

# BOKO HARAM INSURGENCY IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA: ABUJA METROPOLIS SITUATION

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## ABSTRACT

The Paper considers Boko Haram insurgency in Abuja metropolis of Nigeria. Abuja was always seen as a safe place in view of the distance to the North East of Nigeria where its operation started. However, when Boko Haram struck its first shot on Abuja metropolis, it became clear that it was no longer safe for the inhabitants. Therefore, this paper explores the various attacks meted out to Abuja metropolis. Merton's theory of Anomie is applied in this discussion. The paper identifies the various places in the metropolis that has suffered from Boko Haram insurgency in recent times. The paper concludes that disappointedly; Abuja metropolis has become vulnerable to Boko Haram attacks. It is recommended that robust intelligence gathering and multi-agency collaboration is required to counter Boko Haram insurgency in Abuja metropolis and beyond.

**KEYWORDS:** Boko-Haram, Terrorism, Insurgency, Injustice.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout human history, there have been numerous conflicts, most of which have been caused by competition over scarce resources. In many global crises, communities, and modes of life have been devastated and displaced by armed warfare. Armed, state-based conflicts can either be categorized as intrastate or interstate conflicts. The former refers to a conflict between sovereign states, whereas the latter refers to violent revolt by non-state actors who question the legitimacy of the ruling authorities within a sovereign state.

Be it intrastate or interstate conflicts as classified by Petterson and Eck (2018), conflict "seems to be a feature of African societies," (Chabal, 2005, p. 1). The continent of Africa has been engaged in numerous violent conflicts that have severely depleted its natural and human resources (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012). However, how do we make sense of the violence in Africa? First, Fanon (1963, p. 40) described how colonial brutality encouraged the aggressive behavior of the colonized. He stated that colonized people "display the hostility which has been instilled in their bones against their own people." Secondly, he demonstrated how the colonized person was in "a permanent state of tension" due to their interaction with the "colonial order of things. The anti-colonial and anti-Western rhetoric of extreme Islamist organizations like Boko Haram in northern Nigeria demonstrates this pattern. Thirdly, Fanon confirmed that the colonized native was 'an oppressed person whose permanent dream is to become the prosecutor.'

The logic of violence in Africa, according to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2012), is also rooted in "coloniality" and the reproduction of African subjectivities, where race is used not only to dehumanize black people in what Fanon called the nation of the damned in his book (Wretched of the Earth) but also to rob them of their very humanity in order to justify using violence against them. Ndlovu-Gatsheni argues that this form of colonial violence and authoritarianism was reproduced by African nationalism, which bequeathed it to postcolonial Africa as a mode of governance (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012, p. 421). "The violence [is] justified in the name of national identity, security, and postcolonial development perceived as required to secure a postcolonial modernity," according to the postcolonial African setting.

The entrenchment of particularistic new forms of identity and consciousness, frequently based on religion and ethnicity, was another failure of the colonial age that African leaders voluntarily reproduced (Hutchful & Aning, 2004). In Nigeria, where the state frequently uses force to settle internal issues and where frustrated politicians and other evil actors skillfully exploit religious or ethnic identity to spark wars, both the logic of violence and particularistic forms of identification are on display (Agbiboa & Maiangwa, 2013). This is more evident in

northern Nigeria, a region that has been in the throes of escalating Boko Haram terrorism and state counter-terrorism. The so-called "Nigerian Taliban" from north-eastern Nigeria, Boko Haram, has escalated its attacks on the Nigerian government and its people since July 2009. It has launched a systematic campaign of bombings, kidnappings, and drive-by shootings on various government and civilian targets (Susan, Joy, & Ikechukwu, 2020). The attacks by Boko Haram are mostly on Christians and non-Muslims, whom they refer to as infidels in a bid to either conquer or convert them, which strengthens the assertion of Ekot (2009, p. 54) that "Muslims had never given up their quest for Nigeria to be an Islamic state".

