

Reasons Underpinning the Culture of Takfeer from an Educational Perspective: A Field Study

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Abstract:

Takfeer, which is the propensity to condemn people outside the self-defined group as infidels, is an aspect of extremism that has become increasingly apparent in the Muslim World. Takfeer gradually infiltrates the fabric of a society and becomes an integral part of its general attributes. Consequently, bringing cultural balance and reform is even more challenging for local institutions and governments. As a phenomenon, takfeer does not develop in a vacuum. Rather, it has emerged in various times and places as a result of religious wars and conflicts. This paper is a field study that investigates the ideology, background, and reasons underpinning the culture of takfeer. The paper also highlights the role of educational institutions in limiting the dangers of such dogmatic beliefs.

1- Introduction:

For the past few decades, various concepts have been used to describe fanatics and extremists. Used in different cultures, these concepts have become common in political, social, and cultural arenas. They include extremism, excessive abidance by a set of principles, fundamentalism, terrorism, takfeer,¹ and recreants or *Alkhwarij* as called amongst Muslims. These concepts also recall certain historical circumstances and were common before they came to the Muslim world. Extremism, a type of fundamentalism that denotes excessiveness, immoderation and rejection of the middle way, the literal interpretation of the holy text, and adherence to a set of common values and principles, has many historical examples.

Takfeer, which is the propensity to condemn people outside the self-defined group as infidels, is an aspect of extremism that has recently become evident in the Muslim World.

Despite the numerous educational and supervisory efforts that local institutions and governments have made to prevent and/or remediate the consequences of extremism and takfeer, a substantial percentage of fanatics revert to their takfeer behavior (Falah, 2010).

Takfeer has been a social phenomenon with serious consequences at all levels. Contemporary takfeer is only an extension of takfeer chains throughout history. Although not a recent phenomenon, takfeer has evolved substantially in the last few years (Alsamra'ee, 2007).

As a phenomenon, takfeer does not emerge from a vacuum. Rather, it has surfaced in various times and places as a result of religious wars and conflicts. It takes different shapes and forms, including the following:

When religious factions grow in numbers and each gains supporters against the other despite stemming from the same origin

When a defined group monopolizes religion

¹ Takfeer is a religious expression that has no equivalent in English; it means condemning others as infidels. Takfeer adherents believe they are empowered to classify others as infidels because such individuals (infidels) do not share their strict interpretations and applications of the holy text.

When those speaking on behalf of religion are presented as a separate group from the rest of the society, enjoying certain privileges and undeserved jurisdictions

When adherents of the same religion are classified differently in the same society

When religion is employed to serve personal interests

When people compartmentalize their religion, or shield it in public, and isolate it from daily life

When religion is not employed for the purpose of advancing people's lives culturally, economically, politically, and scientifically.

When religious leaders are detained and subjected to maltreatment by unqualified guardians, and

When religion is represented by slogans, rituals, and formalities at the expense of its substance and principles

Such an environment is a breeding ground that gives birth to takfeer, which gradually infiltrates the fabric of the society until it becomes an integral part of its general attributes. Subsequently, bringing cultural balance and reform becomes extremely difficult, if not impossible, and rectifying such a situation may take considerable time.

2- Research Questions

Facts, formal reports, research, and studies indicate that takfeer turmoil has been the cause of serious social problems manifested in the assault on religious scholars, disobedience, violation of laws and adoption of self-directed violence while attacking innocent citizens, terrifying others, promoting confusion amongst people, provoking enemies, inciting hostility, dispersing efforts, and laying waste to property and money. In such circumstances, unsanctioned education plays a salient role in enforcing takfeer culture. In this regard, schools, informal education, and child-rearing methods are seemingly related to the takfeer phenomenon (Fahmy, 1995).

Some believe that protecting the society from such aberrant phenomena as takfeer is the responsibility of educational institutions (Alyoussef, 2004). Abdelati argues that the widespread phenomenon of takfeer is caused by jurisprudence decrees pertaining

to the ethics of disagreement that are introduced to youth at schools and other informal educational institutes (Alshabili, 2004).

Alfadil contends that many of the media shows and forums in the Muslim world have negatively influenced the minds of youths (Alqarni, 2004). Others suggest that a causal relationship between overprotected youth and uncensored exposure to media makes them prone to both diverted thoughts (e.g., mind invasion, terrorism) and takfeer (Alkhateebet. al., 2003).

