



Citizen Diplomacy and Nigeria's International Image: The Social Constructivist Explanation

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Abstract:: The perception of any country is a vital ingredient in assessing her international standing. This implies that a country with negative or image crisis is a bad item in the diplomatic market. Nigeria's international image has oscillated between periods of positivity and negativity, with the latter being preponderant. Citizen diplomacy as Nigeria's foreign policy thrust emerged in 2007 to interrogate and reconstruct the country's dwindling image in the international system. Through secondary sources of data and social constructivism as framework of analysis, the paper posits that restoration and sustenance of citizen diplomacy and vigorous drive have the potentials for creating a better image for Nigeria. Other recommendations proffered can also redress the image deficit of the country.

Keywords:: Citizen, Diplomacy, Foreign Policy, International Image, Social Constructivism

Introduction

There have been arguments advanced that citizen diplomacy is effective in yielding results or dividends as far as positive international image for Nigeria is concerned, which have led to the following questions: How helpful have Nigerian missions been towards the welfare of Nigerians living abroad? How helpful have Nigerian governments been to Nigerians living in Nigeria?

(Dickson, 2010:6,8). Very often, there have been tales of how Nigerians living abroad are maltreated in countries that they are found (Dickson, 2010:5). Nigeria is the 9th most populous country in the world and it is the most populous country in Africa with an estimated 167 million people and a population density as high as 139 people per square mile. On average, 25% of the

world's black population lives in Nigeria and as it is commonly said, one out of every four Africans is Nigerian, also one out of every five black people in the world. It is estimated that over 1 million Nigerians reside in the US, UK Home Office statistics relating to those holding Nigerian passports puts the number at more than 2 million (author not stated, 2012). Such statistics validates the need for effective protection of the rights of Nigerians abroad.

There have been several instances of Nigerians in several countries languishing in prisons, on death row, deported, marginalized, detained, tortured, and most of the time, the reasons are unknown. This is not to say that every Nigerian is a "saint", but more often than not, there have been cases of unfair treatment of Nigerians. To mention but a few: out of the estimated 85,000 inmates in the UK, 11,000 are foreigners, amongst them largely are Nigerians; in 2010, some Nigerians in Togo were detained unjustly and treated with harsh and severe inhuman conditions for offences they did not commit except for being Nigerians (Akinterinwa, 2010a:20-21); In 2010 also, it was reported that over 200 Nigerians were on death row, out of which 18 persons were killed in Tripoli and Benghazi

with exclusive refusal to part with their identities (Akinterinwa, 2010b:22). More recently, in 2012, it was reported also that, there were 53 Nigerians in Indonesian prisons, 18 on death row, 5 imprisoned for life and 53 others under detention (Akinterinwa, 2012a:17)

No Nigerian is immune to this maltreatment, and there is almost no limit to those who inflict this ill-treatment on Nigerians as Damilola Taylor, a Nigerian teenager, was assaulted to death in England by English teenagers; Libyan authorities have been subjecting Nigerian illegal immigrants to physical and psychological torture, killing them sometimes; oil companies' expatriates in the Niger Delta have been subjecting Nigerians to dehumanizing conditions even right here in Nigeria; the challenges of issuance of visas to Nigerians and the ridiculous immigration questions being asked (Folarin, 2013:122).

This paper also notes that the inhuman treatment meted out on Nigerians abroad also replicates itself right here in Nigeria by fellow Nigerian citizens. The inhuman treatment of Nigerians in the local prisons here in Nigeria, not to mention the insecurity perpetrated by the Boko Haram group (Folarin 2013:122), all of

which constitute indignities against Nigerians. The foregoing narrative epitomises disregard for Nigeria, which government should take seriously. The lack of confidence by Diaspora Nigerians in their country to rescue them in times of need is caused by the response and behaviour of Nigerian foreign missions abroad. The constant complaint is their inability to intervene in matters related to the safety of Nigerians (Dickson, 2010:9).

Another very salient issue is that, the conditions of living in Nigeria causes Nigerians to engage in irregular migration to escape the excruciating weight of poverty, unemployment, high crime rate and insecurity in Nigeria (Onwubiko, 2011). In a bid to seek for greener pastures abroad, the migrating Nigerians engage in all forms of vices to make ends meet, ranging from pick-pocketing to cyber-crimes (Adaramola, 2013). These Nigerians that engage in such activities abroad contribute largely to the decline of Nigeria's international image.

