

# REPOSITIONING MUSIC RESEARCH IN NIGERIA - A CASE FOR MUSIC THEORY

## Abstract

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The importance of research in music and indeed in any culture especially as it involves the fundamental paradigms that underlie the concept and practice of 'musicing' as posited by Elliot (1995:50) cannot be over emphasized. However, with the present state of university education coupled with the attitudes of governments (at the state and federal levels) and funding agencies, funding, interest and motivation on researches in the academic areas in the higher levels of our education system have continued to crumble under the pangs of ignorance and neglect as well as misguided public policy. Consequently, the state of research in our departments of music in this country's university system has plunged into a very abysmal level to the effect that most practitioners (those who still care about 'the wig and the pen') resort to mere social discussion of the music subject devoid of even the least socio-analytical paradigms. In fact, the situation has become so sour that the research component of the contract between the universities and their lecturers has become simply a bad debt which, at best, should be cancelled unconditionally. This paper attempts to present a critical position on the status quo with particular reference to the Nigerian situation as it applies to the area of music theory research.

Music is worth studying because it represents a basic mode of thought and action, (above all), in itself, it is one of the primary ways human beings create and share meanings (Mark, 2001:267). (However), musicians...cannot afford to be merely good performers or good composers...students aspiring to a concert career may rebel at research, knowledge does not interfere with artistry...the results of research aid is authentic performance...( and musicality) (Watanabe, 1967: 4).

## Preamble

In the past few decades, the educational sector in Nigeria has suffered a gradual and unprecedented decay in all its various disciplinary areas. The enormous effect of this decadent trend has become so glaring that many voices of reason have cried and continue to cry out for frantic steps to avert the imminent calamity of a total collapse of the entire sector and its attendant tumultuous consequences on the nation and its people, In the higher education level where research and teaching reign supreme, the situation appears to be already at red alert and an unabated level but the relevant authorities appear to use kid gloves on the militating factors. The gravity of the spectacle can be easily appreciated if one takes cognizance of the fact that presently, the certificate - carrying products of the Nigerian tertiary education system no longer enjoy credible recognition at the local, let alone at the international scene.

Education is often said to be the mainstay of any nation's economy and its pursuit and achievements especially at the tertiary (university) are regarded as the most viable and internationally-credible indices for assessing the growth rate of any nation. Consequently, the clarion call for the redirection of the Nigeria's ship of state towards credible development within the present-day world order cannot do without a total revolution in her educational system. The much-needed complete make-over is very crucial and more urgent now than ever in the area of music education at the tertiary (especially the university) level due to its research orientation. The emphasis on research here is not unconnected with the fact that research is the bedrock of growth and advancement in human knowledge, the major attribute that adorns the walls of the history of discoveries and inventions. This therefore underscores the need for sound university education in the various disciplinary areas of human learning, a need which is believed to be responsible for the colonial government's design for engaging in the establishment of university education in Nigeria. The famous Asquith Commission on Higher Education set up by the British Government in August 1943 to look into the yearnings for higher education in all her colonies was, according to Lewis (1954), charged with the following tasks:

...to consider the principles which should guide the promotion of higher education, learning and research and the development of universities in the colonies; and to explore means whereby universities and other appropriate bodies in the United Kingdom may be able to co-operate with institutions of higher education in the Colonies in order to give effect to these principles (Lewis, 1954:45).

Accordingly, the commission came out with its unanimous recommendations captured in Taiwo (1982) as follows:

Universities should be established as soon as possible...As a minimum, facilities should be provided for some subjects in the faculty of arts, for some in the faculty of science and for one or more professional subjects, keeping a balance between the arts and the science and professional subjects. It is of equal importance that facilities should exist for research. Research is an essential part of the life of a university (Taiwo, 1982:89).

This was underscored by the recommendations of a second commission, Elliott's Commission, which was set up the same year as the former (with particular reference to West Africa) and meant to:

...report on the organization and facilities of the existing centres of higher education in British West Africa, and to make recommendations regarding future university development in that area (HMSO, 1945: vi).

The Elliot's commission was therefore expected to make a very comprehensive survey of the existing West African higher educational institutions and the needs to be served. The commission agreed unanimously on the urgent need for the extension of higher education and of university development in West Africa. It pointed out that the time was ripe for action to be taken in that direction but the members differed on the policy required to achieve the general aim of its recommendations hence the presentation of majority and minority reports on the issue of the nature and number of such institutions that would be established.

