
THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN CURBING THE NEGATIVE INFLUENCE OF POLITICAL GODFATHERISM AND ENHANCING GOOD GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The work, The Role of the Church in curbing the negative influence of political godfatherism and enhancing good governance in Nigeria is indeed designed to X-ray the degree of negative influence exerted on the political landscape of Nigeria by political godfathers. The advent of godfatherism in the Nigerian partisan politics dates back to the first Republic when leaders of the three main political parties (Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) Sir Ahmandu Bello) Action Group (AG) Chief Obafemi Awolowo and National Congress of Nigerian Citizens (N. C. N. C) Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe, Carefully and meticulously cultivated godsons that they were convinced would advance the well being of the citizens and indeed they enhanced good and quality governance which was their critical concern. But this trend was reversed by predatory political godfathers who held sway on the country's political arena in the fourth republic that began in May 1999. In attempt to install their godsons into power, they adopted any means, fair and foul, ranging from corrupting of electoral officials to the dispensation of violence, a situation which could be likened to the Machiavelli's ends justifying the means. This work is therefore poised to stem this ugly tide by using the instrumentality of the Church in curbing the trend and enhancing good governance in Nigeria with some suggested strategies.

The concept of godfatherism would have been a good idea if it were not later operated from the negative angle. Godfatherism is synonymous to intermediary, mentoring, benevolence, support and sponsoring, especially in the political sphere. It is sad to note that godfatherism, was not established intentionally as a social detractor or meant to be evil, it was men who made it evil, because evil was never born, evil emanated from man.

It should however be noted that godfatherism in the Nigeria context is plagiaric and devouring hence we must eradicate it from the socio-political soil of Nigeria. Eradicating godfatherism is not the duty of a particular group, but the collective responsibility of every individual, group and corporate bodies including religious organisations and groups. The idea of leaving it to a particular society group will not yield the desired result as the evil we fail to correct we accept directly or indirectly.

Evolutionary Trend of “Godfatherism”

In an analogy, godfatherism is an ideology that is constructed on the belief that certain Individuals possess considerable means to unilaterally determine who gets a party’s ticket to run for an election and who wins in the electoral contest.

According to Gambo (2007), godfathers are men who have the power and influence to decide both who gets nominated to contest elections and who wins in the election. In this sense, godfatherism means the system or practice of societal (political) power seekers connecting themselves to cabals who are mostly business tycoons with much “cash influence”. Such cabals are believed to be determinants of electoral favour, and it is a common belief that they possess the ability to deliver a desired outcome in an electoral struggle. Thus, godfatherism is a practice of total dependence on a system of electoral fuse set up by a few rich and influential sect, it is the tradition of looking for a political father(s) to help promote one’s political aspiration.

Those that play godfatherism are known as godfathers while those who benefit or stand to gain from this ill mutual ache are known as godsons.

In the African continent, especially in the countries infested with high rate of poverty where a large percentage of the citizenry can hardly meet their daily needs, it is highly believed that godfathers are the gods of the society and as such you find them selling their conscience to these few power thugs who in exchange give them peanuts to cater for their needs only for a short time so as to continually have them in the net of their control.

Nwachukwu (2004) traced the origin of the concept of godfatherism to Christianity where godparents are chosen as surrogates to help biological (or adopted) Christian children to become God-fearing and law-abiding adults. Many people had god parents that helped to shape their moral development and some whose parents died early were raised by their godfathers. Quoting Ibrahim Jibrin, Gambo (2007) also traced the origin of godfatherism in electoral politics to the city of Chicago in the United States of America in the pre-world war II era, “when the heads of criminal gangs sponsored politicians in elections, manipulated the results to get them elected and, in turn, received protection and contracts from their political godsons’.

The Advent of Godfatherism in Nigerian Politics and their Mondus Operandi

The advent of godfatherism in the Nigerian partisan politics dates back to the First Republic when leaders of the three main political parties Northern Peoples Congress (NPC), Action Group (AG) and National Congress of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) carefully and meticulously cultivated godsons that they were convinced would advance the well being of the citizens. According to Gambo, (2007) Sir Ahmadu Bello of the NPC, Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe of the NCNC and Chief Obafemi Awolowo of the AG were motivated to do so not to use godsons as surrogates to promote parochial interests, but to promote the developmental aspirations of the people.

