (2012).

As a matter of fact, it is no longer news that religious violence in Nigeria is a volatile mix of high politics and arguably therefore, political anarchists use it to inflame passions, fiasco, aspersion and maiming. In the words of Alamu (2010) making religion an arm race and a lunch pad for expressing political grievances.

Over the years, Christianity and Islam have led to both physical and ideological conflicts which have altered the nation building process of Nigeria. Nigeria after independence and shortly after the civil war which most Easterners saw religious and ethnic colouration have described as one factor that is robbing the nation

of internal cohesion, and largely responsible for the absence of nation building process. Religion and ethnicity have been used by political leaders to canvass and gain support from their adherents. As the former president of Nigeria Obasanjo (2004) remarked: "there are permanent interest groups that have decided to undermine the state, ignore the rule of law and due process and use religion as a cover to perpetuate uncouth and clearly unreligious action. In fact people now appear to have absolutely no respect for the sanctity of human life."

Poverty has also been considered one of the major causes of ethno-religious crisis in Nigeria, despite the abundant minerals and human resources bequeathed to Nigeria, it would seem that the country still continued to wallow in the pool of uncertainty, political instability, poor GDP (gross domestic product) and the standard of living and human development. According to Omorogbe and Omolian (2005), the frequent occurrence of ethno-religious crisis in Nigeria has therefore, been attributed to the level of poverty in the country. Ibrahim (2008) also carried out a research on causes of ethno-religious conflicts in Kano state, a northern state in Nigeria and discovered that poor economic base of the populace carried the highest percentage of 34.8%, while religious fundamentalism followed with 31.8%.

Another factor responsible for fuelling ethno-religious crisis in Nigeria is the wrong interpretation of the scriptures by those who claim authority to do. If not so, one would wonder why people act contrary to the teaching of the scripture in matters pertaining to peaceful co-existence, unity and sanctity of life, and property. It is a truism that for an ignorant person to claim authority to knowledge. Many of the 'religious leaders' are known to use their shallow knowledge to interpret the scripture to suit their selfish end, exploring and capitulating on the ignorance of their followers.

More so, sectarian jingoism, false doctrinal belief, proliferation of sects in both religions, (Islam and Christianity), as well as excessive patriotism to one's religious sect, which consequently transformed to fanatics. An example is the Boko Haram terrorist

group which has plagued the peaceful co-existence and political stability of Nigeria.

In addition, economic marginalisation of some ethnic groups is another contributing factor to the rise of ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria. A good example is the reaction of the Ijaws and Ogonis in the Niger Delta Region against the exploitation of the multinational oil companies in their areas with little compensation for the environmental degradation of the area. Also is the plight and agitations of Nigerians in diaspora. Nigerians living in other areas of the country who are not allowed equal participation in the realm of economic and political affairs also served as a snag to this situation.

Moreover, refugee problems and porosity of the Nigerian borders has given room for illegal dangerous immigrants to make in road into the Nigerian environment, hence, perpetuating various ethno-religious ills in the country. An example is the Maitatsine of the 1980's as asserted by Albert (2005). Foreign influence and support from some religious sects all round the world is also a factor contributing to ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria. This is evident in the support gained by Boko Haram from external countries.

The *Guardian Newspaper* of 16th August 2009, while reporting on the Amnesty offer from the Federal Government of Nigeria gave the reason for the Niger-Delta militant struggle as economic, as they had taken up arms to gain greater share of the country's oil wealth which had ravaged their productive and economic system through oil spillage according to Rice (2009). In Nigeria today one of the reasons adduced by the Boko Haram militant for its menace was the death of its leader, Mohammed Yusuf in 2009. The way and manner of his death, was seen as a direct attack on their image as a group as aptly captured by Henrik (2012). They had up till 2009 remained relatively peaceful and typically criticized northern Muslims for participating in what they call a non-Islamic and illegitimate state. Therefore, the near absence of the machinery to protect and defend the basic human rights of a group of people such as the cases above could lead to militancy and general social disorder.