These at least, clearly show the need for research in university education as can be traced from the early beginnings of the university in Nigeria hence the urgent need to reposition our universities in this direction. Before going into the issue of music theory research, there is need to briefly recount the emergence of university music education in Nigeria.

### **Background of University Music Education in Nigeria**

Although the clamour for higher (post secondary) education in Nigeria took the centre stage as early as in 1908, the expected fruit did not see the light of day until in the 1930's when the Yaba Higher College, Lagos was established, This college, in the words of Fafunwa (1974:141), was established to provide qualified manpower in the areas of medicine, engineering and other vocations as well as teaching staff for higher middle schools. However, the implementation of the Elliot's Commission's recommendations cited above saw to the birth of the University College, Ibadan in 1948 following the approval of Ibadan as the suitable home for the new institution by a delegation of the Inter-University Council led by Sir William Hamilton Fife (Vice-Chancellor, University of Aberdeen) in 1946.

The University College, Ibadan was not only an affiliate of the University of London but also, by its nature, it failed to meet the aspirations of the Nigerian people due to its low annual intake, limited range of disciplines, absence of disciplines and professions which were crucial to the nation's development (eg: engineering, architecture, law, business, accountancy, music, etc) and above all, the nature of its constitution, policy, and administration as well as its fragrant and subtle attempts at racial discrimination. These short-comings resulted in more vigorous agitations as at 1955 for the establishment of universities which will, in addition to addressing the above-mentioned critical areas, meet the demands of (lie people vis-a-vis the impending independence of the nation hence her manpower needs, the demographical realities, geographical, historical and multicultural diversity,

Consequently, the Federal Minister of Education, in April, 1959, set up the Post-School Certificate and Higher Education Commission (also known as the Ash by Commission) under the

chairmanship of Sir Eric Ashby (a renowned educationist and former President and Vice-chancellor of Queen's University, Belfast), The task of this commission was therefore "...to conduct an investigation into Nigeria's needs in the field of post-School Certificate and higher education over the next twenty years (Je up to !980)"(Ashby, 1960:2). It is believed that the recommendations of this commission might have led to and/or gfvn support for the establishment of the five first generation universities namely, the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (1960), Ah mad u Bello University, Zaria(1961), the University of Ife, Ile-Ife (presently known as Obafemi Awolowo University)(1962) and the University of Lagos, Yaba (1962).

These universities and others established later in the !970's, 1980's and thereafter are meant to pursue the aims of higher education in Nigeria as listed in the National Policy on Education (NPE) through the following: (1) Teaching, (2) Research, (3) Dissemination of existing and new information, (4) Pursuit of service to the community and (5) Being a storehouse of knowledge (FRN, 1981:22). It is vital to state that out of these universities, the University of Nigeria, Nsukka was the first to establish a Department of Music in 1961 and to run a Bachelor's degree programme in music. It also introduced a three-year Diploma programme in Music Education in 1963 and a Master's Degree Programme in the areas of African Music (Ethnomusicology), Music Education, Musical Instrument Technology and Theory and Composition in 1988. The Department of Music, University of Nigeria (UNN) might be said to have tried to live up to the demands of its pioneering position in higher Music Education in this country in the form of provision of middle and high-level manpower, introduction of innovational and revolutionary music education as enshrined in its curricula all of which serve as the backbone of the other Nigerian universities which have established their own Departments of Music as a full-fledged department or a unit in their Performing or Creative Arts Departments, Centre for Cultural Arts or Institute of African Studies.

Presently, the other Nigerian universities that have established music programmes include Obafemi Awolowo University, University of Ibadan, University of Lagos, University of Uyo, Nnamdi

Azikiwe University, Awka, University of Ilorin, Delta State University and Lagos State University. The University of Benin and University :of Jos do not have full music programme at the undergraduate and graduate levels but they have students who conduct researches on music and music-related subjects in their Departments of Theatre Arts. Also, Ahmadu Bello University has no music programmes but research works on traditional music especially from Northern Nigeria are undertaken by her students in the Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages (Ekwueme, 1975). Other Federal universities such as University of Sokoto (Usman Dan Fodio University), University of Calabar, Bayero University Kano, University of Port Harcourt and University of Maiduguri have neither departments of music nor do they offer any music programme.