Unlike the present crops of political godfathers, the first generation godfathers were essentially benevolent and progressive because they did not abuse their status as godfathers by imposing frivolous demands on their godsons as it is the case today. They served as a huge reservoir of wisdom and experience to be consulted on the business of governance. Indeed, in a relative sense, the first republic political godfathers were drawn by community sense of interest in seeking to influence the electorates to vote for some candidates of their choice. It was enough satisfaction for them that they wielded tremendous influence in the society and this inevitably generated a groundswell of goodwill and reverence for them, as their views on political issues were scarcely contested in their respective regions of the country.

Corroborating the benevolent nature of the first republic political godfathers, Nwachukwu (2004) noted that, understanding the role of politics as well as the military in an evolving country, Sir Ahmadu Bello placed his godchildren in both institutions and the rewards to the Northern Nigeria are today self-evident, Chief Obafemi Awolowo was godfather to a large number of today's Yoruba intelligentsia that have applied his teachings for the benefit of their region; also in Eastern Nigeria, Alaigbo, the late Sir Odumegwu Ojukwu (father of the Ikemba of Nnewi) was godfather to Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe who rose to become the first Premier of the old Eastern Region and later first President of Nigeria.

During the first republic, the godfatherism played by the architects of Nigerian independence can be rightly described as benevolent because it enhanced good and quality governance which was their critical concern, The godfathers realized and understood that governance is the sum total of activities embarked upon by government in initiating and implementing policies that would engender the well being of her citizens. The United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) (1997) viewed good governance as a sub-set of governance where public resources and problem are managed effectively, efficiently and in response to the critical needs of society. It relies on public participation, accountability and transparency. Hence, the legacies of good governance left behind by the first republic godfathers still endure in those states they held sway.

Unlike in the first republic, predatory political godfathers held sway on the country's political arena in the fourth republic that began in May 1999. In view of their parochial activities, the appellation of **warlords** would be more appropriate, because in their attempt to install their godsons into power, they adopted any means fair and foul, ranging from corruption of electoral officials to the dispensation of violence, a situation which is likened to the Machiavelli's ends justifying the means. Ayoade, (2007) classified the predatory godfathers as mentor, benefactor, financier and moneybags. A mentor is a senior person who is purely desirous of guiding a junior to acquire experience and competence in the same profession or vocation. The intention and objective of mentoring is noble because no patronage of any form is stressed. Benefactor is closely related to mentoring; the only difference is that it does not have a close affinity to apprenticeship as mentoring. Here the benefactor puts his resources, goodwill, support and finance at the disposal of the beneficiary. A Financier bankrolls his godson with a view to receiving rewards (patronage). A Moneybag, like a financier, deploys his financial resources to aid his godsons to achieve predetermined goals. However, godfathers, especially the financiers and moneybags, are selfish and deceptively philanthropic. Their relationship with their godsons is purely contractual and money oriented, and when the contract agreement is not religiously adhered to by their godsons, it could spell doom to the political aspiration of their godsons, such as the case of Dr. Chris Ngige of Anambra State, when Ngige as a godson decided to be of good heart investing on social development rather than enriching the purses of the godfather, trouble came knocking on his door.

Operational Strategies of the Political Godfathers

In Nigeria, the elite nature of the existing political parties gave rise to godfatherism. According to Olarinmoye, (2008), the elite nature meant a reduced mobilization capacity as they are poorly entrenched in the country's civil society with a gap existing between them, and the masses forming the electorate. A Number of strategies, including mobilization of ethnic identity through ethnic movements and use of ethnic leadership at the grass root level are used. The consequence of ethnic mobilization for electoral process in the country is an institutional context where elections are transformed into highly competitive games. In order to confront the uncertainties resulting from the acquisition of political power through mobilisation of ethnic identity, political parties resorted to patronage and godfathers to effectively deploy patronage and overcome the problems of voters compliance that it generated.