Causes of Ethno-Religious Crisis in Xinjiang, China

China is a conglomeration of ethnic groups and races with different political, economic, religion, linguistics, education, psychological and other socio-cultural differences. The complexity of multi-culturalism is a fundamental factor propelling ethno-religious conflicts in Xinjiang Province of China as opined by Hasamath (2014). Some surveillance procedures are known to place constraints which are potentially threatening to social stability. This view as captured by Ham (2014) can be categorically stated in three perspective via-a-via, socio-political, economic as well as ethno-religious factors

Some of the causes of ethno-religious conflict in Xinxiang, China could be adduced here. Ethno-religious conflict in Xinxiang evolved as a result of various factors ranging from ethno-cultural repression on the part of the CPC (Communist Party of China), unequal economic advantage, unfavourable working condition and the economic gap between the two dominant group in the region via; the Han Chinese and the Uyghur.

As a matter of fact, ethno-religious conflict had been on the rise in Xinxiang from the earliest time. The 21st century has witnessed several ethno-religious violence in Xinxiang Province which has claimed many lives as well as the destruction of property and government buildings. One of these was on July 8 2011 when the Uyghur and Han Chinese ethnic groups had violent clashes. Another incidence was the attack on a police station in Hotan, Xinxiang which left no fewer than 20 people killed according to Lim (2011). Just like the scenario of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria, the above factors ethnic rivalry between Uyghur and Han groups have proved more inimical to the peaceful co-existence and unity among the Uyghur Chinese and the Hans. Indeed, ethnic violence has been on the rise in Xinxiang Uyghur autonomous region (XUAR) in recent years as observed by Hasamath (2014). The main actors of violence are the youths who are always used as the vanguard of the conflicts.

Ethno-cultural repressive policies of the state that limit religious practises have proved to be one of the major factors causing the

groups and races with linguistics, education, and politics. The complexity of the region is propelling ethnic conflict in Xinjiang, China as opined by scholars who are known to place a high value on social stability. This is especially stated in three dimensions: economic, social as well as ethno-

conflict in Xinjiang. The ethnic conflict in Xinjiang stems from ethno-cultural differences (the Communist Party of China), the working condition and the status of the ethnic group in the region.

There had been on the rise of ethnic conflict in the 21st century has witnessed in Xinjiang Province which has led to the loss of property and lives. On July 8 2011 when the Uyghurs had violent clashes with the police station in Hotan, Xinjiang, 15 people were killed according to the Chinese government. Religious conflicts in Xinjiang between Uyghur and Han Chinese have led to a breakdown of peaceful co-existence and harmony between the two groups. Indeed, ethnic conflict in Xinjiang has been a major concern of the Chinese government. Uyghur autonomous region has been established by Hasamath (2014). The Chinese government is always used as a tool to control the region. The Chinese government has implemented policies that limit religious freedom and other factors causing the

rise and continuous re-occurrence of ethnic violence in Xinjiang. As observed by Hasamath, (2014) ethno-cultural measures in the areas of religion, cultural practices language are some of the reasons propelling the rise of ethnic tension and violence in Xinjiang, China. The phasing of Uyghur language instruction in schools has been seen as favouring one ethnic group over the other. Chinese authorities in Xinjiang have slowly phased out the use of ethnic minority languages as the primary mode of instruction in the majority of schools leaving Mandarin Chinese being the dominant language of instruction in schools. This idea has been seen as hostile degrading the interests of the minorities in this area. This can be seen from the perception of scholars like Fox and Gladney.

Indeed, another vivid factor is the lack of equal representation. Uyghur's are not being equally represented unlike their counterpart Hans. Chinese authorities see Uyghur's as minorities while the Hans were regarded by the Chinese authorities as majority, modern and united. This has greatly affected preferential policies in the socio, political and economic ramifications in Xinjiang.

Also, in the labour factor as well there are social disparities, in the labour market, the Hans dominate high status and earn higher wages. Jobs which the Uyghur do not receive in return were given to the Hans. Despite having equal educational qualification, in some cases, the Uyghur Chinese are being marginalised in the area of equal access and opportunities in favour of their Han counterparts. This sectorial and unequal distribution in occupational parlance had been contributing to the reinforcement of ethno-cultural violence in Xinjiang. Social factors on the other hand have also contributed immensely to the continued ethnic violence in Xinjiang. Simply put, the Hans earn more than the Uyghur. The Hans are over-represented in high status and high paying occupations and on the part of the Uyghur, the reverse is the case. This has greatly affected social stratification class between two groups in Xinjiang.

It must be further pointed out that settlement pattern between the Hans and the Uyghur Chinese is another contributing factor to the rise of ethnic conflicts in Xinjiang, China. Since the establishment of XUAR in October 1955, the Communist Party of

China has instituted a lot of programs (resettlement) which seems to have favoured the Hans. One of such is the integration of non-Han population into China. This had greatly helped the Han population to supersede that of the Uyghur's.

