



ABSTRACT

The primary objective of this paper is to revive the memory of the indigenous people of Africa, mostly Nigeria, on aspect of religion as becomes more relevant as the potential for losing the reality of the main stream of the historical account coming from European sources. The waning belief in the potency and efficacy of Yorùbá traditional practices is condemned and its superiority to the foreign religions is brought to the fore. To further prove the superiority of the Yorùbá traditional religion, the playwright posits that, for European religion to thrive, it

THE DECEIT OF FOREIGN RELIGION OVER THE YORUBA RELIGION THROUGH THE LENS OF “AKÍNWÙMÍ ÌȘÒLÁ” SELECTED PLAYS

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Introduction

Religious rituals and beliefs, even if not followed as an adult, make up a key component of an individual's cultural identity. Religion can preserve values within the community and foster a sense of belonging. According to Atanda (1996) religion among the Yorùbá is as old as the society itself. This assertion shows that the Yorùbá had their religious identity before the interference of the Europeans; even Islam which many Yorùbá profess today, was introduced only at the close of the 18th century. The Yorùbá believe in a Supreme, self-sufficient Being called Olódùmarè. He is believed to be responsible for the creation and maintenance of heaven and earth, and all that are therein. Olódùmarè also brought into being the divinities and spirits who are his functionaries and intermediaries between Him and mankind (Awolalu 1979). This according to Yorùbá belief, is because He is too exalted to concern Himself directly with men and their affairs, hence the existence of many small gods (òrìșà) such as Ògún, Sàngó, Èsù, Òrúnmilà, Oya, and Òșunas intermediaries. They believed that these òrìșà were servants of Ojórún who to carry out His orders in heaven and on earth. For this task, they were capable of commuting and did commute between òrun (heaven) and ayé (earth) where they would watch what human beings were doing.

The names given to the Supreme Being depict the people's concept about “Him” Ojórún – the owner of heaven; Ełédàá – the creator; Alaàyè – the living one; Ełémíí – the owner of life; Ojójó, òní – the owner of today, etc. Conclusively, it can be said that the Supreme Being, as conceived by the Yorùbá, is the creator of heaven and earth; the one who has everlasting majesty and superlative greatness; who



has to rely on the traditional religion and those that profess to have taken to either of the foreign religions are actually hybrids because they openly profess the foreign religions but they are covert traditionalists. Therefore, the article reminds that African identity has been endangered by foreign religion; that there is a need to rethink our conceptualization as portrayed in Akinwumi Isola's selected play. Finally, this paper examine the potency of power of òrìṣà (gods) in oath taking over the foreign religions (Islam and Christian) as a means of curbing corruption which has seriously affected the African societies especially Nigeria.

Keywords: Religion, Yorùbá, Deceit, Foreign, Tradition

has tabernacles in heaven above, and who determines man's destiny, no one can be equated to Him.

Yorùbá Religious Identity

Yorùbá believed that the òrìṣà are the agents conveying good or evil, depending on man's relationship with Oḷórun. To ensure that they were in tune with the òrìṣà and ultimately with Oḷórun, the Yorùbá devised systemized forms of worship, propitiation and sacrifices in their religion. The desire to achieve the good also made them take their religious practices very seriously. Hence, individuals, each lineage, each village or town; and each state in the Yorùbá country made adequate arrangements for religious obligations as they felt due.

Yorùbá also believed in divination which is an attempt of man to penetrate the future which is obscure (Alana, 2004). According to Awólàlú and Dòpámú (1979)

When something is lost, when a barren woman desires children, where there is an inexplicable disease, when one has strange dream, during crises of life, when a child is born, at betrothal to find appropriate husband, at death to find cause of death, and during an undertaking.

Yorùbá believe that human beings are very limited and cannot know the mind of God unless the diviners called Babaláwo are consulted to reveal the mind of God concerning their various endeavours and what the future holds for them. Yorùbá playwrights portray above belief in various forms. *Ifá* is believed to have been given wisdom, and sent by Olódùmarè, the Almighty God, to use the profound wisdom to put the earth in order. This belief is manifested in some of the praise names given to him like *akéré-finú-ṣogbón* (The small person with a mind full of wisdom) and *Akònilóràn-bí-iyekan-ẹni* (he who gives one wise counsel like one's relative) (Abímbólá, 1976). It is the link between men and gods. The relationship between the people, gods, ancestors and all other spirits in the cosmos is expected to be solved by *Ifá* (Adéjùmò, 1996). If a man is being punished by other gods, he can only know this by consulting *Ifá*. If a community is to make sacrifices to one of its gods, it can only know this by consulting *Ifá*.