The godfather plays the role of a broker, a professional manipulator of information and capital who brings about communication between political parties and voters for a profit. Wang and Kurzman, (2007) stressed that the godfather makes merchandise out of other peoples expectations, anticipation and hopes; and he possesses the knowledge of the type of incentives most likely to mobilize people with, such knowledge being contingent on the kinds of loyalties that are most pertinent to the potential voter and resulting only from an intimate knowledge of the terrain or intuitive grasp of the structure of the voting public, Political events and experiences in the

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country have shown that the godfather utilized his intuitive grasp of the structure of the voting public to engage in compilation of fictitious names on the voters register, forging of voters register, like was predominant in the past elections of Nigeria especially during the 1999 election, abuse of the voters registration and revision exercises, illegal printing of voters cards, illegal kidnapping and possession of ballot boxes, collaboration with polling officials and party agents to contravene the electoral rules deliberate delaying of the supply of election materials to opposition strongholds and delaying the opening of polling centres located in oppositions stronghold and even to the extent of exterminating opponents.

Wang and Kurzman (2007) further opined that, the godfather also organized the stuffing of ballot boxes with ballot papers, falsification of election results, illegal thumb-printing of ballot papers, organizing under-age and multiple voting, illegal printing of election result forms, illegal announcement of election results where elections were not held and harassment of political opponents, hijacking election results before they were announced, as well as attacking the agents and supporters of opponent with thugs. Such dangerous antics of the godfather, aimed at getting their godsons into power at all cost, also include the changing of the list of electoral officials, box-switching and inflation of figures, delaying or manipulation of election tribunals in order to protect stolen mandate, inducement of voters and electoral officials with money and employment opportunities in order to prevent them from giving evidence in favour of opposition candidates before election tribunals.

For many decades, democracy and good governance has eluded Nigeria due to fragrant abuse of the electoral process by the political godfathers. All general elections ended in bloody crisis and unending petitions in tribunals. The electoral system itself does not help the situation. The incumbent President and State Governors are allowed to remain in office to organise and supervise the elections in which they and their political parties will also participate; and this gave them undue chances to misuse their powers of incumbency to manipulate electoral process to the advantage of the ruling parties and their candidates.

During electioneering campaigns, the incumbent governments directly or indirectly use public vehicles, offices, security agents, public utilities, public funds, public servants and other paraphillanials of office to oppress their political opponents. All these metamorphosed into the menace that Nigerians are enduring today, Ogudu, (2011).

It therefore stands to reason that the electoral commission and committees set up by the incumbent Federal and State governments respectively will definitely have credibility problems, as election results will be protested and rejected by the suspicious opposition parties. It is also an open secret that godfatherism and misuse of the powers of incumbency have forestalled true democracy in the country, and the political experiences of the fourth republic was living evidence.

The duo of Wang and Kurzman, (2007) asserted that, under normal circumstances, democracy is about participation and representation. Political parties, not godfathers, take the responsibility of recruiting competent individuals for political leadership through periodic free and fair elections, educating the electorate through issues-based political rallies and dissemination of information about government policies as well as serving as a vehicle for the articulation and aggregation of the interest of the people. Elite parties that are not common in Nigeria are, however, non-ideological organisations because they have less interest in political principles than in securing and retaining political office for their leadership and distributing income to those who run them and work for them.

The Negative Influence and Effects of Political Godfatherism on Good Governance in Nigeria

- 1). In Nigeria's Fourth Republic, the emergence of godfatherism posed great threat not only to good governance but also the socio-economic stability of democratic governance. Perhaps one of the most disturbing and damaging influence of godfatherism in Nigeria's fourth Republic was in the domain of making nonsense of a truly free, fair and creditable electoral process in which the electorates by right are expected to freely elect people of their choice into public office to represent their interests. Indeed, the privilege of electing people of their choice into public office was denied given the situation in which godfathers foisted candidates of their preference on the generality of the people. This is to say the least very inimical to the tenets of democratic rule. (Udofia and Edet, 2008).
- 2) In the same vein, when public office holders find themselves in public office with the support of their godfathers the tendency is that the public office-holders would not be accountable to the people, who at any rate did no count in their elections into public office. Invariably, the loyalty of such public office holders would be tilted toward their godfathers and this itself negates one of the critical attributes of democracy which is responsible and accountable government. This scenario is also inimical to good governance which is predicated on the rule of law, due process, accountability and transparency in the management of public business.
- 3) Udofia and Edet (2008) again asserted that, another implication of godfatherism on good governance in Nigeria and by far, the most irritating in Nigeria's fourth Republic, was that the emergence of godfatherism had robbed the citizens of the privilege of enjoying the dividends of democratic governance in the sense that the would-be government became reluctant to initiate and implement policies that would advance the well-being of the generality of citizens. This was a result of the fact that godfatherism was basically predatory in nature. The primary motive of venturing into politics was borne out of the need to acquire money from the coffers of government to which their godsons held sway.