Current information from the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) (2022) reported that Boko Haram attacks had killed more persons than any other terrorist organization and recorded only fewer attacks by the Khorasan Chapter of the Islamic State. Similarly, it was reported that Chadian Foreign Minister, Moussa Faki Mahamat, commented: 'The Nigerian Army has not succeeded in facing Boko Haram. My fondest wish is that they assume their responsibilities ... our biggest wish is that the Nigerian Army pulls itself together – that it takes responsibility in the towns' (Baiyewu, 2015). According to a report from Human Rights Watch (2014), Boko Haram activities have extensively spread from their origin in Northeast Nigeria and advancing menacingly into the nation's seat of power, Abuja. This paper, therefore, focuses on the impact of the Boko-Haram insurgency in the Abuja metropolis.

## 2. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

### **Boko-Haram**

The Boko Haram sect was established in the early 2000s. Muhammad Ali and later Muhammad Yusuf led the organization at its inception. Compared to what it metamorphosed in earlier 2009, the Boko Haram activities were relatively peaceful in their early stages (Alkali, 2015). However, the group intensified its influence after the 2009 extra-judicial killing of the Boko Haram leader Muhammed Yusuf (The Guardian, 2009), and its activities have become more aggressive since 2009. The group was first proclaimed Foreign Terrorist Organization by the US government based on its terrorist activities (Yunus, 2014). At first, the insurgent group focused on opposing Western education against which all its teachings were channeled. Its interest later became political, which was to create an Islamic state and establish Sharia law in Nigeria. To achieve its goals, the Sect clashed several times with the Nigerian Police in 2009. Since July 2009, when Boko Haram engaged Nigerian security forces, the group has become a serious national, regional, and international concern (Onuoha, 2014). In trying to draw the attention of the international communities, the group intensified its activity in August 2011 and bombed the United Nations building in Abuja that killed at least 23 (Onuoha, 2014). It has sustained its terrorism in Nigeria and even increased its violent attacks and activities in the North-eastern States of Nigeria in 2014.

### **Terrorism and Insurgency**

Insurgencies directly oppose the state's authority (Joes, 2006) and challenge the regime (Lomperis, 1996) through politico-military actions intended to weaken the control of a constituted government through a protracted organized war (O'Neill, 2001). Between different types of political violence, Kydd & Walter (2006) maintained that terrorism is a costly form of utilizing intimidation, incitement, attrition, outbidding, and spoiling to destabilize a system. Nevertheless, this conceptual clarification is based on an expansive definition of terrorism that only reflects the basic tenets of action targeting civilians, religious organizations, and state agencies. Boko Haram purpose or motivation was not aimed at capturing State power initially, but rather to Islamize Nigeria though subsequently, they drive to control the State apparatus of authority, obviously turning them into an insurgency group deploying terrorism.

This difference is essential, considering the connotations behind these terms. Terrorism is considered to be a derogatory term (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2014). Revolutionary warfare and insurgency, by contrast, carry a superior measure of legitimacy due to their association with liberty and freedom fighting. As a result, they are frequently used as counter-arguments for terrorism in political disputes between conflicting parties. The bottom line for definitional disputes about these terms is the degree of legitimacy or lack thereof and the end goal of the origin of a violent uprising, which is highly subjective and ideological due to the self-proclamation of righteousness. As a result, definitions, especially for terrorism, are inherently debatable and may not be definitive due to the subjectivity of the political goal and the intents behind using violence to further a cause (Barber, 2007; Gibbs, 1989). However, terrorism could be considered a process of pursuing a political goal (Findley & Young, 2012), while insurgency is a political movement aimed at realizing a specific political goal (Terrorism Research, resource document, n.d.); (Alexander, Brenner, and Krause, 2008), which is generally to overthrow a regime. Whether terrorism is a separate phenomenon or part of a broader insurgency strategy in the context of a civil war is a matter of debate.

### Rationale Behind Boko Haram Attacks

Many analysts have interrogated the reasons behind Boko Haram terrorism (Onuoha, 2012; Mustapha, 2012; Kukah, 2012; Zenn et al., 2013). Several explanations have been put forth, including:

1. a sense of alienation between the northern region of Nigeria and the more developed Christian south of the country,
2. widespread government corruption,
3. ineffective and brutal state security services, and
4. the idea that relations with the West have a corrupting effect.