If somebody visits a good Babaláwo, he/she does not need to tell the Babaláwo the reason for his/her visit. Immediately the Babaláwo consults *Ifá*, he will tell the person the problem facing him



or her. Also, among the other Yorùbá deities, *Ifá's* importance cannot be over emphasized. According to Abimbola (1965), without *Ifa*, the importance of the other Yorùbá gods would diminish. *Ifa* co-ordinates the works of all the gods in the Yorùbá pantheon. He serves as a 'middleman' between the other gods and the people, and between the people and their ancestors. He is the mouthpiece and the public relations officer of all the other Yorùbá gods. The relationship between *Òrúnmilà* and other deities is portrayed in Yorùbá written plays. *Òrúnmilà* is believed to know the tastes and taboos of the divinities and he is capable of giving guidance to them and mankind through divination. In addition, *Òrúnmilà* through *Ifá*, is the one who interprets the wishes of *Olódùmarè* to mankind and who decides what sacrifices to offer on any given occasions, this is why he is consulted on all important occasions and his directives cannot be ignored. If ignored, it is always calamitous for the person. For instance, in *Lísàbí Agbòhgbò Àkàlà*, *Lisabi* is asked to make some sacrifices to *Èṣùso* that after he gains victory for *Ègbá*, they will not plot against him. He refuses to offer the sacrifice, believing that it cannot happen, victory is won but he is plotted against and killed. The playwright uses this to demonstrate the potency of Yorùbá traditional religion and the disastrous consequences of ignoring the voice of *Ifá*.

The belief in deities as benevolent beings, the position and role of *Òrúnmilà* among other deities and in the society is also upheld in the selected texts. For instance; in *Abé Ààbò*, *Jeremáyà* and *Màikéèlì*, who are Christians and also religious leaders, seek solace in *Ifa* when looking for money, power, fame, growth and development of their churches. *Ifa* does not fail them because *Màikéèlì* who introduce *Jeremáyà* to the *Babaláwo* affirms that he owes his success to *Ifa*.

Deceit, love of money and greed are imported into the Yorùbá society via foreign religions. *Isola* portrays this clearly in *Abé Ààbò*, with characters like *Jeremáyà* and *Màikéèlì* who he intentionally paints bad so as to bring to fore his stance on foreign cultures. He shows the superiority of Yorùbá traditional religion to foreign ones in what the *Babaláwo* says when *Jeremáyà* expresses surprise at the *Babaláwo's* refusal to take any remuneration for the consultation he does for *Jeremáyà*. He says:

...àwa ò gbòdò puró, èyàn a máa puró mó *Òrúnmilà*? Kòṣé é ṣe. Bóo bá fé ṣaájò mìíràn, èyìun òtò. Sùgbón *Ifá* ò gba nṅkan lówó rẹ lóri eléyí.
(Ìṣòlá, 1983:44)

... we must not tell lies. Can one lies against *Òrúnmilà*? Impossible! If you want to do another thing, that is different. But for this one, *Òrúnmilà*? Is not asking for anything from you.

Before now, *Jeremáyà* lies to a lady about the man she wants to marry and on several occasions, he lies against his own God – what God does not tell him, he cooks it up and claims he is sent by God, without fear for his God. So, *Ìṣòlá* here is drawing a contrast between the worshippers of the God of the Europeans and those of *Òrúnmilà*. He also shows another contrast in *Maikeli's* speech when discussing with *Jeremáyà*. He says:

... eni tí ò gbón lààwè ní gbò. Iṣé wa yíi ṣòro díè. Bí o bá so, pé eṣe wúra nikan lo fé máa kó sóri, kakí lo maáa fi lẹ wúli. (Ìṣòlá, 1983:31)



... you only suffer if you are not wise. This profession of ours is very difficult. If you decide to cram bible passages only, you will have to patch khaki with wool material.