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Therefore, the lean financial resource accruable to the state from the federation account which was meant for the improvement of the living standard of the citizens was not of paramount interest to them. In instances where the godsons upon reflection refused to settle their godfathers as agreed upon before securing public office, hell was let loose. The experiences recorded in Anambra and Oyo States in the fourth Republic support this contention beyond reasonable doubt.

- 4) Another far-reaching implication of godfatherism on the entrenchment of good governance, which in turn would endanger democratic growth and stability, is the complete erosion of the normative elements of democracy of which trust is a sine-qua-non attribute between the government and the governed. In a polity where prescribed rules guiding the- electoral process are frequently disobeyed with impunity, the basis of citizens trust in government was compromised. If the situation is not decisively addressed with the urgency it deserves, the resultant effect is that trust as a vital social capital is lost and when there is no trust between the government and the governed, interaction would only take place on the basis of mutual suspicion and this does not augur well for the healthy development of democratic governance.

In the light of the above, Olarinmoye, (2008) spotlighted some major areas of the negative influence of political godfatherism on Nigeria's political landscape to include the following:

- 1) In Anambra State, Governor Chinwoke Mbadinaju was supported by Chief Emeka Offor to win election in 1999 and throughout his tenure as governor, he expended more energy and time struggling to free the resources of the state from the predatory grips of his godfather, and the struggle was so much that the critical issues of governance were ignored, The conflict between the governor and his estranged godfather got so pronounced that it crippled the machinery of governance in Anambra State, and the repercussion was gross deficit of democratic dividends recorded by the state government and this led to Mbadinaju losing re-election into office in 2003,
- 2) Also in 2003, Mbadinaju's successor Governor Chris Ngige, had Chief Chris Uba as his political godfather who manipulated elections that brought Ngige into office upon an agreement on financial reward and allocation of political offices to Uba's candidates. On reflection, Governor Ngige refused to honour the agreement and fought back to save the resources of the state for the common good of the people. Chief Uba allegedly demanded for N3 billion from Ngige as compensation for the cost of financing the governor's election which Ngige declined to honour. To break the Camel's back, Uba publicly confessed that he rigged the election that saw Ngige into office as governor and the election was consequently invalidated by the Federal Court of Appeal.

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- 3) In Oyo State, the reputed strongman of Ibadan politics, Alhaji Lamidi Adedibu, played the godfather to Alhaji Lam Adesina in 1999 and Alhaji Raseed Ladoja in 2003 to enthrone them as governors. Shortly after he was sworn-in, Governor Adesina refused to honour his financial pledge to Adedibu and slugged it out with his godfather. Consequently, he was denied a second term of office by Adedibu. In the case of Governor Ladoja, he bluntly refused to accede to the frivolous demands of his godfather shortly after he got into office and the consequence was his eventual impeachment by the state legislature that Adedibu allegedly coaxed to boot the governor out of office. Until Adedibu died, Ladoja's successor, Governor Alao Akala, dared not break his agreement with the strong man of Ibadan politics.

- 4) In Kwara State, the disagreement between Governor Mohammed Lawal and his godfather, Dr. Qlusola Saraki after the 1999 gubernatorial election that brought him into office developed into political fray that eventually denied the governor a second term in office in 2003, He was succeeded by Saraki's biological son, Dr. Bukola Saraki. Similarly, Governor Malla Kachalla who was sponsored by Alhaji Modu Ali Sheriff to get into office in Borno State in 1999 eventually fell apart with his godfather and he consequently lost his bid for a second term in office to his godfather in 2003.