In the south and among Christians, there is a belief that Boko Haram is the product of disgruntled northern Muslim politicians who want to make life difficult for a southern Christian president (Agbibo, 2013). According to a popular conspiracy theory in the north and among Muslims, Boko Haram is not an act of Islamists but rather the work of anti-Muslims who wish to discredit the faith. In the north, there is also the conspiracy theory that the former President of Nigeria, President Goodluck Jonathan's administration, funded Boko Haram activities to either discredit Islam or reduce the northern population before the 2015 elections (Adibe, 2014).

The assertion that Americans created Boko Haram is sandwiched between these conspiracy theories with local origins since two studies from US institutes have forecasted that Nigeria will collapse by 2015 and 2030, respectively (Mustapha, 2012). Not infrequently, leaders in Nigeria abuse these conspiratorial theories 'to locate the blame for violence elsewhere, away from poor records of governance, state capacity, and representation' (Dowd & Raleigh, 2013, p. 498). The extent of relative poverty, unemployment, and inequality in the north is a recurring theme in Boko Haram literature, which has led some analysts to argue that underdevelopment is the primary precipitator of extremist groups like Boko Haram and the main reason for their rebellion. Kwaja (2011) claims that injustice and disenfranchisement are the real causes of violence, despite the reality that "religious components of the conflict have been misinterpreted as the fundamental driver of violence". Kwaja's assertions seem to fit into the context of the conflicts in Nigeria going by the postulations of Ekot (2009, p. 51) that "religious extremists have always threatened the secularity of Nigeria and religion does appear to polarize the north and south".

Boko Haram is the symptom of Nigeria's failed attempts at nation-building and democratic politics, according to Mustapha (2012). It is the mistaken cries of a frustrated youth who has been both oppressed by the government and crushed by the socio-economic system. Kukah (2012) noted a subtle shift away from the poverty-conflict nexus to the bad governance-conflict nexus with the north. According to Kukah, social anomalies are thought to have their origins in modernity, so people utilize religion to organize against it. In Kukah's words, "the (Boko Haram) sect members could only attribute the continuation of corruption, the collapse of public morality, injustice and so on to those who govern". He logically maintained that people in charge of us (yan boko) do so since they (boko) obtained their tools through receiving Western education (Kukah, 2012, p. 3). Sustaining the view of Kukah, Clapham (2004, p. 200) made a more general argument that "the breakdown of law and order in African states was largely the outcome of the legacy of weak governance".

Others, like Evans (1994), contend that governments that are at or near the point of collapse and being challenged, frequently violently, by their inhabitants are the result of a downward spiral of economic deterioration that is frequently aggravated by official corruption and mismanagement. The process of national disintegration has accelerated due to economic deterioration and vice versa. Azcarat ("n.d") asserts that conflict is caused and escalated to a considerable degree to unfulfilled needs – not only material needs but also such psychological needs as security, identity, self-esteem, recognition, autonomy, and a sense of justice. Parties in conflict, in pursuit of their security and identity and related needs and interests, undermine and threaten the security and identity of the other. The "relative deprivation" theory connects economic inequality with people's inclination to engage in violent political action, and the "human need theory" has a similar understanding of what motivates people. According to Gurr (1970, p. 27), "misery fosters revolution."

The connection between relative deprivation and the start of conflict has, however, come under fire as being simplistic since it fails to explain why some impoverished individuals or areas do not engage in violence and because it makes few specific recommendations for policymakers (Agbibo, 2013). People can benefit even in relative deprivation (Leach et al., 2007). In contrast, people can be relatively disadvantaged without feeling deprived by their disparity (Jost & Banaji, 1994). This may explain why relative impoverishment is identified as a possible risk factor for radicalization in social psychological studies (King & Taylor, 2011). Krieger and Meierriek's study concluded that "there is only minimal evidence to support the notion that economic hardship drives terrorism. Low economic conditions matter less to terrorism once it is adjusted for institutional and political

factors." They contend instead that "terrorism is directly linked to political instability, extreme polarization within the public, country size, and further demographic, institutional, and international issues" (Krieger & Meierriek, 2011, p. 3).