Although educational factors might not be the direct cause of the prevalence of takfeer, some researchers believe that the advent of alienation among youths is caused by the limitations and negative aspects of curricula and schooling systems combined with a lack of good teaching in the religion to foster ethics, values, and order (Hanoon and Albitar, 2008). Alfudla believes that civil sector administrations can play an important role in raising awareness with the goal of achieving security in society and eliminating fear and insecurity caused by such elements as extremism, violence, terrorism, and takfeer (Alfudla, 2003). However, Alkhashmi believes that the family is the chief body responsible for protecting children from religious terrorism related to takfeer (Alkhashmi, 2009).

Research questions can be summarized by identifying a number of educational elements that trigger takfeer, as identified by experts and specialists.

3- Objectives

The researcher aims to achieve the following objectives:

Establish a frame of reference for educational reasons associated with the takfeer phenomenon

Investigate some of the education-related factors leading to takfeer

Propose an educational treatment for the causes of takfeer

4- Theoretical Framework

The deterioration and degradation of education during and after school, along with the spread in class consciousness among the different layers of the society, have made

young people vulnerable. Thus, young people have started to adopt such beliefs as takfeer as their own because these beliefs appear to offer the easiest path.

In fact, in an unseen contemporary revolt among youths, they rejected almost every aspect of daily life, particularly the blind imitation of certain behaviors promoted by the media and other outlets. In addition, they have thought about adopting various hostile means; adherents are even ready to sacrifice their lives to achieve limited personal gains at the expense of innocents (Aba Alkhail, 2007).

Albahnasawi (2006) indicated that the phenomenon of extremism took different shapes from one region to another. In the Gulf States, extremism focused on deeming the following acts as haram (religiously forbidden): singing, watching television, working in the field of law, supporting liberty of thought, and expressing religious diversity. This form of extremism also includes forcing Muslims to follow one opinion on who should be the ruler, forbidding work through parliament, barring women from working in the public domain, condemning other religious schools and beliefs, and considering adherents of Sufism as disbelievers. Such extremism considers contemporary Islamic society to be ignorant and forbids patriotism, nationalism, and/or saluting the flag.

Furthermore, extremism often defames and slanders scholars and accuses them of religious peculiarity, deviancy, and eccentricity. It incites adherents to abandon people with different opinions and forbids befriending them, and Muslims who do not pray (out of laziness) are labeled as disbelievers and forced to separate from their wives and get divorced. In addition, this extremism forces Sufis to divorce their wives and considers their innovative acts in religious matters to be derogatory and defamatory of genuine beliefs. It uses force to change what is viewed as unacceptable and legitimizes harming the society and stealing its financial assets as long as that society is identified (in the extremist view) as deviating from the real teachings of Islam. Muslims are forbidden from praying behind an Imam who has different views than their extremist ones. These extremists claim that the era of peace with non-believers has ended, and thus, their financial assets can be legitimately acquired and their rights should be denied. Even Muslims who are not practicing their religion are considered disbelievers.

In other countries, extremism took different forms, such as putting brains ahead of revelation, criticizing the Quran, and claiming that religious text is human. It uses media and other communication forms to weaken faith, family, and parental authority, thus instigating rebellion among youth against social principles, turning a blind eye to, or even allowing, indecency and/or obscenity. It is characterized by the creation of laws that contradict religion and cites the sovereignty of the nation as justification for their enactment.

Extremism and takfeer are attributed to a lack of understanding of Sharia regulations, through which the views of scholars and scientists are dismissed and religious decrees (Fatwa) are issued. Leftist extremism is caused by the separation between religion and the affairs of worldly life, ignorance, silence, and the decline of religious institutions (Albahnasawi, 2006).

5- Aspects of Takfeer (Based on Extremism)

Takfeer is based on emotions rather than sense. As a result, its reactions contradict reason and logic that is based on religious ethics, values, and norms. Takfeer is loaded with fallacy and manipulation, with no distinction made between right and wrong, and deviates from the majority opinion (Alkhateeb, 2007).