Godfatherism, according to Nwachukwu, (2004) is now the godfather of nepotism. (Ajayi, 2006) quoted former Vice President, Alhaji Abubakar Atiku, as lamenting that the concept of godfathers as owner of political parties or sections thereof is a threat to the development of democracy. Godfather must not be allowed to substitute themselves for the members of political parties or indeed for the voting citizenry during elections by determining who gets nominated to contest for and who wins elections. Leon, (2009) also quoted Dr. Ahmadu Alli, former Chairman of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) as lamenting the problem of overbearing godfathers in the ruling party which must now diminish.

On the other hand however, Obineche, (2008) quoted Chief Emmanuel Iwanyanwu, a chieftain of the PDP, as endorsing the concept of godfatherism in politics by saying that it is a worldwide practice. *I do not think that, that type of system will stop. There is no time in politics in Nigeria when you won't have people who have been there. You will have leaders and those leaders must exercise their powers in accordance with the constitution of the party* (Olarinmoye, 2008) also quoted Governor Jolly Nyame of Taraba State as stressing that *one thing in politics is that you must believe in godfatherism. If I did not believe in it I would not be in daddy's place. Whether you like it or not, as a godfather you will not be a governor, you will not be a president, but you can make a governor, you can make a president.*

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Corroborating the contentions of Chief Iwuanyanwu and Governor Nyame, Ajayi, (2006) cautioned that the issue with godfathers in the Nigerian politics is something Nigerians should be careful in condemning, because Nigeria's political system is evolving from the traditional method to the modern process. An individual is interested in a political office; he approaches an individual whom he thinks can help him win the position, looking for a political godfather is practice all over the world. In Nigeria, it comes with spending your personal resources to win an election without any method of fund raising. The individual you approached would have to fund your election for you at least make sure that he covers some grounds for you financially. After winning that position, common sense implies that you have to appreciate that individual in the Nigerian way, whatever that means to Nigerian political process, you cannot be at logger head with your mentor, your sponsor, or godfather.

The Role of the Church in Curbing the Negative Influence of Political Godfatherism and Enhancing Good Governance in Nigeria

Having critically appraised the roles and implications of godfatherism in Nigerian politics, it is pertinent to state the role of the church in eradicating the negative influence of political godfatherism and enhancing good governance. The church has a great deal in terms of spiritual and social influence, the Nigerian Nation is highly populated by Christians of both the laities and clergies that have been misled by leaders, and even some of the leaders (political godfathers) belonged to one Christian denomination or the other. If this is true, where does the integrity of the church lies? queried Oroka, 1991.

It must however be emphasised that, the church has a greater role to play in terms of bringing about public enlightenment through workshops and seminar, Radio talk and public rally as well as melodramatizing the negative effects of the negative influence of political godfatherism. The media can do it but the church can do it better especially on the pulpit. It is in conformity with this, Walker, (1952) as cited by Erhuvwujefe, (2007) posited that, the church especially the pulpit is a place to express public opinion and ills of the society.

Relatedly, the church must stand up to eradicate poverty and ignorance especially the (mega-churches) as these are the tools and weapons with which the past oppressors and even the present oppressors are using. We must understand the application of several principles of success and not dependent on get rich quick method which is fostered by these godfathers. It is in line with this development of thought that Erhuvwujefe, (2011) asserted that the church should promote socio-economic empowerment of members and non-members who are poor, less privileged and physically challenged in the society as being practiced by prophet T.B. Joshua at Synagogue Church of All Nation (SCOAN) Lagos Nigeria and Bishop D.D. Miyerijesu of God's Grace Ministry Inc Warri.