Also, with the backing of the 1979 Constitution of Nigeria, state governments started establishing universities in their individual states. This led to the establishment of many state-owned (some of which later became Federal-owned) universities in the 1980's and beyond. Some of such universities include Anambra State University of Science and Technology (ASUTECH), which gave birth to the present Ebonyi State University,.Enugu State University of Science and Technology and Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka; Bendel (now Edo and Delta ), Ondo, Ogun, Imo and Lagos States' Universities as well as Cross River State University which gave birth to the present University of Uyo. Of all these, only the Delta and Lagos States' Universities have music programmes. The other upcoming state universities such as Benue and Kogi States' Universities as well as the private universities including Madonna, Igbinedion, Babcock, etc have also neither departments of music nor music programmes.

### **Nature and Scope of Music Theory Research**

The term, theory is derived from the Greek *theoria* which means to inspect, observe or consider hence music theory has to do with all the rational contemplation of music from practical, historical and analytical points of view. From a modern perspective of music scholarship, music theory is said to belong to the trinity of the intellectual discipline. Music comprising musicology, ethnomusicology and music theory. While musicology which originated in the 1880's as *Musikwissenschaft*, 'science of music' (erroneously perceived as the parent of the three) has had to concentrate on the historical, documentary and critical discourse of the music of western European

(classical) tradition from antiquity to the modern era, ethnomusicology which started as *vergleichende Musikwissenschaft* (comparative musicology) focuses primarily on the music and musical practices of non-western cultures as well as the traditional music of Europe and America. Music theory itself has both pedagogical and research orientations involving the development and analytical application of theories emanating from in depth investigation of the paradigms surrounding the process of conceiving and generating musical sound and applying them to the process of creating and 'consuming' music from scientific and analytical standpoints. It therefore involves empirical definition of structural issues in tonal, atonal and even pre-tonal music. Its investigation also covers the history of music theory and pedagogy of musical skills as well as music perception and cognition which both on purely psycho-musical logical reflections. Music theory in the western European music scholarship is part and parcel of musicology. However, from a North American perspective, it has a pedagogic-analytical research disposition which involves the traditional role of teaching the fundamental and traditional skills of music including harmony, aural training, sight singing, counterpoint and analysis as well as the strictly research area of empirical investigation as found in the sciences and humanities.

Actually, music theory traces its origin as far back as Aristoxenus in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. but its status as an autonomous academic discipline in the modern sense took root in the American academia in the 1960's much later than musicology. With this development, music theorists started to take their proper place in the academia in place of musicologists, composers and performers who were usually employed to teach music theory courses. Consequently, music theorists have come to regain their positions in the administration of the music theory faculty and its curricula, a feat which was boosted by the birth of their own specific **disciplinary journals** including the following:

Journal of Music Theory - (University of Yale, 1957). Perspectives of New Music - (Princeton University, 1962). Indiana Journal of Music Theory - (Indiana University). The Journal of Schenkerian Studies - (University of North Texas). Music Theory Spectrum - (University of California). Music Theory Online, Music Perception - 1984.

Following the usual process of inception, continuities and discontinuities which it has waded through, music theory not only became a credible autonomous part of empirically-oriented music discipline but also a conventional body of knowledge with sets of shared practices. Though originating as part of the American School of Music Scholarship in the 1950's, today music theory has grown beyond leaps and bounds, employing its distinctive knowledge and practice to establish for itself and its practitioners a secure position in the world of academia. As a body of knowledge, music theory turns its research searchlight on varied areas of musical thought and practices which, despite its continued diversifications in the modern times, focuses primarily on such areas as theoretical systems, musical analysis and history of music theory; pedagogy of music theory as well as tonality, tonal and atonal theories, -music perception and cognition.

The areas of theoretical systems and musical analysis may be said to be closely related since the main thrust of the discipline is the evolution and application of analytical paradigms as tools of musical discourse. While new theories are constantly evolved, existing ones such as the Schenkerian theory, theories of tonal and atonal music in terms of melody, harmony and rhythm (eg: 12-tone theory, etc.) as well as the pitch-class set theory, group theory and transformation have been developed into credible usage over the past five decades of the discipline's lifespan.

