

Problems and Prospect of Islamic Da'wah in Nassarawa Eggon Local Government Area, Nasarawa State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Da'wah is a duty for all Muslims. The Glorious Qur'an as the Muslim's most authentic Book (*Kitab*) provides the basic principles of Da'wah methodologies to be applied by the Muslims *Da'i* (preacher) in the Da'wah field. This paper, therefore, attempts to provide the much-lacking information on the problems and prospect of Da'wah in Nassarawa Eggon. It looks into the challenges and problems faced by the Da'wah movement and also examines the reasons for the slow progress of Islamic Da'wah in the area. This is crucial because necessary actions could then be taken or solution is sought to ensure the smooth progress of Da'wah activities in Nassarawa Eggon. It examines the prospect of Islamic Da'wah and the efforts of the Muslim community towards the future and progress of Islamic Da'wah in Nassarawa Eggon in years to come.

Keywords: Islamic Da'wah, Nassarawa Eggon, Problems, Prospects

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Nassarawa Eggon is an integral part of Nasarawa State of Nigeria. Being one of the most populous Local Government Area in the state, Nassarawa Eggon is known to others especially in the realm of economic activities and peaceful co-existence. Yet, the same thing could be said with regard to Islam in Nassarawa Eggon. Very little is known about the history of Islam in the area.

Islam as a religion started to penetrate into the lives of the Eggon people from the beginning of the 20th century. This is a relatively late compared to places like Lafia and Keffi Local Government Areas of Nasarawa State, this is due to number of factors, by virtue of their geographical location, historical and ethnic relationship with Kanem Bornu Empire and the Sokoto Caliphate respectively, the Eggon people had no direct trade link with the two great empires in the Northern Nigeria that contributed to the spread and development of Islam which could have to attract immigrant Muslim traders and preachers into their midst to introduce the religion of Islam (Focus on Nassarawa Eggon, 1993).

However, the rapid acceptance of Islam when Sir Ahmadu Bello visited Nassarawa Eggon during the reign Alhaji Abdullahi Idde in 1953, a Muslim Aren Eggon (the King of the Eggon people). The visit attracted a lot of Eggon people to embrace Islam (Focus on Nassarawa Eggon, 1993). In the Glorious Qur'an Allah, had spoken the truth when He declared that:

When comes the help of Allah and conquest, and you see that people enter Allah's Religion in Crowds (Qur'an, 110: 1-3).

With this many Hausa traders and scholars became familiar with the area and started to establish their ideals must especially that of Islam. Thus, a Qur'anic school was established in the Palace of the Aren Eggon and this helped in the spread and dissemination of the teachings of Islam amongst Eggon people.

The exact percentage of Muslim community in Nassarawa Eggon is uncertain, for several reasons. To begin with, in Nassarawa Eggon, the government simply does not keep records or statistics on the number of Muslims in the local government. Unlike in many other parts of the world, religion is not considered as an important demographic factor in Nigeria. It is deemed as a matter of individual's choice and freedom.

It against this backdrop of the state of happenings, this paper looked at the phenomenon of Da'wah, its problems and prospects in Nassarawa Eggon and how Islam drew most of its followers and other non-Muslims in understanding the teachings of the religion of Islam. Hence, the Islamic Da'wah has been playing a significant role in promoting peaceful co-existence in Nassarawa Eggon and Nasarawa State in general.

2.0 DEFINITION OF DA'WAH

According to Abu Ammar (2016), da'wah, an Arabic term, means to invite. Essentially, da'wah has two dimensions: external and internal. External Da'wah is to invite non-Muslims to Islam and teach them about Islamic beliefs and practices. Internal da'wah is to teach Muslims about aspects of Islam.

Da'wah is a *fard kifiya* (an obligation that rests upon the community, not the individual), if there are individuals within a community inviting people to da'wah, then others within the community are relieved of the obligation. If no-one in the community issues the invitation, the sin falls on every individual within that community (Ammar, 2016). A person who performs da'wah is known as a *da'is* (persons carrying out da'wah duty). Although their effectiveness will vary according to their ability, all *da'is* (those carrying out da'wah) should be, at the very least, familiar with the basic teachings of Islam (Ammar, 2016).