This paper seeks to examine the causes of the continual flux and arguable decline in Nigeria's international image, and the successes or failures of citizen diplomacy in Nigeria. It attempts to ultimately demonstrate that proper investment in citizen

diplomacy can lead to a laundering, rebranding and positive projection of the country's international image using the Social Constructivism Theory as a tool of analysis. The period selected for this study (2007-2014) took into consideration the commencement of citizen diplomacy in 2007 till President Goodluck Jonathan administration.

Conceptual Clarification

The concepts of citizen diplomacy and Nigeria's international image are explained here.

Citizen Diplomacy

Ogunsanwo (2009:19) posited in his work that the concept of citizen diplomacy was a novel foreign policy orientation announced by the former Foreign Affairs Minister, Chief Ojo Maduekwe which would lay emphasis on the citizens. He noted that, this citizen-centred diplomacy could mean that the Nigerian citizen abroad is the centre of Nigeria's national interest and therefore the country's entire diplomatic machinery should be geared towards protecting the interests of the citizen in whatever form they come (Ogunsanwo, 2009:22).

The author recognized the fact that the interests of the citizens may conflict with each other and ultimately the Nigerian

government, but he proposed that the interests of the Nigerian citizen should be protected within the limits permitted by international law.

Eze (2009:31) improved on the above thus:

Citizen diplomacy articulates what is or should be implicit as the major goal of our foreign policy. Being people-centred, it is a step further in saying that, in both its national and international actions, the Nigerian state will be driven primarily by the need to promote the welfare and security of every Nigerian.

Eze (2009) tried to establish by the above assertion that in the light of the implementation of citizen diplomacy, two major factors must be present – psychological commitment leading to ensured security and welfare for every Nigerian; and resources that must constantly be present to meet the rising demands from competing development projects. He noted that Citizen Diplomacy when well-articulated and pursued adequately could solve the first problem and thereby lead to the provision of solutions to the second problem (Eze, 2009:39).

Citizen diplomacy is construed by Nwogbaga (2013:46-47) to be a citizen-centric model of

governance that considers the nationals as both the end (essence) and the means (agents or instruments) of government. His conception of citizen diplomacy was in relation to the Diaspora question and as a foreign policy response to it. He noted that it would require the government of Nigeria to more consciously resort to the calculi of the basic needs, human rights, security and socio-economic welfare of the citizens in conducting bilateral and multilateral engagements with other nations (Nwogbaga, 2013).

He corroborated thus:

Some of the contents of Nigeria's foreign policy as expressed in citizen diplomacy include the desire to ensure that (a) Nigerians travelling or resident abroad are treated with respect by other nations; (b) the growing number of Nigerians in the Diaspora invest their resources in the development of the Nigerian economy; (c) the images of Nigeria and Nigerians are improved abroad; (d) Nigerian Diaspora who seek consular assistance receive sufficient and timely diplomatic attention (Nwogbaga 2013:47).

Dickson (2010:1) stated that citizen diplomacy is a foreign policy thrust, under which The Federal Government of Nigeria seeks the assistance of Nigerians at home and in diaspora in its

effort to develop the country economically and politically. He advised that the policy should be reviewed and re-packaged in the light of new realities of the global order to make it “efficient, responsive, dynamic and proactive”.

Nigeria’s International Image

The positive perception of any country's image is an important gauge for judging her standing in the international political system. A good image translates to respect, influence and prestige. On the other hand, a bad or negative perception of a country's image indicates that such a country lacks respect influence and prestige in the international system (Egwemi, 2010:131).

Egwemi (2010) noted in his work that Nigeria’s external image has swung between periods of extreme positivity to extreme negativity. He stated that over the years and quite historically, the country had a good image between the periods: 1960-1967, 1970-1983, 1999-2007; and a negative image between the periods: 1993-1999, 2007-2014.

Uchem (2009:83) submitted that the country's image is constantly blighted by the activities of a growing number of unemployed youths who engage in internet scam or advance fee fraud. He posited that thousands of

Nigerians are behind bars across the world for drug offences and currency trafficking among other heinous crimes. The combination of these with rampant kidnappings and hostage taking of expatriates makes the nation a risky destination for investors.