This excerpt, when compared with Babaláwo's speech above, shows that Màíkèèlì is only interested in people's money and self-aggrandizement in the practice of the foreign religion unlike the Babaláwo who does his own wholeheartedly without selfish interest. In essence, those that profess to have taken to either (Islam/Christian) of the foreign religions are actually religious hybrids because they openly profess the foreign religion but they are covert traditionalists. While condemning this hybrid identity, Ìsòlá also condemns Christians that erroneously advice people to lose their identity. They dissuade people from charms while they are actively involved in it. This is not because they believe that traditional charms are bad but because of their selfish interest. When Babaláwo asks Jeremáyà to hang a charm at the entrance of the church, Màíkèèlì quickly says:

À, rará o. A ò lè fi ǹnkankan sí ara s̀òòs̀. Àwọ̀n ̀jo, yòòrì. Àbí e, ò mò pé àyóse ni gbogbo èyí. Wọ̀n ò gbodò, rí àsírí yí. Àwa gan ni a máa n sọ fun wọ̀n kí wọ̀n lo, kó oògùn wọ̀n dànù. (Ìsòlá, 1983:45)

Ah, no. We cannot hang anything on the church. The congregation would see it. Don't you know we do these things in secrecy? They must not be privy to the secret. It is we that tell them to discard their charms.

And Babaláwo exclaims:

À à, kí wọ̀n kó oògùn dànù, è má níkà nínú o! (Ìsòlá, 1983:31)

Ah, you told them to discard their charms, you are very wicked!

Isola corrects the erroneous notion about traditional charms which is propagated by those that claim to have embraced foreign religions. Talking about the potency of charms, Màíkèèlì says:

... .ońdè yí dára púpò, Mádaríkàn ni. Eńi tí ó bá perí re, níbi, isẹ ní sọmo, gúnugún... ..ó ye, kí o ní gbètugbètu kan. Bí òrò, bá dójú è, tán, tí omo, ̀jo, kan bá féé, da ̀jo, rú, bí o bá ti fi gbètugbètu bá were sòrò, kíá ni yòò máa se ohun tí o bá féé, kí ó se. (Ìsòlá, 1983:30-31)

... this charm belt is very good. It is Untouchable. Whoever that tries to curse you... .. you suppose to have one command charm. If the case reach the climax of disruption in congregation, if you use this command charm, instantly the person will yield into your instruction.

He uses this Màíkèèlì's speech to affirm the Yorùbá identity and their belief in charms, traditional medicine. He also asserts that Yorùbá traditional religion is more reliable and superior to that of the Europeans.

One of the reasons why people throng to the foreign religion is prophesying or ability to see either the past or the future. This can also be enjoyed in traditional religion as portrayed in the texts. Akínwùmí Ìsòlá portrays the issues of prophesy in both the traditional and western religion.



Also, Màikéèlì's Abé Àbò tells Jeremáyà about the Babaláwo he consults:

A ó kókó dé òdò babaláwo kan. Wò ó, ó rí ran gan an. Ó ti so pé n ó
ra mótò kí n tilè to láláà è. (Ìsòlá, 1983:30)
*We will first visit an herbalist. See, he forecasts so well he had
predicted that I would buy a car ever before I dreamt about it.*

Furthermore, Ìsòlá posits that for the European religion to thrive, it has to rely on the traditional religion which further proves the latter's superiority. This fact is seen in Babaláwo and Jímò's discussion:

Babaláwo:..... ohun tí ojú wa ní rí kí ẹ díẹ... àwọn Mùsùlùmí á wá. Ti
woṅ o tilè wá tó ìdájí táwoṅ onígbagbó. Á à, ó búyárí. Àwoṅ tí ó pe ra
woṅ ní aládùúrà un ló tilè wá le jù.
Jímò: Sé emò pé àwa Mùsùlùmí náà máa ní poyódà nípa tírà dídi àti isé
wíwò. Èyíun ni kò jé kí ẹ máa rí àwoṅ Mùsùlùmí tó bẹẹ.
Babaláwo: Bẹẹ ni. Àwoṅ onígbagbó ò rónà rẹ nínú Bíbélí woṅ padà wá
sí òdò wa nu un. (Ìsòlá 1983:47)
*Babaláwo:what we are passing through is not a small thing... the
Muslim people will come. Their own is not even up to the half of the
Christian. Haaa, very surprise. The most surprised are those that called
themselves Cherub and Seraph.*
*Jimo: Do you know that we Muslims too are doing herbalist work like
rapping verses of Quran and prophesying. That's why you don't see
Muslim as such.*
*Babaláwo: it's true. Those Christians don't have that ways in their bible,
that's why they return back to us.*

This excerpt above shows in Ìsòlá's view, the dependency of the foreign religions on their traditional counterpart for survival.