The phenomenon of takfeer varies depending on time, place, and subject matter. A takfeer adherent is typically a futile person with an extreme sense of egoistical superiority. He/she also looks down on others and does not think positively of them until they prove that they belong to his/her camp. The Takfiri venerates earlier generations. The takfeer mode of thought is dominated by this reverence for the past, in combination with ignorance and narcissism.

Takfeer adopters suffocate other viewpoints and may falsely claim or judge those with different views, asserting that they do not belong to the religion, defaming them, slandering them, and calling them names. This behavior particularly occurs when they fail to distinguish between concepts and biased behaviors.

Takfeer adopters have a flawed understanding of certain concepts, such as the difference between the right and the extreme right. They adopt the views of their imams

and do their utmost to acknowledge such views and affirm their loyalty to those who made them, even if they are wrong.

Despite some similarities in their views, takfeer adopters have disharmonious relationships. They often misunderstand adhering to the truth and hold fast to earlier views, even when identifying the mistake and admitting it should allow them to abandon those views (Alsharif, 2001)

One of the most important reasons for the religious failures of the AODG adopters can be found in their distorted way of thinking, which is manifested in the adoption of trivial and incomplete philosophy, over-glorification of human beings, mental weakness, blind imitation, and self-conceitedness. Therefore, they appear to be unaware and somnolescent due to their full or partial submission to emotional reactions, lack of trust, and suspicion of others. They do not give others the benefit of the doubt even when those others try to support their views. When sufficiently strong, envy can occasionally lead these individuals astray and can be one of main factors behind takfeer (Alkhateeb, 2006)

Experts believe that some of the main reasons leading to extremism include premature bias, enthusiastic propaganda, the views and statements of famous and powerful people, and false referendums. Preempting the issuance of supporting Fatwas; exploiting occasions, crisis, religion, and religious emotions; using the names of famous personalities; holding press conferences, forums, and fake occasions; overwhelming people with daily living problems and distracting them with various activities and entertainment; and suppressing freedom of expression are also identified as factors. Extremism may also be fueled by scapegoat policies, preventive strike policies, riding the wave, the carrot-and-stick approach, Othman's shirt, repetition, and media cover-ups. Extremism is also fostered by concealing the source, calling or avoiding attention, reversing facts or telling half-truths, spotlighting, eliminating thinking, charging emotions, and spreading rumors (Alsharawi, 1991).

Contemporary life problems, such as poverty, unemployment, work stress, marriage problems, and demographic factors (e.g., family education, children's upbringing, and damage to the personalities of youth and children through belittling their feelings, views, and opinions) all cause skewed social relations. Spare time, social hypocrisy

and contradictions, frustration, despair, anxiety, and depression all lead to mental imbalances, which pave the way to the emergence of takfeer thinking (Arnoth, 1992).

6- Takfeer Background

Many educational factors underpin takfeer problems. Educational factors are likely the most responsible factors for the growing phenomenon of takfeer. The parents' low educational background can also lead their children to drift away and fall into the takfeer trap. Family living style (either liberal or conservative) can also be a reason for takfeer. In addition, other family-related causes include the modern family method of raising children, the lack of interest in observing religious values prevalent in the family, the type of clothes that girls and boys are wearing, and the degree to which the family is open to the world. Moreover, discrimination between sons and daughters, parental lying, and relationships between relatives, friends, and neighbors are also factors.

The existence of such circumstances in family life sometimes leads some family members to feel isolated or mocked, resulting in a desire to harm a family member or leading them to favor friends over family members, oppose and belittle the views of family members, and rebel against one or both parents.

Thus, experts believe it essential for the family to play a number of important roles to shield its members from extremism. The most important roles are enhancing values of love, mercy, harmony, forgiveness, understanding, wisdom, courage, chastity, justice, and discipline; abiding by social norms; and uplifting personal characteristics (Alrefaei, 1995).

The family can protect its members from drifting to extremism through advancing their personal characteristics, teaching them social roles, achieving standards of social discipline and adhering to them, promoting awareness of the terms and rules of establishing social ties, enhancing values (i.e., love, mercy, harmony, forgiveness, understanding, wisdom, courage, chastity, and justice), teaching family members to economize and not to waste, to value and love work and honor earning living, establishing justice and equality and respect of other people rights, and modeling good examples. All of these factors will enhance language, values, and norms and will encourage good behavior (Alkhateeb, 2001)

In contrast, the reasons leading to extremism and takfeer include low self-esteem, the feeling of being unaccepted by other family members, frustration, lost love, and lack of family belonging (Alrefaei, 1995).