Akinterinwa (2012b:28) observed that the Nigerian image problem is as domestic as it is global. He noted that though Nigeria is not the worst country in Africa, she has however acquired an unenviable image for herself. He identified that, the general perception and graphic portrayal of Nigeria is that of “a country where corruption is rife and insecurity of life and property is the defining characteristic, a country where nothing works and everything is wrong!” (Akinterinwa, 2012b:29). He averred that the Nigerian image had not always been bad, but took a lot of downturns starting from the 1980s. The successive military governments made many Nigerians to become “economic migrants and refugees abroad”. This factor was one of the major factors that led to the decline of Nigeria’s international image perception from the rest of the world.

The Nexus between Citizen Diplomacy and Nigeria’s International Image

Nigeria's foreign policy has largely been Afrocentric since independence in 1960. Sir Tafawa Balewa, the first prime minister led this policy posture by the establishment of a foreign policy that provided for good neighbourliness; respect for territorial integrity; sovereign equality of all states; respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter; non-alignment; promotion of pan-Africanism and African unity; commitment to decolonization and eradication of racist minority rule from Africa; promotion of the rights of blacks under colonial rule; the creation of the necessary economic, political, social and cultural conditions to secure the independence of Nigeria; and the promotion of world peace built on freedom, mutual respect and equality for all peoples of the world (Enikanolaiye, 2013:19).

The Afrocentricism in Nigeria's foreign policy was very constant until the administration of former President Olusegun Obasanjo who shifted Nigeria's foreign policy thrust from "afrocentricism to global-centricism". This was because decolonization and apartheid had become a thing of the past (Akinterinwa, 2011:23). The Afrocentric foreign policy initiative and the successful execution of its objectives have

however led to several questions such as: has Afrocentricism yielded any tangible and measurable benefits to Nigeria? Do the African countries that benefited from Nigeria's assistance owe Nigeria a debt of appreciation and gratitude in response to Nigeria's sweat, blood and toil? Has Nigeria enjoyed positive diplomatic support from these countries even in multilateral fora? (Eze, 2009: 9-10)

After the Obasanjo administration, a repositioning of Nigeria's foreign policy was rationalized by President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua in 2007. The new thrust of the foreign policy was then articulated by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ojo Maduekwe also in 2007. This thrust he called "citizen-centred diplomacy", was to put the interests of the Nigerians at home and abroad as the centre of the country's national interest. In other words, Nigeria's new international behaviour and actions would primarily be the protection of its citizens' interests and wellbeing anywhere around the world thereby shifting the focus from the traditional Afrocentric foreign policy to a more citizen-centric foreign policy (Folarin, 2013:110).

In a bid to explain the concept of citizen diplomacy, Maduekwe said

the following in a Keynote Address:

Diplomacy is a term which broadly speaking describes the *raison d'être* of interstate behaviour in the conduct of relations between nation states. Relationship is about interaction between entities with "people" at the centre of that interaction. Nation-states are not mere geographic expressions. Nation-states are indeed about the people or the citizens of that geographic expression...Citizen

Diplomacy is therefore, about people i.e. about the citizens of a nation-state. It is diplomacy conducted at the behest of and the benefit of the people, the true custodians of sovereignty. Citizen diplomacy, therefore, is a foreign policy initiative that will be citizen-oriented in its approach, objective and outcome (in Eze, 2009: 7-8).

This is not necessarily a complete departure from the country's traditional approach to Afrocentric foreign relations; however, the policy is rebranded to focus on the citizen (Dickson, 2010:1). The concept of citizen diplomacy may seem self-explanatory, but this is not so in the context of use under which the Yar'Adua administration formulated it. It is sometimes called "track two" or "unofficial diplomacy" (Agbu, 2009:52). The term "track two diplomacy" refers to private

citizens negotiating topics that are usually reserved for official negotiations—the formal resolution of an on-going conflict or arms reduction, for example. Over time, however, the term has come to be used more broadly to encompass processes such as problem-solving workshops, dialogues, cultural and scientific exchanges, traveling artistes, sports teams, or any other contacts between people whose groups are engaged in an intractable conflict (International Online Training Programme on Intractable Conflict, 1998). The impact of citizen diplomacy has grown in part because of the unprecedented capabilities of the internet, which has grown from 360 million users in 2000 to 2.3 billion users in 2011 (Kadishson, 2012). Citizens can organize, communicate, and share information in real-time without geographical boundaries and with minimal costs. The internet gives citizens an audience to hear their views, and policymakers listen to those who have audiences (Kadishson, 2012).