In terms of the history of music theory, several materials have resulted from prolonged researches on the provision of historical narratives of music theory and theoretical systems the fact that the scope of liberalism and inclusion as projected by Foucault (1973:xiv) still remains apparently unresolved notwithstanding. Needless to state that the situation is even more advantageous than disadvantageous since the trend has left a huge fallow area for prospective researchers. Nevertheless, it is vital to state that several milestones have been set in this area by the works of Hugo Riemann and Francois-Joseph Fétis who were also noted for the evolution of musicology. Matthew Shirlaw set another milestone in the field with the publication of his work, history of harmonic theory (the first of such work in English) in 1917. Moreover, the founding of American music theory in 1960 opened up a

vast area of research in this direction.

The pedagogical area, which apparently is the only area which thrives in the Nigerian set-up, involves the usual classroom teaching work aimed at exposing the students to the rudiments of music, harmony, rhythm and counterpoint among others. It is vital to add that this area has a strong research disposition which involves disseminating the knowledge of the ongoing developments of new knowledge which has to do with perception and theory and the interaction between them- areas yet to be harnessed in the Nigerian setting.

The area of music cognition and perception developed in the 1960's and 1970's from as a cross-breed between cognitive psychology and music education/pedagogy and its research focuses on aspects of musical learning. In addition, so many experimental and wide range research issues are

now found in the field of music theory. These include: gesture, semiotics, transformation, networks and group theory, rhythm, temporality and meter, algebraic approaches, feminist and critical theory, Schenkerianism, modern (new) music, harmonic issues in Jazz and popular music, music and science, psychoacoustics, music and computing as well as dialectics, compositional strategies and (Dis)continuous forms among others.

Accordingly, in addition to the traditional courses in rudiments, elementary and advanced harmony, the music theory faculty now presents a wide range of courses for her students in the area that exploits the potential of other fields of learning. The fruits of these endeavours can be found in such areas as semiotics, feminist and critical theory, psychoacoustics, temporality, hypermeter, transformation .and networks, informatics and algebraic approaches as well as dialectics. The pedagogical area of teaching has also been diversified to involve contemporary research in music theory pedagogy so that the students are exposed to music-theoretical knowledge that focuses on perception and theory as well as the issues of transdisciplinarity which rids the discipline of intellectual rigidity.

### **State of Music Theory Pedagogy and Research in Nigeria Today - Militating Factors and the Way Forward**

The state of music theory pedagogy and research presents a clear picture of how this discipline has fared since 1961 when formal music scholarship found its way into the Nigerian university education system. My experience from this study shows that only a few of our universities run music programmes. The table below \*shows the universities which run the various programmes in music and the area of specialization of their graduate programmes:

<i>Name of University</i>	<i>Music Department/ Unit</i>	<i>Pre-degree Certificate</i>	<i>B.A &amp; B.A.Ed. Degrees</i>	<i>M.A &amp; Ph.D Degrees</i>	<i>Areas of Specialization of Graduate Research Programmes</i>
University of Nigeria. Nsukka	Department	Diploma in Music/ Education	DA & BA.Ed.	MA offered (Ph.D available but yet to takeoff)	Ethnomusicology (MA/ Ph.D), Music Educ.(MA/ Ph.D) & Theory & Composition, Music Media, Business and entertainment Industry and Musical Instrument Technology (MA)
University of Ibadan	Unit of institute of African Studies	N/A	N/A	MA & Ph.D offered	Ethnomusicology (African Music)

Obafemi Awolowo University Ife	Department	Certificate Course in African Music (CCAM)	BA & BA.Ed. available	MA & Ph.D available	Ethnomusicology(MA&Ph.D), Composition, Music Education, Music Production & Mgt., Music Technology and Performance (MA).
University of Lagos	Unit of Cultural and Creative Arts Dept.	1 year Pre-degree Programme *(no certificate awarded)	BA& BA.Ed. available	MA offered (Ph.D yet to take off)	Ethnomusicology, Composition, Music Education, Performance and Psychology of Music (MA).
University of Ilorin	Unit of the Department of Performing Arts	N/A	BA in Performing Arts (Music Stress)	N/A	N/A
Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka	Department	Diploma in Music Education	BA in Music only	MA and Ph.D available	Ethnomusicology and Music Pedagogy (MA & Ph.D)
University of Uyo	Department	N/A	BA in Music only	N/A	N/A
Delta State University Abraka	Unit of the Department of Fine/Appl. and Performing Arts	N/A	BA & BA.Ed. available	N/A	N/A
Lagos State University	Department	Diploma in Music (2 years)	BA available	N/A	N/A