The youth earn their cultural identity through the education system, their social and family rearing (where such rearing aims at creating an atmosphere of harmony and ability to establish decent personal relationships with others), self-development, social discipline, language and traditions, belief, liberation from conformity, and guided openness (Alkhateeb and others, 1997).

Communities of friends and companions can also be an important source of shaping thoughts and ideas, which can be wrong. As a result, youth can learn many dubious and crazy thoughts and behavior. Therefore, youth must be supervised and parents must guide and help them select their friends. The nature of peer communities creates a sort of pressure for conformity, in which the peer attempts to prove his loyalty, gain the approval of his peers, and considers everything they do as positive. Some peers can go as far as believing they have no life without their peers, who are viewed as God soldiers and agents on the earth. Learning from peers takes precedence over learning from parents. Trust in peers by their fellows is very strong and can be powerfully defended. Moreover, commands from peers and friends should be executed unquestionably. Friends are viewed by their peers as the hope that will carry the banner of goodness and reform to their country. The peers who are trusted exploit the trust granted to them by others, manipulating or blackmailing them through knowledge of some private problem, to control them so that they are merely tools to carry out commands (Abdelmoety, 2001).

In the last few years, communication technology has become one of the most effective sources of education. Through those technologies, individuals are introduced to highly influential characters whose thoughts and plans they share, following their commands and instructions, running activities and operations, attacking opponents, and practicing all types of mental and emotional abnormalities (Arabic Center for Security Studies and Training, 2008).

Illegitimate educational sources include groups of different natures: religious groups with wrong principles and deviated missions. Activities produced by those groups can

lead to considerable grief. Some religious groups promote abnormal ideas and can cause unrest among people. Some call for rebellion against authority and the ruler and cause turmoil for people and country, and some of those groups enjoy many privileges and possibilities, enabling them to easily and more smoothly spread their ideas. Appropriate authorities must comprehensively review those groups.

Numerous studies have examined the effect of the instructional methods in public schools, institutes, and universities in shaping the way students think (Ads, 1995; Alhor, 2001; Hirshy, 1996; Bear, 2001; Costa and Jarmeston, 2000; Kohn, 2000; Holms Group, 1996). Those studies have shown the following causes lead students to lose their mental security and confidence in the schooling system: rigid education; focus on exams and having many of them; using improper evaluation methods; utilizing inaccurate reform policies; ineffective motivation system; lack of skill training; adherence to the philosophy of unaltered school myths; the dissemination of views opposing knowledge; monopoly of thinking; disregard for mental capital as a civil right; lack of social equality and justice in educational services and facilities; declining motivation for learning; and lack of management leadership. These factors all contribute to continual failure of education.

Those studies have also shown that education based almost exclusively in teaching theory rather than real-life situations can lead to mental deviation in the new generation, as reported by educators and parents observing student behavior. In addition, sitting for long periods of time on uncomfortable seats can, in turn, negatively affect the students' psychological and social mental health and foster laziness and mental idleness, particularly if the method of instruction is based on lecturing and lacks active classroom participation. These together make students more hostile, trouble making, and rebellious (Alkhateeb, 2006).

A hidden curriculum plays an important role in shaping youth emotions and ways of thinking about religion, politics, and culture. For every declared curriculum, a hidden curriculum exists that should integrate and achieve their goals. However, observations indicate that in the absence of control and follow up, hidden curricula can be misused and can disseminate orientations and instructions that contradict the declared curricula. Hidden curricula have a certain influence on the learner or the recipient that

varies based on the skill and experience of the user (Alkhateeb, 2004; Alssafar, 1992; Alzaidi, 2004).

These studies conform with the conclusions of other studies (Bruzzone, Temori, and Massei, 2009; Canadian International Institute of Applied Negotiation, 1999; Cline, 2006; Krueger, 2003; Moghadamm, 2002; Philip, 2004; and others) concerning extremism and its behavior, which worsen when caused by ideological and unusual circumstances.

7- Methodology

The researcher followed a descriptive analysis method based on describing the phenomenon in question, takfeer, and the educational factors leading to it. The following steps were taken: collecting, classifying, and analyzing data in preparation for the results and then proposing solutions (Ingle, 1982).