The term *da'wah* which is used in Qur'an and *hadith* denotes the number of meaning. However, in the modern period, "*da'wah*" often refers to Islamic missionary activities, which are increasingly characterized by long-range planning. Competent utilization of the media, the establishment of study centers and mosques, earnest urgent preaching etc. (The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World, 1995a). Equally, in religious sense "*da'wah*" refers to an invitation addressed to men by God (Allah) and His Prophets towards the belief in the religion of Islam (The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World, 1995b).

Literally, *da'wah* means to call, appeal, and request people either towards the truth or falsehood, appeal for an aid or a call for help, appeal to God or pray (Jamil Hashim 2002). *Da'wah* also meant an invitation to a meal. *Da'wah* is the process of reminding man of his true mission and attempting to bring him back to his origin. Thus, the mission of all the Prophets is made up in this way of reminding their people about their destiny to which they were committed (Khurram Murad 2002). Allah says:

They are those whom Allah had guided. So, follow their Guidance. Say No reward I ask of you for this (the Qur'an). It is Only a Reminder for (mankind and jinn's) (Qur'an, 6:90)

Furthermore, Shaykh Aliyu Mahfuz defines *da'wah* as motivating and directing people to the performance of good deeds in the right path (Mahfuz, 1979). A contemporary scholar in the field, give the following definition of *da'wah*; theoretically, *da'wah* means efforts to people to believe in Allah and His Prophet (SAW) by obeying and implementing the teachings of Qur'an and *Sunnah*. *Da'wah* covers all aspects of human life personally and collectively. *Da'wah* also means calling people to the fold of Islam. Whenever the term of *da'wah* is attributed to Islam, it means an effort to spread and convey the message of Islam to people. *Da'wah* is also defined as the initiative to motivate people to enjoin the right and forbid them from the wrong so that they may succeed in this world and in the hereafter. It is an effort to protect or save humankind from evil and to admonish them from that which leads to the punishment of Allah (Hashim, 2002)

Again, it was also defined by Al-Bayanuni Muhammad (1995) as conveying Islam to the people and educating them (about its teachings) and implementing its rules in the state of affairs. Adam Abdullah Al-Ilori (1979) viewed it as drawing people's attention and rationality toward an ideology or belief which is of benefit and advantage to them. It is also rescuing people from going astray or from tribulations which beset them (Al-Ilori, 1979).

In the same vein, Munir Hijab (2004) succinctly stated that the formal meaning of *da'wah* could be identified in two ways: first (teaching the) religion or Islam, its basic elements, facts and values and its legislation. It is, in reality, a complete social system which comprises all facets of human activity and all laws regulating this activity including those that involve the rights of the Lord over his servant. The second identification involves spreading, conveying and inducing or communicating and informing the religion (Munir Hijab, 2004). In a conference organized by Muslim World League *da'wah* is defined as:

Sermonizing about Islam and communicating the message of Islam to the Non-Muslims. This is a rather limited view of the meaning of Da'wah. The essence of Da'wah begins in the Midst of the Muslim Ummah itself. It is the search for practical means of organizing and directing all aspect of individual and communal life according to the principles of Islam (Da'wah and the Development of Muslim World, 1987:1)

Contextualizing the meaning of *da'wah*, Sayyid Qutb (2002) in his translated work, submitted that, the task of enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong is not an easy one, especially when we consider that it inevitably conflicts with people's desires, interests, and pride. There are in this world of our tyrants who impose their authority by force, people who are interested only in carnal desires and who do not wish to be elevated to a nobler standard. There are also the lazy who hate to be asked to be serious, the unfair who hate justice, the deviant who do not for a moment contemplate a

straightforward attitude, as well as those who think wrong of every right thing and consider every wrong thing to be right. No nation, let alone humanity as a whole, can prosper unless goodness prevails, right is upheld and wrong is thrown out (Qutb, 2002).