Citizen Diplomacy was articulated under President Yar'Adua's administration to mean that Nigeria's foreign policy will henceforth be focused on the Nigerian citizens at home and in the diaspora. The goal was to strive for a synergy between

foreign policy and domestic affairs in such a way that the citizen is the focus of foreign policy. A few weeks after this policy was adopted, Maduekwe reiterated the new foreign policy thrust adding that a citizen-centred diplomacy would imply 'diplomacy of consequences'. Maduekwe stated that: "Citizen-centred diplomacy will be diplomacy of consequences such that if you are nice to us, we will be nice to you, if you are hostile to us, we will be hostile to you" (Ojiabor, 2007 in Agbu, 2009:53-54).

Citizen diplomacy is geared towards "protecting" the image and integrity of Nigeria and retaliates against countries who are hostile and who continue to brand only the "corrupt" practices in Nigeria. Maduekwe further explained that Nigeria's foreign policy has come of age and that age of innocence is over. He noted that for Africa to remain the centre-piece of Nigeria's foreign policy, it should not be abstract to the ordinary citizen of Nigeria. He also recognized that since Nigeria carries a burden to be the symbol of success of the black nation, there cannot be a black success story unless it is a Nigeria success story (Okocha and Nzeshi, 2007:2-3). The basic thrust of citizen diplomacy therefore,

revolves around the concern for the basic needs, human rights and socio-economic welfare of Nigerian citizens in conducting bilateral and multilateral engagements with other countries (Mbachu, 2009:72).

The concept of Citizen Diplomacy rests on the existence of the 'citizen'. A citizen is noted to be one who enjoys fundamental human rights such as freedom of speech, association and religion, which are usually entrenched in a constitution and are obtainable by legal status predicated on shared identity between the individual and the state (Ayodele, 2006:147; Omolayo, 2006:40-41). The concept of the Nigerian citizen is questionable because the factors mentioned above that are used to define a citizen can arguably be said to be absent in the Nigerian state.

The wellbeing of citizens, in any human society, is expected to be the major concern of the leaders, who are custodians of societal resources (Brimah, Bolaji and Brimah, 2013:37). Reconnecting the state to the citizen and vice versa is a major area of needed intervention for all Nigerians. In Nigeria, the average Nigerian is treated badly by some authorities. For instance, some of the members of the Nigerian Police Force who are vested with the

responsibility of maintaining internal peace and security have been accused as being agents of terrorism, engaging in extra-judicial killing, arrest, and detention of innocent Nigerians, extortion of multifarious dimensions, and brutality; several people have been killed in sectarian violence in northern parts of the country. Then what is the role of the government in the security of its citizens? (Dickson, 2010:7). Security is a social contract between the state and its citizens, in which the former is expected to protect, defend and provide for the latter (Dania and Eboh, 2013:566), but can this be said to be the case in Nigeria?. In a situation whereby these 'rights' are not obtainable based on the foregoing, can the Nigerian people be called citizens in the context in which the concept of citizenship evolved? It is based on this realisation that the word 'citizen' will be interchangeably used with the words 'individual' and 'people' in the course of this paper.

Citizen diplomacy was conceived as a means of rebranding Nigeria's image and of protesting the maltreatment of Nigerians abroad (Akinterinwa, 2009:21). The positive perception of any country's image is important for judging her status in the

international system. A good image translates to respect, influence and prestige, while a bad or negative perception of a country's image indicates that such a country lacks respect, influence and prestige in the international system. As a consequence, all countries endeavour to build, maintain and enhance their images in relation to other countries. Nigeria's external image has swung between periods of extreme positivity to periods of extreme negativity (Egwemi, 2010:131).