7-1- Research Population and Sample

The research population consisted of experts in the High Institute of the Ministry of Interior and the Advising Committee members, who address layers of society proven to adhere to takfeer thought. The researcher chose for this purpose a sample of 20 from both the experts and committee members, who have long-standing experience and knowledge of the various aspects concerning takfeer. The sample represented more than 50% of the population.

8- Research Tools

The researcher utilized a variety of resources and official reports in forming the theoretical framework of takfeer. In addition, reports on interviews with recovered takfeer adherents (after they had been rehabilitated to their rational selves and had discovered the falsehood of takfeer) were added. The researcher also developed a questionnaire composed of a number of categories covering the educational factors leading to takfeer. The questionnaire was distributed to the study sample (experts and Advising Committee members) to closely analyze those educational factors.

9- Testing the Tool Validity and Reliability

For the purpose of validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by a group of five experts with long-standing experience. Their remarks, in addition to the remarks of division managers related to mental security, were considered to finalize the tool.

With regard to reliability, the constant alpha Cronbach ratio was found to be .83. The researcher utilized a number of statistical methods to the record answers of the respondents, including frequencies, percentages, averages, and standard deviations.

The general numerical average of the study is considered high, exceeding 2.75.

Table. Categories of the questionnaire, averages, standard deviations

#	Questionnaire categories	Average per category	Number of sentences in category	Range of standard deviation for sentences in category	Range of averages of sentences in category
1	Relationship between education environment and takfeer	3.62	10	0.37–1.27	2.65–4
2	Methods of communication between teachers and students as related to takfeer	3.26	9	0.86–1.23	3.05–3.35
3	Relationship between curricula and takfeer	3.35	10	0.83–1.27	2.65–4.1

4	Relationship between religious groups and takfeer	3.75	15	0.75–1.26	3.15–4.15
5	Relationship between peer groups and takfeer	3.72	15	0.69–1.15	2.95–4
6	Relationship between child-rearing style and takfeer	3.25	15	0.70–1.05	2.6–3.7

10- Summary And Analysis of The Field Study Results

From Table (1) above, the category “religious groups” occupies the highest average (3.75) in terms of influencing the takfeer behavior. This category is followed by the educational environment, with an average of 3.62, followed by curricula (3.35) in the fourth place. The fifth and sixth ranks went, respectively, to the communication between teachers and students and the method of raising children in the family: 3.26 and 3.25. The table illustrates that all averages are either high or relatively high, which means that educational factors, through either the formal or informal educational system, play an effective role in causing the API behavior.

Religious groups remain the strongest influence in causing the takfeer behavior due to their ideologies, which oppose the mainstream moderation of religious philosophy and teaching. Meanwhile, friends and peer groups have a considerable influence in attracting members to groups that promote takfeer behavior. Educational environment can positively or negatively influence individual behavior. The way is paved for takfeer traits whenever the environment is loaded with failure and frustration.

The influence of methods of communication between teachers and students, curricula, and child-rearing style cannot be underestimated in producing takfeer traits. Classroom activities, recreational field trips, and authoritarian family styles can all encourage deviant behaviors, including takfeer.

The field study has shown that approximately 75% of the individuals in the study sample believe that a relationship exists between educational climate and the phenomenon of takfeer. This study outcome concurs with the conclusions of previous studies (e.g., Alhusain, 2004; Alkhateeb, 1995; Abdelati, 2009; Fahmy, 1995; Filip, 2004).

Communication between teachers and students who are not particularly observant of their religion, especially with respect to the five daily prayers, is primarily passive. This inference was also reached in a number of studies, including Alzaydi, 2002; Hanoon & Albitar, 2008; Alyoussef, 2004; Alzahrani, 2004; and others. In addition, curricula in the Saudi educational system do not include texts that entice students to adopt takfeer behavior (Alkhateeb and others, 1983). However, some texts can be misunderstood by some and mistakenly thought to encourage takfeer behavior. Comparative studies have demonstrated that texts in many countries demonstrated the inclusion of stereotypes in some religions.