The principle of Da'wah should not be carried out with oppression since Islam emphasize that, there should be no force in the matter of belief or religion. It should be carried in an appropriate manner considering the time, place and people to who is introduced either through speech, writing or any other suitable means. There are three ways, which according to *Ahlul Tafsir* described effective Da'wah namely; *Hikmah* (through wisdom), *mau'izatul hassana* (good advice) and proper dialog or debate (Murad, 2002). This is based on Allah's saying:

Invite to the Way of Your Lord with wisdom and fair preaching, and argue with them in a Way that is better. Truly Your Lord knows best who has gone astray from His path, and He Is Best Aware of those who are guided. (Qur'an 16:125).

3.0 DA'WAH IN NASSARAWA EGGON LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA

In doing da'wah in Nassarawa Eggon, the role of the Muslim organization or the Muslim Preachers are indispensable, coming from places like Lafia, Akwanga, Nasarawa, and Keffi. The organizations or Muslim scholars gave Islamic lectures and called the Eggon people and other tribes towards Islam. Their intention is clear, that is to propagate Islam and its teachings to the people.

In Nassarawa Eggon da'wah by Muslim scholars started in 1958, according to Usman Aboh Angolo who revealed that Muslim scholars come from Lafia and Keffi most especially on Fridays and immediately after Jumu'ah prayers they moved into some villages and began their da'wah activities till Sunday evening which they will return to their various destinations (In-Depth Interview with Angbolo, 2016).

The researcher also observed that the activities of the *Jama'atu Izalatil Bid'ah Wa'iqamatis Sunnah* (JIBWIS) group have contributed in the da'wah activities in Nassarawa Eggon through their weekly preaching in villages in the area (JIBWIS, 2013). This is because its da'wah cut across all the villages and areas within the Nassarawa Eggon. This Islamic organization does organize lectures to sensitize people to the real teachings of Islam.

The *Jama'atu Nasrul Islam* (JNI) and JIBWIS in conjunction with the Muslim Students' Society of Nigeria (MSSN) in Nassarawa Eggon were able to be organizing da'wah programs for secondary school students. This they do through their programs in secondary schools within the Area Office of Education. During the in-depth interview (IDI) with Islamic religious teacher Ishaq Muhammad Idde (2016), he recounted that the programs are aimed at educating the students on the various teachings of Islam, most especially the issue of morality.

Similarly, it has been observed that there are other Muslim groups who involved in da'wah activities in Nassarawa Eggon like the Muslim Sisters of the Medical and Health Workers in Nassarawa Eggon. This group have successfully been organizing da'wah lectures for women during the weekend and normally pay a visit to hospitals and the less privilege. They do involve children in Qur'anic Recitation competition in order to keep the children busy and up to date about their religion (IDI with Maimunat Danladi 2016).

4.0 PROBLEMS OF DA'WAH IN NASSARAWA EGGON

In explaining the reason for small Muslims population in Nassarawa Eggon Local Government of Nasarawa State, some people tend to point to the slow progress of Islamic Da'wah in the villages that surrounded Nassarawa Eggon town.

4.1 Ideological and Methodological Difference

It has been attributed that disunity within Islamic organizations is the single most threatening problem Islam faces in Nigeria in general and Nassarawa Eggon LGA. There exist many Islamic organizations mostly propagating incompatible ideologies and working at cross-purposes between Sunni and Sufi schools of thoughts. These internal wrangling had deviated the attention of the Islamic organizations from preaching the teachings of Islam to non-Muslim particularly in the rural areas. Non-Muslims are left in doubt on where they would belong if they are converted to Islam, these have tremendously affected the spread and development of Islam in the areas surveyed.

Additionally, the coming up of several Islamic organizations with contradictory ideologies on the fundamental objectives of Islam, time of prayers, the process of digging graves and the supplication for the dead person in the cemetery. Celebrating the birthday of Prophet Muhammad (SAW), naming ceremony congregation, insulting and cursing most of the Prophet Muhammad's companions and wives by Islamic sect, has dwarfed the development of Islam because the Islamic scholars and followers expend great deal of time debating and arguing instead of taking the religion to the rural areas that Islam has not reached. These methodologically (*Minhaj*) divide between those who believe teachings and practices should be strictly on Qur'an and Hadiths based on the understanding of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), his companions and those who followed them, on one hand, those who counter such methodology has created an irreconcilable methodological and ideological rift, which has been the detrimental to *da'wah* in the area studied.