It should be added that only a few of the colleges of education (mainly in the southern and -middle belt parts of the country) offer music in their programmes. These colleges of Education are those at Agbor, Ankpa, Eha-Amufu (Federal), Ekhiadolor, Ikerre Ekiti, Ilesa, Ilorin, Nsugbe, Owerri (Alvan Ikoku), Oyo (St. Andrews and FCE (special)), Pankshin, Warri and Port Harcourt (RSCE). In addition, Alvan Ikoku College of Education runs the BA.Ed. degree in Music for regular and sandwich students (in affiliation with UNN) while College of Education, Ikerre Ekiti runs the same programme in affiliation with UNN but for sandwich students only. The Polytechnic Ibadan is the only polytechnic in the country that has a music programme. It offers ND and HND certificates in music (with emphasis on Musical Instrument Technology).

In terms of course content of the graduate programmes in the theory and composition areas (available in UNN, OAU and UNILAG only), the following courses feature prominently: Advanced Harmony, Musicology, Analysis and Analytical Techniques, Seminar, Advanced Orchestration, Applied Music, advanced Ear Training, Musical Acoustics and Research Methods. These courses are good but they do not offer the depth of scholarship required in today's graduate studies in the music theory and composition areas. These leave the graduates with very shallow exposure and more or less equip them with essentially a mere generalistic research orientation. In fact, after my recent research trip which took me to most of the departments of music in Nigerian universities, I was tempted to ask myself where we are, where are we going to and is the story of music theory pedagogy in Nigeria just a harvest of set-backs. Well, as the saying goes, the toad jumping in the broad day light must have some adverse circumstances around its abode.

### Factors Affecting Music Theory Research and the Way Forward

Experience is often said to be the best teacher. Thus, my several years teaching and research experience in Nigerian universities have made me to have a closer appreciation of the travails of music theory pedagogy and research in Nigeria. As this author pointed out recently,

Music scholarship has clocked over 40 years since after it took its place in the Nigerian university education system...enough years for a full academic career from assistant lecturer to a professor emeritus! However, we are left to see and say whether the discipline is (on course or)...resigning itself to the depressing

prospect of watching its own sunset (Nnamani, 2005:7).

Though music theory feature frequently in the various curricula of the various universities, the issue of content, focus and research orientation has been bedeviled by a myriad of militating factors. These factors addressed below need urgent redress to get us back to track, to be in tune with the current world order in the field otherwise the future would be better imagined than experienced.

### **Funding**

The syndrome in Nigeria is for a prospective researcher to inflate his research bill to the usual "Nigerian -times-ten" practice. Adjudicators sometimes are forced to give little to nothing to most proposals sometimes to make sure that the little money released go round to all those who applied including some 'friends' whose proposals are less than relevant. Consequently, most of the approved research works, like the usual government contracts, mostly end up at the mobilization stage leaving the researcher at risk with his conscience and moral background in terms of producing and submitting an accurate account of the budget he used. This practice is closely linked to our government's attitude to adequate funding of education to the tune of the UNESCO standard which it willingly signed up to uphold.

### **Government Policy on Education and NUC Standard**

Despite all the ritual of accreditation which the NUC subject the universities to at almost very religious frequency, the findings apparently often remain in the bound copies of the reports shelved in the most secured cupboards of the relevant government agencies. The issue here that we are not bereft with the preponderance of very fascinatingly-articulated policies and programmes but that of the willingness on the powers that be to turn mixed wheat flour into real bread. How the fund that is salted away in this ritual from time to time is properly accounted for is a matter of conjecture. Again, like father like son, though our ministers of Education have opportunities to tour round the world, the experiences of such (rips have not started yielding the required dividends in terms of appreciable practical changes for the better. It is not enough to globe-trot for debt rescheduling, servicing, buy-backs and personal "TAM" trips with cap-in-hand requests for foreign aids some of which are said to be projected for the education sector. The good things we see in other lands should also be of interest to us. We should be able to emulate such good things for the betterment of our own society. Permit me to ask, is the NUC standard document not due for review or complete make-over to make it relevant, viable and in consonance with today's world standard? If it is due, when shall this process come to be? Even, when several memos have been churned out in this regard, the experience on the ground does not match the directives and contents of those memos.