Nigeria is regarded as the giant of Africa in terms of population, human resources and natural resources, put together. The image of Nigeria in the eyes and minds of the rest of the world in recent years can be termed to be "ugly, unpleasant, unattractive, frightening and dreadful" (Bamiduro and Aremu, 2012:18). This can be said to account for the fact that Nigerians are viewed as rogues, fraudsters, and are therefore badly treated and subjected to inhuman treatments in other countries. Nigeria has the natural resources to sustain herself, but there are inadequate social amenities for citizens, the educational system calls for urgent attention, health sector is not reliable; brain drain syndrome has been the experience in the last few decades; and as a corollary, so

many professionals have left the country for Europe, Asia, America, and to some less endowed African countries in terms of population and natural resources (Bamiduro and Aremu, 2012:18).

A state with image crisis is difficult to market or advertise in the 'diplomatic market.' Laundering the battered image of such a nation in the international arena is as difficult as trying to engage in image-making for an international terrorist gang such as the Al Qaeda and Nigeria has been plagued with image crisis at several points in time in her history (Ajayi, 2006:110; Egwemi, 2010:134).

The Afrocentric policy from independence has been at a huge cost. In spite of this cost, Nigeria's external image and respect has been on the decline. The many interventionist roles to stop wars, offer grants, democratise, and even feed other African nations have been affecting national resources with effect on the home front. These factors, coupled with: prolonged leadership ineptitude; economic mismanagement; general insecurity; unbridled corruption; advanced fee fraud (419); ethnic and sectarian violence; upsurge in militants' violence; gross electoral malpractices; inability to have

functional refineries; decades of energy or power crisis; infrastructural decay everywhere in the country; and Nigerians' anxiety to cut corners to travel and stay illegally abroad: have all contributed to the decline of Nigeria's external image (Folarin, 2013:115).

The Social Constructivist Explanation

Social Constructivism is a theory employed in International Relations based on how actors define their national interests, threats to those interests and their relationship to one another. This puts International Relations in the context of broader social relations. It posits that states decide on what they want and need, not only based on material needs but social interaction. Therefore, this theory posits that what states do depends on what their identities and interests are, and it should be noted that identities and interests change (Weber, 2005:60). Constructivism also recognizes that power is not absent from the international system, but it focuses more on social interactions based on perception (Goldstein and Pevehouse, 2011:121).

The focus of social constructivism (also known as constructivism) according to Jackson and Sorensen (2006:162) is on human awareness or consciousness in its

place on world affairs. In other words, they argue that the international system exists as an inter-subjective awareness among people in the sense that the system is constituted by ideas, not by material forces. Therefore, if the thoughts that enter into the existence of international relations change, then the system itself will change, because the system consists of thoughts and ideas (Jackson and Sorensen, 2006:162).

In 1992, Alexander Wendt published an article in a journal of International Relations titled: *Anarchy is what states make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics*. He built on the works of Kratochwil (1989) and Onuf (1989), and he has helped to raise the Social Constructivist theory of International Relations (Daddow, 2010:115). He tried to establish in this article that change becomes possible in a big way because people and states can start thinking about each other in new ways and thus create new norms that may be radically different from old ones (Jackson and Sorensen, 2006:162).

An analysis of the social context in which international relations occur leads Constructivists to emphasise issues of identity and belief (for this reason Constructivist theories are sometimes called idealist). The

perception of friends and enemies, in-groups and out-groups, fairness and justice all become key determinants of a State's behaviour. While some Constructivists would accept that States are self-interested, rational actors, they would stress that varying identities and beliefs underlie the notions of rationality under which States pursue simply survival, power, or wealth (Slaughter, 2011:4).

Immanuel Kant was another proponent of social constructivism (Jackson and Sorensen, 2006:165). Kant argued that we can obtain knowledge about the world, but it will always be subjective knowledge in the sense that it is filtered through human consciousness. Human beings rely on 'understanding' of each other's actions and assigning 'meaning' to them (Hacking, 1991:4 in Jackson and Sorensen, 2006:165).