4.2 Ignorance

In looking at the problems facing Islamic *da'wah* in Nassarawa Eggon some factors are worthy of discussion. To begin with, even with the progress of Islam among the people of Nassarawa Eggon, a large proportion of the people of Nassarawa Eggon are ignorant of the true teachings of Islam as practiced by the Noble Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W). In villages unlike the township, they know very little about Islam and whatever they know of are either sketchy or misleading (IDI with Nasir Al-Qasim 2016). And even the non-Muslims are ignorant of the religion of Islam which leads them to develop hatred against Muslims and Islam. All these were as a result of their misunderstanding of Islam, lack of interest in getting to know about Islam, ineffective programs conducted by Muslim groups to acquaint the Non- Muslims with Islamic teachings and lack of enough Muslim *Da'wah* persons who are fluent in the Eggon language.

The lack of concentration of *da'wah* in urban and rural areas has left a significant population of Muslims with ignorance, there is a discrepancy between what Muslims ought to be and what Islam is. Due to ignorance, most of the Muslims in Nassarawa Eggon failed to know the ideological line that divides Islam from Christianity and other traditional religions thereby created the perception among the non-Muslims that all religions are the same because Muslims also partake in their activities and celebrate with them during their religious festivals.

Therefore, ignorance among the Muslims created misgiving and misunderstanding, of misperception and misrepresentation, of mistrust and hostility, of images, both false and true, which seems to have become permanently lodged in hearts and minds of the non-Muslims. Most of the impressions and perceptions created by ignorant Muslims are ill-founded, some non-Muslims in Nassarawa Eggon Local Government Area deliberately believed and planted hatred and disdain against Islam and Muslims in order to prevent others from embracing it. Some may be as a result of ignorance and follies of those who want to convert to Islam such as referring to them as converts (*tubbabu*).

In order to address problem of ignorance in Nassarawa Eggon, it has succinctly suggested that *da'wah* must strive ceaselessly against these walls of ignorance, prejudice, and hostility, and either admit defeat or find a way to overcome them through rigorous teaching of basic foundations of Islam

across all communities and villages thereby reducing the magnitude of ignorance and illiteracy of the basic knowledge of Islam.

4.3 Funding

Connected to reducing the magnitude of ignorance and illiteracy in the areas studied, there is exigent need of funds to finance establish schools, train Islamic teachers and pay the salaries of the teachers as well as other logistics to enable Islamic teachers to go to the remote areas and villages.

An Islamic scholar, during an interview, revealed; that lack of funds, enough Islamic books, sound equipment are some of the major problems of *da'wah* in Nassarawa Eggon. He further stated that lack of funds to carry out *da'wah* activities causes a lot of problems in the effort to spread the true Islamic teachings and call the non-Muslims to Islam. Very often, the Muslim communities or organizations in Nassarawa Eggon have to seek for donation and contributions from the government and wealthy individuals outside Nassarawa Eggon to build much-needed facilities such as *Masjids* (Mosque), sound instruments, Islamic schools and travel for outreach preaching and teaching (IDI with Jibril Yahya, 2016). The *Masjid* is particularly crucial in spreading *da'wah* since these institutions served not only as places of worship but also learning centers for those who wish to learn more about Islam. He also observed that despite the contributions and donation from individuals, the accumulated funds always fall short, to the extent that proposed programs and projects have to be stopped or abandoned due to financial constraints.

Therefore, in order to cushion the effects of lack of funding to finance Islamic activities, there is a need for religious organization to engage in corporate business, establish companies that would engage in corporate enterprise that would yield profit thereby become self-reliant and self-sufficient in carrying out *da'wah* without relying donation, charity, and contributions from questionable sources.

4.4 Insecurity

Security challenges also hindered *da'wah* activities and programs in Nassarawa Eggon as the scholars/preachers find it difficult to get into the rural area to extend the message of Islam to the people. An Islamic cleric, Al- Qasim (2016) expounded that, we faced security problem whenever planned *da'wah* program aimed at going to villages because the *Ombatse* (ethnic militia) does not allow us to call people against their beliefs, the *Ombatse* militia during their peak, had overpowered the security agencies and for that no Islamic Scholar would want to risk his life. Couple with the fact that Islam is not strong in the villages hence, the *Ombatse* Cult finds it very easy to penetrate into the lives of the villagers, in spite of the fact, *Ombatse* has not historical roots in the culture of Eggon people and base in Nassarawa Eggon town. In order to address this issue, the Council of Ulama of JNI and JIBWIS took the matter before the State Government which acting on such reports banned the activities of the *Ombatse* entirely.