### **Professional Organization**

At the end of my recent presentation of an annual lecture at one of our most respected universities, one of the graduate students posed a very salient question namely, who tunes the tuner? In a sense, the questioner was bothered -by the fact that the fault with the system cannot be blamed essentially on the led (which is being made to be in 'tune') but also on the leaders (those who 'tune'the led). In Nigeria, as in other parts of the globe, each university is somehow autonomous as regards its curricula, etc but there is usually a body that regulates the practices of such professions as NMA (Medicine), PSN (Pharmacy), Nigeria Legal Council (Law) and COREN (Engineering) among others. However, in the literary music profession, like several other disciplines in our universities today, such bodies are impotent or non-existent. We have the body known as Musicological Society of Nigeria (MSN) but despite all its well-articulated objectives at inception in the early 1990's, the society appears not to be ready to stand on its feet yet let alone attempting to walk to realize its aims. Even the annual conferences of the Society appear to be presently bedeviled by some sort of improper focus, Jack of currency and relevance, It bothers one the amount, currency and viability of the intellectual fruits that can be reaped from a scholarly conference whose theme is on the role of music in festivals especially when such a gathering includes heavy weights of such areas as music theory, composition, musicology, music therapy, music pedagogy, music cognition and science among others.

## Staffing, Training and Specialization

This area used to be very neatly taken care of by the governments and the universities but apparently due to the inertia in the overall social fabric of the nation, more general practitioners are being recruited to replace those old foreign-trained experts in the various disciplines in Nigeria's universities. Unfortunately, most of these experts are presently making their exodus out of the ivory towers in obedience to the roll call of retirement. The policy of "no contract for retirees" might be said to be imperative, interesting and beneficial for attracting new breeds but these breeds must be well bred, at least as good as the older colleagues. If this is not the case, they will not be able to meet up with the local, let alone the foreign 'championships' in the world scholarship stage today. As the popular Latin parlance puts it, "*memo dat quod non /iabet*" (*One cannot give what one does not have*). Effective training of music experts in today's scholarship must be taken seriously so that the clarion call for a complete make-over of our music curricula content, focus and implementation strategies can be effectively. It is only well-trained literary musicians who enjoy the much needed exposure of attending international conferences so as to be in tune with the new developments in the field. This training and re-training opportunities is *a. sine qua non* to repositioning our discipline in such a manner that it will be possible to prepare the leaders of tomorrow in our discipline. In the field of music theory such courses that should be injected into the curricula and for which experts must be trained in and hired for a more focused research and pedagogical harvest include the following: Advanced Studies in Music Style, Music History Seminar, Computer Music and Media technology, New Music, Popular Music-theory and analysis, Issues in Music Theory and Analysis, Pro-seminar in Musicology, Seminar in Music Analysis, Pro-seminar in Music Theory and Analysis, Graduate Keyboard Seminar, Area Studies in Ethnomusicology, Contemporary Folk and Art Music in Africa, Music Cognition and Perception, and History of Music theory, among others.

### Conclusion

The need to attain this status of repositioning music research calls for urgent steps in the areas mentioned above including adequate funding and implementation of up-to-date policies for a better researched based scholarship in the area of music theory scholarship. The training of the young lecturers in universities abroad should be taken seriously at the present lime; otherwise we will end up producing and recycling local champions who might not even qualify as mere technicians in the field when the chips are down, even at the local league level. When these steps are adequately balanced with the provision of modern equipment and facilities including computers, projectors, electronic teaching and research aids as well as other modern electronic equipment and facilities our journey towards repositioning music research would have been given a solid base. Furthermore, we would be able to tackle headlong the growing syndrome of apathy among our students whose moral value of hard work appears to have been sacrificed on the altar of the "grab-quick by all means" syndrome imported from the general social atmosphere in Nigeria today.

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