The story of Abé Àbò can also be analyzed from the perspective that Jeremáyà's metaphorically represents the Europeans while Jòṣònú and his family represent Africans. Jeremáyà comes to Jòṣònú with the message of God who he claims sends him specifically to Jòṣònú knowing very well that Jòṣònú will not reject a message from God because of religious dogmatism. But in actual fact, Jeremáyà's intention is far from what he tells Jòṣònú. Just like the Europeans who came to Yorùbá land with the message of civilization but their ulterior motive was to exploit the land. In support of this view, Norris (1974:51) asserts that:

*In despotic statecraft ... the supreme and essential mystery is to
hoodwink the subjects and to mask the fear which keeps them down,
with the specious garb of religion.*

At the close of the drama, Ìsòlá points out foreign religions are the colonizers' means of blindfolding the colonized and the earlier Yorùbá should go back to their religion and stop chasing



the shadow by running after the foreign ones, the better for them. He puts this in the mouth of Jòḡnú after Jeremáyà had been exposed. He exclaims:

Háà! Ojú mi wá là gbàà. Àsé wèrè lèsìn, gígún ní gun ni. Inú ẹnì làlùfàà ẹnì. (Ìsòlá, 1983:76-77)

Ah! My eyes are now open. Religion is like lunacy, It intoxicates. One's mind is his pastor.

The religious identify of the Yorùbá has changed since colonialism. One of the major routes through which colonialism gained foothold in Africa, especially Yorùbá land, is religion. The Europeans know that Yorùbá believe in unseen gods and they are a religious set of people. It is through this belief that they are able to evangelize the Yorùbá. Ìsòlá paints the scenario in *Abé Ààbò* with greedy and fraudulent Jeremáyà and gullible Jòḡnú and his family.

In *Abé Ààbò*, Ìsòlá uses African religion to ridicule foreign religions as he tactically puts them in stark contrast to each other.

Socio-Political Identity of Yoruba

Yorùbá had their standard way of governance before the advent of the colonizers which, according to Oyewo (2008), had a three-fold effect on the society. A new system of governance alien to the people, which ushers in corruption, selfishness and many other vices in governance, was introduced among others. Inferiority complex imposed by the colonizers was one of the tactics they used to maintain their grip on the colonized. This is what Màíkékèlì suggests to Jeremáyà when the latter is exercising fear that their nefarious acts might be blown open. He says:

Awo wo ló n ya? Wàá fi yé wọn pé Oḡorun ló rán o, àti pe isé ti wọn gégé bí aládùúrà ni láti fetí sí ohunkóhun tí o bá pa láṣẹ fún wọn. Bí kò bá sí ibèrù díè, èsìn kò lè dúró... o ní láti sọ ara rẹ di èrùjèjè. (Ìsòlá 1983:62)

Which secret will leak? You will let them understand that God sent you and their duty as the sheep is to adhere to any command you give them. If there is no iota of fear, religion cannot stand ... you need to turn yourself to a terror.

This is exactly how the Europeans turned themselves to a terror, 'èrùjèjè' among the Yorùbá and they make the Yorùbá see themselves as very inferior to them.

Also in *Efúnróyè Tinúbú*, Vikiansony, a Yorùbá man who changes his identity by bearing a foreign name refers disdainfully to the uneducated Yorùbá as *púrùntù*, *lásánlásán*, *alàimòwé* (ordinary, illiterates, unlettered). But in order to awake the Europeans about them is mere fallacy and a ploy to keep them under hegemonic control, Ìsòlá uses Tinúbú to oppose this erroneous view. He airs his view in the speech of Aya Adéyeyè when discussing with Vikiasony she says about Tinúbú:

Ó le má mọwé o, sùgbón orí rẹ pé ju orí òpòḡopò yín lo. (Ìsòlá, 2010:15)

She may not be educated but she is far more intelligent than most of you.