The Hans have been favoured by the government to settle in urban areas through its various settlement policies. Thus, has restricted the Uyghur Chinese to settle in poorer urban areas of southern Xinxiang. This idea was also opined by Hasamath, and he further observed, that officially, 80.8% of Uyghur's reside in rural areas, in comparison to 46.4% for Hans. That equally well, 9.0 and 0.1% of Uyghur live in the town and city with a corresponding figure of 13.0 and 40.6% for the Han population. Between 1991 and 2011, Han presence in Xinxiang's urban areas increased at a positive rate of about 1.78% with the corresponding rate for Uyghur at 0.07%. This settlement pattern shows a form of internal colonisation he observed.

More so, unequal access to economic opportunities also becomes one of the major factors degenerating to ethnic violence in Xinxiang. Economically, the Uyghur's have difficulties in obtaining or getting highly paid wage jobs and high status in the labour market. Research revealed that the Hans have more advantage than the Uyghur's in the areas of job placement and wages remuneration in Xinxiang, China. Most top government offices are dominated by the Han Chinese, hence, making it possible for the Hans to have superior treatment over the Uyghur Chinese.

Interestingly, the state response is another major factor causing ethno religious violence in Xinxiang, China. This is evident in the various government soft and hard policies to curb this menace. The state had done this through the intimidation of some religious leaders who had been threatened and tried for advocating Islamic fundamentalism and fanaticism. The state also confined and reduced the connection to form Islamic solidarity among the Muslims in China through their various hard policies. Ilham Tohti, (2014) a Uyghur academic was apprehended and imprisoned in Xinxiang. Ilham Tohti is a Uyghur economist serving a life sentence in China, on separatism-related charges. He is known for his

research on Uyghur-Han relations and is a vocal for his criticism of the Chinese government's policies toward Uyghurs in Xinjiang.

Understandably speaking, Uyghurs in both Xinxiang and across the nation in China are been targeted and put under government surveillance by the state authorities. State authorities had painted ethnic violence in Xinxiang China as religious terrorism. The state media have suggested that overseas extremist influence from such terrorist organisations like ISIS, Al-Qaeda among others were responsible for the rise of this ethnic snag according to Dilxat Rexit. (2015)

At this juncture, it needs to be stressed that the state also embarked on some other soft policies, even though, they have not all been able to proffer a lasting solution to ethno-religious crisis in Xinxiang China. These asserted by Guo-Ming Chen et al (1996) are funding, building and maintenance of mosques by the government, preferential policies in education as well as giving favourable access and equality in the area of educational pursuance for the minorities in Xinxiang.

Recently in the last Ramadan of this year, the government of China as reported in the *Guardian Newspaper* placed a ban on Muslims during the month of Ramadan claiming that the practice tended to bring about terrorism, similarly government went further to place ban as indicated thus; "according to the Food and Drug Administration in Xinjiang's Jinghe county. "China's goal in prohibiting fasting is to forcibly move Uighurs away from their Muslim culture during Ramadan," this according to Dilxat Rexit, (2015) a spokesman for the exiled World Uyghur Congress. "Policies that prohibit religious fasting is a provocation and will only lead to instability and conflict." He further opined that some of these policies gave vent to instability and conflict within the area

As opined by Rexit, (2015) the Communist Party of China is seen as an atheist organisation, hence, party members who happened to be government workers who happened to be government workers are being subjected to some religious repressions in the areas of participation, worship and practices. This includes the story of religious text, repressive measure on religious

attires as well as obligations. The overall effects of state policies on minority ethnic groups has proved inimical and endemic to the re-occurrence ethno-religious violence in Xinjiang, China.

The various causes of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria are multi-dimensional, just like the case of China. Many factors have been identified by Ideyi, (2008) which includes selfishness, greed, injustice, poverty, do-or-die politics, and avarice, accumulation of wealth, revolt, repression, immorality and ignorance.

A Comparative Approach to Sino-Nigeria Ethno-Religious Conflicts

Comparatively, economic and social parties, is one of the fundamental factors causing ethno-religious conflicts in Sino-Nigeria countries. For example, Nigeria as a nation is made up of three major tribal groups, viz: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. Anytime, any-day, Nigerian president comes from any of these 3 dominant tribes. The issue of marginalisation is always paramount. Since the attainment of independence in 1960, Hausa's have dominated political economy power. Other tribes since then, has been crying of been marginalised in this realm.