Similarly, Umar Galle (2016) revealed during In-depth Interview that, the *Ombatse* Cult are found harassing people in the *Masjid* in some of the villages. He said Islamic scholars find it difficult to go to villages to preach as members of the *Ombatse* Cult beat or threaten to kill any Muslim preacher that preach against their activities. He further stressed that the coming of the *Ombatse* Cult in early 2011 has been causing havoc and damage to Islamic *da'wah* and acceptance of Islam among the Eggon people. At the heat of the *Ombatse* crises, they destroyed most of the *Masjids* and other structures in the affected villages. They also caused a setback to the foundation laid by Muslim Scholars, most especially the aspect of *Tauheed* (monotheism), since the teachings of Islam did not penetrate much into their lives.

4.5 Ethnicity

An ethnic group is not a problem but judging people based on their ethnic group is one of the detestable practice that Islam frown at, since the days of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W). Ethnicity has been adjudged as one of a factor which hindered the spread of Islam. During In-Depth Interview, Leader of JNI Nassarawa Eggon, Jibrin Yusuf (2016) narrated that, ethnicity is one of the major impediment to the development of Islamic *Da'wah* in Nassarawa Eggon. People refused to embrace the teachings taught by someone that is not from their ethnic group especially in rural areas where inhabitants understand only the Eggon language. In the early days of Islamic missionaries, preachers faced stiff resistance especially Hausa people that came to preach Islam, because the Eggon people viewed Hausa as an alien language and Hausa people are in the villages to spread the dominance of the Hausa hegemony on the minority ethnic groups in Northern Nigeria. It was also observed that lack of enough Islamic scholars from Eggon ethnic nationality who can conduct the contemporary *da'wah* programs in the area and regular training and re-training of scholars to update their knowledge as far as *da'wah* is a concern in Eggon language has greatly contributed to the low rate of people embracing Islam. Effort should be geared towards sending the children from Eggon ethnic nationality to study Islamic religion to come and spread Islam among their folks. Scholarship and funding are needed to sponsor young and devoted Muslims from villages to be trained as teachers and preachers.

4.6 Manpower

Since the inception of Nassarawa Eggon town in 1953, there has been a shortage of well-educated Islamic teachers and preachers. This has hampered the spread of Islam because the converts have no enough places to learn Islamic education and those who have little knowledge have no scholars to advance their knowledge. It was only in 2002 that, an Eggon person emerged the Chief Imams of one of the four Juma'at Masjids in Nassarawa Eggon town, as, at 2017, three of the four Imams of the Juma'at Masjids are not Eggon people. There is need of fund for a foundation that will be sponsoring children and youths who have a passion for Islamic education in order cushion the effects of the shortage of manpower to teach and preach.

5.0 PROSPECTS OF *DA'WAH* IN NASSARAWA EGGON

Regarding the future of Islam in Nassarawa Eggon Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, the prospect of *da'wah* as a whole is promising and portends a bright future due to the current efforts and activities by some Muslims organizations. Though there some problems related to the *Da'wah* activities such as the fear of being isolated as encountered by new converts to Islam still remain, some would subside and the situation improves with time especially as the Muslims and non-Muslims continue to understand the true teachings of Islam. Most of the villagers are doing away with the *Ombatse* cult and embrace Islam as a result of the influx of Islamic preachers to hitherto restricted areas.

Despite the low proportion of Muslims that acquired Islamic education and those who understands the teachings of Islam among the non-Muslims in Nassarawa Eggon, it is encouraging to see that Islam is steadily growing and gaining ground among the Eggon people, more interesting is, most of the converts are youths which showed that they would convince their friends and relatives to embrace Islam. A statistic by the *Jama'atu Izalatil Bid'ah Wa'iqamatis Sunnah* (JIBWIS), showed that over 70 percent of the total Muslim population belongs to the 25 – 35 and 36 – 45 age groups (JIBWIS, 2013). With the steady increase in the number of Muslims in Nassarawa Eggon and the existing trend which shows younger person's converting to Islam, contacts between Muslims and non-Muslims either at workshops and seminar or other public places will increase substantially, and this would help the non-Muslims population in the villages to have a better understanding of Islam.