Also, in her speech during one of their meetings with Dòsùmú, the Lagos king, Tinúbú addressing the foreigners and the likes of Vikiansony and Adéjùmò says:



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Èrò yín ni pé àwa tí a ò lo sí ilé ìwé, a kò gbón. Sò! Nígbà tí ẹ bá fi sàgbèlójúyóyó aṣọ òkèèrè pón iró yín, tí àwa bá kò ó, ẹ kì í gbà pé a mo ohun tí á n sẹ ... ẹyin fẹ sọ ara yín di aláṣe ilú Èkó nítorí pé ẹ rò pé àwọn tó wà níbẹ báyí kò lè sàkóso dáadáa nígbà tí wọn kò ti lo sí ilé ìwé lókè òkun. (Ìsòlá,

2010:71)

You think those of us that did not go to school are daft. Nonsense! When you present us with your lies wrapped in deceptive foreign fabric and we reject it, you do not admit that we are sensible. You want to install yourselves as the controller of Lagos because you think the people in governance now are not capable because they did not go to school abroad.

This excerpt shows that intelligence should not be attributed to acquisition of foreign education. This is the erroneous belief that colonialism forced down our throats and Ìsòlá here wants us to clear our minds of this degrading belief so that everybody educated or not can contribute his or her quota to the development of Yorùbá society.

The Yorùbá had a well-organized political system with which they were known and which was peculiar right from the pre-colonial era. The political system was absolute monarchy in which an individual with the title Oba (king) became the embodiment of the state and the process of succession was hereditary in the same family but not necessarily from father to son (Akínjógbin 2002, Raji & Danmoje 2004 & Adéoyè 2005). The (Oba) king is usually elected by a body of noblemen known as Oyómèsì, the seven principal councilor of state. Both in theory and concept of his position as well as his appearance, the Oba was vested with authority with a lot of honour and an aura of dignity. He had supreme authority and his words taken to be law by the generality of his subjects. A king was referred to as kábíyèsí (ká bi í kò sí) - no one questioned his authority, Aláṣe - the owner of authority. Èkeji òrìṣà - second in command to the gods. According to Òjó (1966) in the olden days, the king's house called ààfin used to be the most impressive in the community and located in the Centre of the settlement or town that form the capital of his domain. His regalia, crown, staff of office or scepter and other paraphernalia of office made him the most impressive personality when he appeared in public to his people. He was also the most respected in the society.

However, in spite of his being regarded as a divine ruler, the king was not an absolute ruler. The political structure was such that everyone - young and old, men and women - took part in the affairs of the state. Also, the king administered his state with the advice and active involvement of a council of chiefs known generally as Igbimò or Ilú. This council has different names in different parts of Yorùbá land, in Ifè and Èkiti they are known as Ìwàrèfà, Oyómèsì in Oyo, Ilamuren in Ijèbù, Ògbóni in Egbá, Egin in Oñdó etc. The chiefs in the Igbimò stood as the voice of the people as they were representatives of lineages and other interest groups in the society. The King could not make or take any major policy-decisions without the advice and consent of his Igbimò.



In *Ayé yẹ wón tán*, the king and his chiefs are the oppressors while the masses are the oppressed. The way out of oppression proposed by the playwrights is corroborated by Fálójá (2012). He says that:

The condition of slavery gave birth to expansions that tapped into Yorùbá ideas, practices and history, making language and religious practices resilient in the face of powerful attacks. These expansions were in turn nurtured by a sense of nostalgia, the search for liberation. Mythologies became very powerful devices for remembering, of reenacting aspects of the past, of formulating practices for the future, of aesthetic imagination. Enslaved communities are as the colonized subjects are ridiculed by those in power. To fight back, the Yorùbá turned to their mythologies to indict slave masters and colonialists, and to ridicule the culture impose on them.