Secondly, religion has equally remained a factor to reckon with in Sino-Nigeria countries in the promotion of ethno-religious crisis. False *doctrina* belief has been greatly exhibited in these countries. For example, in China, it has led to such strenuous policies by the Chinese government to banish some religious practices in Xinjiang such as phasing out of Joppa cap by the males, banning of women from wearing hijabs and other coverings, and instruction of mosque, temples, and shrines to allow peace to reign in China.

Likewise in Nigeria, government hard and soft policies have been promoted to arrest ethno-religious conflicts. Conversely, the physiognomy and anatomy of Sino-Nigerian political edifices is such that it is characterised of multi-ethnic, religious, multi-lingua and multi-cultural differences. This factor has propelled various ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria like the Kaduna and Jos ethno-

religious conflicts in Nigeria and the re-occurrence of ethno-religious violence in Xinjiang, China.

Lastly, interpretation of religious texts greatly accounted for the eruption of ethno-religious conflicts in Sino-Nigerian countries. This could be vividly seen in the various acts of some religious leaders who have indulged themselves in discrediting other people's belief.

In China, to arrest the problems caused by ethno-religious conflicts Chinese government have promoted a lot of soft and hard state policies. Such soft policy includes the various needs of some religious practises which had been mentioned earlier. Likewise in Nigeria, government have done a lot in arresting the scourge. This includes the introduction of the zoning system (rotational presidency), establishment of federal character commission, convenience of sovereign national conferences, improvement of quota system, establishment of federal ministry of Niger Delta as well as NDDC (Niger Delta Development Commission).

All these are some of the parameters used by the federal government to arrest the continuous uprisings of ethno religious conflicts in Nigeria. In a small extent various hard and soft state policies promulgated by the Sino-Nigerian government to put an end to ethno-religious conflicts were achieved. To a very large extent, some of the policies have not achieved their aims and objectives of promulgating state policies. The order is still the same. Issues of marginalisation still remained in Sino-Nigerian political systems, socio-economic disparities as well as religiosity are still at stake.

Conclusion

The issue of ethno-religious crisis still prevalent in Sino-Nigerian countries upon all the measures put in place by government, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO), civil liberty organisations to put an end to this scourge, still seem not to be enough to solve the problems. However, the following recommendations were made.

- Establishment of federal ministry of minorities in Sino-Nigerian countries. By this, minority problems ranging from employment, appointments, electioneering, admission quota systems and others will be solved amicably. The ministry will be empowered to take care of minority questions in all ramifications. This to a very large extent would create an harmonious environment from the domination of the majority by the minorities.

- Destructions of the strong holds of false doctrina beliefs. By this, the issue of condemning a particular religion apart from one's religion will be greatly arrested.

- Re-drawing, re-mapping, re-structuring and re-merging of tribes with a common political, economic, cultural similarities to form a state.

- There should be promotion of comparative law of advantage. That is, using the available resources in a state to develop its economy. This would in turn reduce the over dependency of states in the federal allocation which is one of the propelling factors of ethno religious crises in Sino-Nigerian countries. Borne out of the fact that one of the major causes of ethno-religious crisis in Sino-Nigerian countries is resource control. This means that, who is going to be in charge of the national resources or national cake.

- Also going by the research of Xinjiang conflict by Ching Mun Rosalyn Lim (2011) p21, "the Chinese authorities need to recognise that religion can be a force of peace, and differentiate between terrorism, separatism, and mere expressions of political, economic, and cultural grievances". China's conceive approach to managing ethnic relations in Xinjiang is perceived as an attack on the Uyghur identity and this is fanning the simmering conflict in Xinjiang moderating the controls on Uyghur society would help to ease Uyghur dissonance arising from the need to fight for cultural revival.

- There should be a pursuance of a nationalistic vision of religious tolerance and freedom. This could be done through leaders who can spearhead genuine reconciliation effort. These

individuals should sincerely believe in change and genuinely desire a multi-ethnic Sino-Nigeria that accommodates all people irrespective of race, creed, religion or colour. These leaders will be the leaders that would seek mutually beneficial solutions and correcting ethnic prejudices in the Chinese and Nigerian societies. These group of leaders would help to foster commitment and inspire change in the social system

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