Similarly, Piazza (2006, p. 171) uses a series of multiple regression analyses on terrorism incidents and casualties in 96 countries from 1986 to 2002 to make the case that the "rooted-in-poverty" thesis is false and that factors like population, ethnoreligious diversity, increased state repression, and most significantly, the structure of party politics are [more] significant predictors of terrorism. The understanding here is that the socio-economic aspect cannot simply be wished away in the quest for comprehension. To investigate the variables influencing youth radicalization and recruitment into Boko Haram, the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) funded a study titled "Why Youths Join Boko Haram?" According to the findings, widespread unemployment and poverty are major risk factors for radicalization among northern youth (Onuoha, 2014).

According to a survey report by Onuoha, youth involvement in violence motivated by religion is most often caused by poverty and high unemployment rates in several northern states, with ignorance of anti-violence religious teaching ranking top; eighty-three percent of respondents in Kaduna state cited unemployment and poverty as significant issues; in Kano, 92% said poverty was crucial (Onuoha, 2014, p. 5). Mustapha (2012, p.13) asserted, "Boko Haram... is the misdirected scream of a disillusioned youth crushed by the socio-economic system on the one hand and then repressed by the state on the other." The critical takeaway is that the north's tremendous poverty and relative deprivation are significant variables in developing a young male army and, to a greater extent, a female army ready to fight or be murdered in the service of religious identity.

According to Adejumbi (2005) and Solomon (2013), sharp divisions in social relationships result from dwindling social resources, severe economic crises, a retreat of the welfare state and its effects on reducing social services, and a market ideology of "fend for yourself," in which the identity issue turns into a vital tool of economic and social competition. Within this context, political elites exploit resurgent identities for political and economic gain (Solomon, 2013).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical frame this paper employs is Merton's idea of anomie. According to Merton (1968 cited in Haralambos and Holborn 2004, p. 333), "deviance arose from the culture and organization of society itself. Merton maintains that when people are exposed to cultural ideals that they cannot achieve due to a lack of access to culturally sanctioned methods, they experience strain. The objectives may be monetary gain and material things, and the authorized means may include employment and education. Unfortunately, when denied proper access, some people attempt to reach these objectives using unethical means.

Merton starts with the knowledge that every society has a cultural system that incorporates socially sanctioned objectives and the accepted customs or standardized methods for reaching these objectives. He asserted that citizens are content with institutionalized means and cultural aspirations that are given equal weight in a balanced society. Unfortunately, the members are not allowed to pursue solely achievement in the proper manners due to the established aims and means. While they fight to accomplish these achievements, goals and values, some segments of society are pressured to act non-conforming because the institutional tools are not openly available to all members of the community. For Merton, pressure for socially unacceptable behavior is generated by the numerous persons that make up that system (Haralambos & Holborn, 2004, p. 333). Anomie or a lack of norms develops and leads to criminal behavior when societal ideals and institutionalized ways of accomplishing them are at odds. As it is, not all persons are abnormal; Merton as cited in Haralambos and Holborn (2004, p. 347), listed five possible responses to structural stress.

- **Conformity:** Regardless of success or failure, the individual accepts the culturally established goals and adheres to the institutionalized ways of obtaining them.
- **Innovation:** This is perhaps the most typical way that people embrace illegal methods of accomplishment in order to accomplish their customarily held objectives in response to structural stress.
- **Ritualists:** This group consists of those who follow the rules (means) but are not dedicated to the objectives. For instance, lower-level bureaucrats like teachers and public servants fall under this category. Because they have disregarded the achievement objectives shared by the majority of society's members, ritualists are aberrant.
- **Retreatists:** This category of persons has strongly internalized the cultural goals and the institutionalized means of achieving them, yet they can't achieve societally defined success. Therefore, they reject both the

institutionalized means and the cultural objectives. This includes psychotics, autistics, habitual drinkers, pariahs, outcasts, wanderers, tramps, and drug users.

- **Rebellion:** These individuals reject the societal objectives and methods in favor of brand-new norms and values that replace the old ones. People that fit this description include, for instance, religious extremists and political revolutionaries. People in the rebellion group could possibly include terrorists. The terrorist group Boko Haram is one example of the rebellion group in Nigeria. The Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria might be explained using this theory.