In *Ayé Yẹ WónTán*, Ípo town is governed by greedy and corrupt Oba Simisólá Ọṣinyàgò and his chiefs (members of his council – *afobaje*) who can be divided into two factions: those that are in support of the Oba's oppressive attitude, like Basòrun and Asípa; and those that are not, like Alápiini, Sàmù, Lágúnnà, Àgbàakin, and Akíníkú. The Oba, his wife and first set of chiefs mentioned above are the oppressors of the masses they are supposed to govern. They are involved in all forms of corrupt practices, like sharing public fund among themselves and claiming the money from the coffers of the town without executing the project, sharing among themselves and giving out of exorbitant rate to the market women shops that were built with the money from the town's treasury. Even the Olorì (king's wife) is not left out. She too oppresses her domestic staff as well as the women in the town. Any attempt to question the Oba's or the Olorì's attitude attracts severe beating. The whole town is groaning under the yoke of brutality and oppression of the Oba and his cohorts.

When the yoke becomes unbearable, the people of Ípo turn to their age-long tradition of the Obas and chiefs swearing at the shrine of their god to attack oppression. Alápiini says:

Alápiini:ibèèrè wa nipa bí a bá máa bú irúnmoḷè. Gbogbo yín lẹ̀ mò, pé bí ọ̀rò bá díjù bá yí, tí ó dàbí ẹ̀ni pé tòtún tòsì rò pé e jò àrè loun n rò. Ọ̀bíri tó tẹ̀ ẹ̀po dó pa á láse pé kí o ba àti ijòyè máa búra níwájú irúnmoḷè. Ọ̀un ni adájó, tí kíí tí. Ijá sí, ijà ò sí tẹ̀lẹ̀, ọ̀dún keje-keje làá bú u. Ẹ̀ è sí rí i, ọ̀dún keje tí a bú ọ̀kan séyìn niyí. Lódótó, ẹ̀yin sẹ̀sẹ̀ gorí oyè ni, bóyá ì bá sè sẹ̀ díẹ̀ sí i kí ó tó kanyín, àmó, ó dàbí ẹ̀ni pé iná ẹ̀yí tí jó dórí kókó. Yálà kí á sẹ̀ bí àwọ̀n ilú tí wí nipa iwádíí ikú tí ó pa àwọ̀n kan, àtúnnyèwò ọ̀rò, ojà àti ọ̀rò ilè, tàbí kí á sè bú irúnmoḷè. (Ayé yẹ wón tán, o.i 131)

Alapiini: ...our request about swearing before the gods. All of you know that when things go awry like this, and everybody thinks he is right, Obiri who found Ípo town commands the Oba and all the chiefs to swear before the gods. He is the incorruptible judge. Whether there is feud or not, our usual practice is to swear before the gods every seven years. You



see, this is the seventh year after the last one. Truly, you have just ascended the throne, maybe we would have delayed it a little longer but it seems as if the die is cast. We either do what people of the town want, that is, investigating the causes of the death of those that died, revisiting the market and land matters, or we swear before the gods.

The *Oba* knows the efficacy of the oath so he tries all possible means of preventing it, including hiring thugs to disrupt the process. But at the end, the thugs are overpowered by the youths of the town, the *Oba* and his cohorts are brought to book.

In *Ayé Yẹ WónTán*, the people of *Ìpo* turn to their age-long tradition of swearing at the shrine of their god by the kings and chiefs to attack oppression. *Ìsòlá* here proposes that *Yorùbá* should revert to traditional practices in tackling political oppression.

Conclusion

Frantz Fanon argues that a native writer assists in the process of cultural and personal re-identification by acting as a communicator of the national struggle to the people. It is the writer's task and unique ability to use literature to describe the illusion, the void, and thereafter, the imbalance created. In this paper, it is discovered that *AkínwùmíÌsòlá* has performed this feat to a very great extent and in so many ways.

The waning belief in the potency and efficacy of *Yorùbá* traditional practices is condemned and its superiority to the foreign religions is brought to the fore. To further prove the superiority of the *Yorùbá* traditional religion, the playwright posits that, for European religion to thrive it has to rely on the traditional religion and those that profess to have taken to either of the foreign religions are actually hybrids because they openly profess the foreign religions but they are covert traditionalists.

AkínwùmíÌsòlá postulates the potency of the power of *òrìṣà* in oath taking as a means of curbing the social malady called corruption which has seriously affected the society, instead of the European system of adjudication the *Yorùbá* have adopted. He also suggests that if any intending leader or those in power who are suspected to be corrupt can be subjected to oath taking in the shrines of *òrìṣà*, culprits will be brought to book promptly and others will be deterred from being corrupt.

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