The researcher observed the growing Muslims' population in the area, the number of *Masajid*, Islamic Schools, and Muslim Organizations, which would enhance the *da'wah* process further, are expected to increase. *Masjid* is found in almost all the villages in Nassarawa Eggon Local Government Area with the exception of Kagbu, Arikpa, Aguji, Lizzi Keffi, Alushi and Ubbe/ Ogba villages out of the 34 villages under Nassarawa Eggon. One of the progress that Islamic *Da'wah* is gaining in Nassarawa Eggon is that Islamic Scholars are now preaching and calling people to Islam in the Eggon dialect. An Islamic preacher during In-depth Interview, Marafa (2016) opined that, contrary to the opposition to early Islamic preachers that were not from Eggon ethnicity faced in their quest to spread Islam, now there are a lot of indigenous scholars which are well-versed in both Islamic and Western education, entering the nooks and crannies of Eggonland preaching the words of Allah in Eggon language without fear of tribalism and attack. People are embracing Islam after understanding the explanations in Eggon dialect.

However, an Islamic preacher in Nassarawa Eggon during in-depth interview (IDI) Al- Qasim (2016) observed that, there is some progress and stated that, unlike in some other areas where the number of Muslim converts reached few hundreds per year and is growing, the recorded number of Muslim converts among the people of Nassarawa Eggon is low, most likely about 40 – 50 a year.

Therefore, another area in which Islamic *da'wah* show a lot of prospects is in the establishment of Islamic Schools that run both Islamic and Western educational programs in Nassarawa Eggon today. Muhammad Maigari (2016) submitted that these schools were built in order to bring up the young ones who would assist in doing *da'wah* in the future. He mentioned of the Islamic schools, for example, the *Al-Iman* School, *Alogani* established by a Syrian Nurudeen Al- Rawi in 2007. Also, the (JIBWIS) built and run school in Nassarawa Eggon, *Ummul Qura* schools and Sheikh Abubakar Mahmud Gummi School both of which enrolls students into Nursery, Primary and Secondary sections. It was also observed that the (JIBWIS) owned and run *Assasul Islam* (basic Islam) nursery and primary school. There are other Islamic schools that also run Western educational programs like *Hayatul Islam*, *Al-Ikhlās*, and *Al- Bayan* Schools.

6.0 CONCLUSION

Neither accurate statistics of the Muslims has been recorded nor is the clear history of the first coming of Islam and carrying out Islamic *Da'wah* in Nassarawa Eggon available. There are rather various oral accounts and views in respect to Islamic *Da'wah* and number of Muslims in Nassarawa Eggon. In brief, substantial impact of Islam into these areas was not promising until recent times that the Muslim population undoubtedly are on the rise; almost on daily basis.

Regardless of these facts, Islam is rapidly growing in Nassarawa Eggon and its surroundings, now there are Nineteen Juma'at Masjids from the previous two in the 1990s. Though some challenges and problems in carrying out Islamic *Da'wah* are expected to continue or persist, in due course Islam hopefully, would find a better place in Nassarawa Eggon and become the leading religion from all indication if the current tempo is maintained. With the recent developments in Nassarawa Eggon, i.e. the increasing number of Muslim converts, especially young people and the growing number of Muslim organizations and Islamic institutions such as masjids and schools, etc. the future of Islam in Nassarawa Eggon is certainly looking bright.

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- Mal. Jibril Yahya, (40 years), Islamic Scholar, Nassarawa Eggon, interviewed on 29/02/2016.
- Maymunat Danladi Asse, (30 years), Civil Servant, Nassarawa Eggon, interviewed on 28/02/2016.
- Muhammad Abdullahi Maigari, (32 years), Student, Nassarawa Eggon, interviewed on 18/04/2016.
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- Usman Aboh Angbolo, 78 years, Tafidan Eggon, Nassarawa Eggon, Interviewed on 18/02/2016.
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