Terrorists like Boko Haram disregarded societal objectives and they removed the ways of obtaining them in favor of their extreme beliefs. They insisted on imposing Islamic law on everyone and refused to accept democratic or Western education. However, critics criticized Merton's approach for ignoring the power structures in society, which are responsible for deviance and conformity. Merton was attacked by Taylor (1971), who was referenced by Haralambos and Holborn (2004, p. 334), for not taking his analysis far enough and for neglecting to consider who develops the laws and who benefits from them. Merton was also attacked for supposing that human society has a shared set of values and that deviations occur as a result of structural stress.

### **Abuja Metropolis Boko Haram Incidents**

The federal capital of Nigeria, Abuja, has long been considered the safest location in the country. The reasons for this are not implausible (Okpan, Ezeah & Njoku, 2022) as it is the headquarters of a whole Brigade, an elite, hand-picked, and well-trained corps of troops with the sole duty of guarding the seat of power and authority. Abuja is, therefore, undoubtedly considered to be the safest location in Nigeria. However, Boko Haram attacks have deepened the religious and regional fault lines, reversing the city's gains of peace and communal unity within Federal Capital Territory and its environs threatening the stability of Abuja and threatening Southerners and Christians to relocate from the north (Langman, 2011).

Some of the incidents of Boko Haram's infamous attacks carried out in the federal capital territory could be identified. However, these certainly do not include individual incidents of kidnapping and attacks by Boko Haram.

#### **1. United Nations Building Bombing**

In the early hours of Friday, 26 August 2011, in Abuja, a car bomb-laden with explosives and driven by a 27-year-old suicide bomber Mohammed Abul Barra (Onuoha & George, 2016, p.211), drove through two barriers guarding the United Nations (UN) building and exploded. The explosive severely damaged the first two stories and the ground-level reception area while blowing out windows throughout the building. The explosion left 25 individuals dead, including 22 Nigerians, 1 Norwegian, and 1 Kenyan, and more than 100 injured (Oloja, Obinor, Anuforo, 2011). Boko Haram claimed responsibility for the bombing of the UN building through two videos that later emerged showing members of Boko Haram preparing for a suicide attack, including Mohammed Abul Barra. In the video, a voice said to be Shekau's was heard describing the U.N. headquarters as a "forum of all the global evil" (Karmon, 2014, p. 76), confirming his authorization for the U.N. building bombing. The U.N. building bombing "recorded massive deaths and wounding scores launched Boko Haram into world news (Bekoe, 2011, cited in Ekereke, 2013, p.

#### **2). Nyanya Bomb Blast**

The busy bus station in Nyanya was also attacked on April 14, 2014. Boko Haram detonated a car bomb containing an estimated 500-800 pounds of explosives, blew up at the Nyanya District bus station on the outskirts of Abuja (Jenkins & Butterworth, 2014); four large buses filled with passengers, and many other smaller busses were destroyed by the bomb, leaving 75 people dead and over 141 seriously wounded. According to Onuoha (2014), more than 40 vehicles were destroyed in the Nyanya attack, which was said to be carried out by Boko Haram agent Kabiru Sokoto.

#### **3). St. Theresa Church Massacre**

It is very characteristic of the Boko Haram terrorist groups to target innocent people on a significant religious celebration. In Abuja, a worship center was bombed on Christmas day, December 25, 2011. The Boko Haram terrorist group, under the leadership of one of their commanders Abubakar Dikko (A.K.A. Kabiru Sokoto) bombed the St. Theresa Catholic Church, Madalla in Suleja, a satellite town of the Federal Capital Territory (Chinwokwu, 2014). The attack was confirmed to have been authorized and master-minded by the Boko Haram sect. The attack caused the death of "not less than 50 people (Ekot, 2012), while over ninety others sustained severe injuries (Osuala & Omonayin, 2020; Vanguard, 2011).

#### **4). ThisDay Newspaper office attack**

The Abuja office of This Day Newspaper was bombed on April 16, 2012, resulting in the death of the suicide bomber and two other people and the destruction of 10 vehicles (Onuoha & George, 2016, p.211). It was believed that the bombing of the premises of the national daily was to cow them into a favorable reportage of BOKO Haram activities, as claimed by the group's spokesman Abu Qaqa (Ebim, 2017). The sect claims that the newspaper has been reporting 'lies' about them and condemned an article dishonoring the Prophet, which they published in 2002 as reasons for the attack (Reinert & Garçon, 2014).