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In the same vein, the clergies should be seen to be upright in all their endeavours, Clerics must come out of the idea of seeking favours from these rich moneybag politicians and godfathers, as this will make it impossible for them to speak the truth without fear or favour. This Uprightness Was exemplified by Bishop Blessing Erifeta of the Anglican Diocese of Sapele Delta State who suspended a member of the church for sponsoring and leading a gang of youths who drove voters away, thump-printed and stuffed ballot boxes for a political party in Delta State in the just concluded general election of April 2011. (Urhobo Times 16th June, 2011). If majority of the churches can uphold this ideal, the negative influence of the political godfathers will be greatly curbed.

Erhuvwuife, (2011) also opined that part of church proceeds should be used to provide social services in some villages and cities like borehole water, provision of transformers, printing and supply of books to schools, donating classroom building, as well as school furniture to schools etc. All these are to compliment government efforts, and to make life more meaningful to the people and thus de-emphasizing materialism which is a driving force compelling people to succumb and allow themselves to be used by political godfathers to perpetuate political and electoral fraud that enthrone unpopular candidates and breed mal-administration. It is only through this way that we can all influence our society as is expected of us by our creator Jehovah.

Conclusion

A trace of the history of Godfatherism has revealed that it is as old as humanity, and when applied conscientiously and selflessly, has helped not only to advance human being, but also promote democracy and good governance. It has been revealed how benevolent godfatherism played by the doyens of Nigerian politics in the first republic enhanced the political aspiration of godsons and spread the benefit of good governance to the citizenry. The benevolent godfathers played by Sir Ahmadu Bello, Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe were a positive practice that benefited Nigerians. On the other hand, it has been revealed that the practice changed completely in the Second, Third and Fourth Republics where godfatherism became driven by selfishness and greed. And the consequence was the use of godfatherism to twist the arms of government to achieve selfish and self aggrandized ends.

The destabilizing effects of such nefarious display of political might was clearly evident in the Adedibu versus. Adesina/Ladoja in Oyo State, Ofor versus Mbadinaju and Uba versus Ngige in Anambra State, Saraki versus Lawal in Kwara State and Sheriff versus. Kachalla in Borno State. Broken agreement that brought political godfathers at loggerheads with their godsons revealed a major reason for the inability of the godsons on the seats and corridors of power to fulfill their political promises to the electorates.

Godfatherism has caused enough turmoil in Nigeria, and it is likely to remain for eternity unless the Christians and non Christians alike rise up to the challenge of tactically chasing out the godfathers by educating and empowering the church (the

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citizenry). It is a collective responsibility, no single individual has the almighty ability, and together we can achieve even the seemingly impossible.

Recommendations

Consequent upon the above findings, it is the recommendation of this work that:

- 1) The Church should institute sanction on any erring member of the church caught or implicated in high level electoral fraud no matter how highly placed the individual may be.
- 2). Churches should reject special thanksgiving in their church by disgruntled political godfathers and politicians who secured electoral victory fraudulently,
- 3). The church to initiate and sustain micro-credit facilities, Economic empowerment programmes and poverty alleviation packages to stabilize members alongside prayers and deliverance.
- 4). There should be a federal legislation stipulating serious sanctions and punishment for electoral fraudsters (who are both Christians and non-Christians) and the law to be effectively enforced on victims to serve as deterrent to others.
- 5). Each and every member of the society must make it a point of duty to get enlightened as ignorance is the foundation for oppression and depression.
- 6). Christians must come out and take charge of their responsibilities as leaders and moralists and not as observers.
- 7). The Church leaders should not favour a particular group but should stand out for sanity and development.
- 8). Money, self-centredness and selfish influence should be de-emphasized in partisan politics through vigorous public enlightenment about the fundamental human rights of both the political aspirants and the electorates.
- 9). The electoral law should lay emphasis on proper conduct of primary elections in order to enhance the rights of the electorates in the choice of their candidates or representatives.
- 10). Political parties and the election umpires should request for and duly treat preliminary public petition against candidates chosen both at the primaries and general elections.
- 11). Misuse of the power of incumbency should be curbed by appointing interim government in place of incumbent President, Governors and Local Government Chairmen shortly before the next elections. This will curb the practice whereby the aforementioned public office holders preside over the elections in which they are contestants and collude with godfathers to rig elections in their own favour with the paraphernalia of office.
- 12). Electronic voting should be adopted for all elections in the country in order to minimize electoral fraud.

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