Some inferences of the field study concerning the relationship between curricula and takfeer conform with the conclusions of prior studies, including Alkhateeb, 2006; Alkhateeb, 1999; and Alhossain, 2004. The field study has demonstrated that approximately 80% of the study sample believes that IAO adopters have strong loyalty toward their groups. They are willing to do whatever their groups ask them to do, legitimate or otherwise. This conclusion corresponds with the outcomes of studies by; Moghadamm, 2002; Ministry of Waqf and Islamic Affairs, Promulgation, and Guidance, 2004; Almajali, 2010; and others.

The field study has also demonstrated that approximately 75% of the people in the study believe peer groups and friends were the main reasons beyond takfeer behavior. This conclusion coincides with studies by Alsamra'ee, 2007; Falah, 2010; and Alshabili, 2004. Regarding the style of child rearing within the family as a reason for takfeer behavior, 20-60% of the individuals in the study support this conclusion. This

wide range may be attributed to the difficulty of obtaining accurate information on such relationships because takfeer adopters do not always speak truthfully about their family problems. Rather, they often mislead and tell lies. This conclusion agrees with studies by Alkhateeb and Metwali, 2002; Alkhamshi, 2009; Alkhateeb and others, 2003; Youssef 1995; and Abdelati, 2009.

11- Other Findings of the Field Study

The field study has found that most of the people involved with takfeer activities are:

Young (age 19 to 30)

At an educational level between high school and the early years of college.

Unmarried

From families with little or no education

From families with low incomes

From unstable and/or broken families (e.g., divorce problems, second wife, death, inheritance)

From families that are not necessarily conservative.

Furthermore, it found that:

The extremist educational environment at school or university breeds takfeer and adherents of takfeer

Preventive methods for the phenomenon of takfeer:

Publish and broadcast everything related to takfeer along with religious scholars' views on them to the public

Train the young on methods to enhance moderation and eliminate psychological and social reasons that feed into or pave the way to takfeer

Enhance security awareness among the young through various programs led by security officials in a comprehensive community partnership and redefine the role of security officials and their interactions with individuals and society to secure social unity

Revise concepts of religious authority and civil authority and achieve integration between them toward unity

Conduct comprehensive studies on methods for caring about adolescents and youth of both sexes and on ways to integrate those methods into a national strategy

12- Curing the Phenomenon of Takfeer

Conduct a background check on individuals employed by schools and universities in any capacity, including leadership positions, overseas scholarships, promotions, and job assignments to ensure they are not involved with takfeer

Impose severe punishment on any attempt to promote takfeer philosophy and equate such acts with treason, particularly when they take place in the formal or informal educational field

Continue to support efforts and activities made by male and female experts and specialists to offer instant advisory services to extremists who have been involved in takfeer activities and diversify methods of advising and orientation

Monitor and follow up on various events and activities carried out by educational institutes (formal and informal). In addition, make efforts to develop all types of education, including familiar, media, technological, religious, political, civil, and social education

Review systems and by-laws concerning contacts outside the country. Illegal contacts should be deemed violations of civil, security, and religious laws and authority and should be appropriately punished

13- Recommendations

In light of the field study results, the researcher recommends the following:

Activate the university and school roles in developing awareness, guidance, and civil and religious education, thereby encouraging adherence to unity, enhancing values of citizenship, filling the spare time of the youth, and maintaining the safety of the learning environment

Enhance efforts on both formal and informal levels to fight poverty among marginalized factions of the population, who have been particularly suffering

Elevate educational leadership in all dealings and communicative activities, adopting legitimate measures in interacting with all individuals in formal educational institutes, and punishing negative communications

Continue to maintain curricula at schools and universities free from blemishes feeding into extremism, excessiveness, terrorism, and takfeer while paying attention to the hidden curricula in all directions

Strengthen the relationship between formal and informal educational institutes and enhance integration among them in theory and practice through uninterrupted joint efforts

Reconsider religious groups' composition and legitimacy and establish legal rules and measures for their safety, the soundness of their goals and directions, and the integrity of their staff

Care for adolescents and youth through new perspectives and provide better measures for their protection while paying attention to international and societal development; these tasks can be performed by both formal and informal organizations related to youth

Ensure that civil and security information technology organizations play more advanced roles in preserving security measures related to misuse of modern technologies; they should shield youth from their harms and ban the use of some technologies that could cause problems or civil and safety failures

Introduce civil education and make it an essential part of the curriculum

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