#### **5). Pre-election Day Rally Bombing**

On the 3rd of March 2011, a bomb exploded "during a People's Democratic Party (PDP) rally in Suleija. As a result, more than 13 persons were killed and many more injured (Sampson & Onuoha, 2011, p. 44). Most of the victims of this attack were young university graduates who were on National Youth Service assignment as returning officers for the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) for that year's general election.

#### **6). Police Headquarters attack**

Boko Haram also struck on June 16, 2011, when a thirty-five years old Mohammed Manga drove a car bomb into the Louis Edet House – Nigeria Police Force headquarters in Abuja, exploding a suicide bomb (Onuoha & George, 2016). It was in an attempt to kill the Inspector General of Police – IGP Hafiz Ringim, whose convoy he was following. However, he was stopped by security forces before he could detonate the bomb. Nevertheless, the suicide bomb exploded, killing seven people, burning thirty-three cars, and damaging forty vehicles. The bombing of the police headquarters is considered "the height of impunity by the Boko Haram insurgents"(Ebim, 2019, p. 39).

#### **7). Kuje Correctional Facility Attack**

On July 5, 2022, armed members of the Boko Haram faction 'Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP)' attacked the Kuje Correctional Facility, which is about 40 Kilometers away from Aso Rock, the seat of government. "About nine hundred inmates escaped, including more than sixty suspected members of Boko Haram" (Ogele, 2022, pp. 51-52).

#### **8). The Presidential Brigade of Guard's Ambush**

As if the Kuje prison attack was not daring enough, on the 25th of July 2022, unidentified assailants suspected to be members of Boko Haram "killed six presidential guard brigade officers in "an elite force of the army responsible for protecting the president and the federal area, in Bwari (Ogele, 2022, p. 52)", where Veritas university and a campus of the Nigeria Law School are located.

### **3. IMPLICATION OF BOKO HARAM ATTACKS ON THE METROPOLIS**

Boko Haram is thought to have recently developed a presence close to Abuja, the nation's capital, as they seemed to have taken a foothold for the first time in Abuja (Bukarti, 2022). When Boko Haram first emerged in 2014 and 2015, neither the North-Central nor the North-West had a resident cell; instead, bombers from the North-East were dispatched to explode bombs in Abuja, Kano, and other locations. However, all three Boko Haram factions currently have cells in Niger, Nasarawa, and Zamfara states close to Abuja, and this is concerning given that they are becoming deadlier in their operation.

At its inception, the Boko Haram sect was perceived as a religious group without tendencies to disrupt the peace and security of the nation. However, over time, the sect has metamorphosed into a core terrorist organization at the instance of the death of its leader. While the group was raving unmitigated havoc across the North-East of Nigeria, they attacked churches, State security agencies, schools, communities, and any form of human gathering causing loss of lives and properties with millions internally displaced. It was unimaginable that the sect would advance to the Federal Capital of Nigeria, Abuja, with the headquarters of all military and security agencies. Currently, evidence abounds to suggest that Abuja is not safe. For instance, from the suicide bombing at the United Nations building to the recent attack on Kuje correctional facility and other related attacks on Churches and public places, the Boko Haram sect and its splinter factions have laid a siege on Abuja. The Boko Haram sect has either cautiously or inadvertently terrorized and still terrorizing Abuja, the Federal capital territory, with citizens full of apprehension not knowing where next could be attacked by the sect.

### **4. CONCLUSION**

Given these facts, the conclusion on the need to rescue Abuja, the federal capital territory of Nigeria, must be considered as a matter of utmost national importance and treated as such. Therefore, it is pertinent for all Nigerian security agencies to synergize in information sharing and deployment of well-trained personnel to protect Abuja.

Again, security has gone beyond merely setting up roadblocks and parading streets; there is nothing wrong with these strategies. However, deploying modern security technology will tremendously improve and prevent the advancing Boko haram sect from Abuja.

In the long run, sustainable security in Abuja and Nigeria at large will be addressed more effectively if the government, in partnership with private agencies, could create medium and small-scale industries that will employ the teaming unemployed youths who find joining Boko Haram terrorist group as means of livelihood the group will be depleted and over time eradicated.

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