The Constructivist theory examines how state interests and identities are intertwined and how those identities are shaped by their interaction with other states; they also hold that state identities are complex and changing, emanating from interactions with other states – often socialization. For constructivists, power, politics, anarchy and military force cannot explain change totally, but institutions, regimes, norms and

changes in identity are better explanations (Goldstein and Pevehouse, 2011:122-123). Wendt (1995 in Weber, 2005:65) stated that the fundamental principles of constructivist theory include:

- People act toward objects, including other actors, on the basis of the meanings that the objects have for them: SOCIAL KNOWLEDGE
- The meanings in terms of which action is organized arise out of interaction: SOCIAL PRACTICE
- Identities (and interests) are produced in and through 'situated activity': SOCIAL IDENTITIES AND INTERESTS. 24

Relevance of Theory to Citizen Diplomacy and Nigeria's International Image

This paper seeks to evaluate the impact of citizen diplomacy on Nigeria's international image using the Social Constructivist framework. Social Constructivism helps to give a platform for its justification in the sense that, when a state is able to construct a perception of itself for another state to see, it then changes the nature of relations in the international system. As has been stated above, if the thoughts and ideas that enter into international relations change, then the system

itself will change through: an identification of the manner in which the Nigeria should be seen, addressed based on social interaction and laying of emphasis on the country's identity and interest. In other words, when Nigeria is able to create a positive perception of itself to the rest of the world in the context of social relations, then the manner in which the rest of the world relates with Nigeria will change.

The manner in which Nigeria relates to the international system is through her foreign policy. If her foreign policy is properly articulated and implemented, it will help to build a better image for the country. In this context, Citizen Diplomacy as a foreign policy thrust was formulated for the benefit of the citizens of the state and also to assist in laundering the image of the country. Therefore, citizen diplomacy can create a better image for Nigeria, thus leading to an increased level of prestige in the international system and improving her relations with other states.

Some of the practices that Nigeria had employed in the past to improve her image included the interference in colonially dominated and racially discriminated states such as South Africa, Angola, Namibia,

Zimbabwe, but since changes have occurred in the international system, and that is no longer of major concern in the international system, Nigeria had to engage in other practices that may have existed, but is now more acceptable and fashionable in the international system – protection of the welfare of the citizens of the state. Thus, validating the constructivist postulation that states may choose policies based on what is perceived to be popular by other states. Thus, in this case, citizen diplomacy seems to appeal as a method of elevating a country's image as the ideas and norms in the international system are subjective to what states make of them.

Conclusion and

Recommendations

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When adequate efforts and processes are put in place to establish the success of citizen diplomacy, the extent of elevation in the country's image and international status will indeed increase. Based on the increasing population of Nigeria, Nigeria will remain a force to reckon with on regional and international platforms. These relations will include political; socio-economic; and cultural, thus improving the status of the country. However, these might not yield profitable results if the image of the country

suffers. As the Social Constructivism explanation posits, Citizen Diplomacy can be used as an effective tool to launder the Nigerian image and form a better perception of the country in the International System.

There are some measures that should be taken to ensure that the Citizen Diplomacy policy is quite effective within and outside the country. First, to ensure the safety of Nigerians at home, the security issues at home should be well taken care of. Most pressing is the issue of terrorism perpetrated mostly in the Northern region of the country. The need to tackle these security issues is pertinent for the safety of the Nigerians at home. If not curbed early, it may transcend the Northern region and affect other parts of the country.

As noted earlier in this paper, many Nigerians engage in irregular migration mainly because they seek "greener pastures" in other countries. Some take to vices to survive in other countries, but the number of migrants from Nigeria can reduce if basic amenities necessary for living can be provided for them within the confines of Nigeria. These include: constant electricity; better medical facilities; qualitative education; potable water; and efficient infrastructures. Another measure

that can reduce the rate of irregular migration is an increase in job opportunities. When jobs are available for eligible citizens, there is reduced request to seek greener pastures in other countries. The rate at which a country caters for her citizens will determine to a large extent how other countries treat her citizens as well as the respect the country receives internationally.

Nigerians abroad should be well taken care of when in need of assistance from their home country. The Nigerian foreign missions should be well equipped to cater for the needs of Nigerians in the several host countries where

Nigerians are located in their large numbers. This is one of the major thrusts of citizen diplomacy and is necessary for the success of the policy.

The media also plays a role in the image laundering process. The activities of Nigerians are not always negative, as such; the media should engage in the projection of positive achievements of Nigerians and the country as a whole. The information management and dissemination style can alter positively the impression in the minds of the target audience. This should be properly utilised as a tool for better international image.

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