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ABSTRACT

Background: Insecurity has become a watchword in humanities; social sciences and a societal problem that has led to the destruction of human lives and acquired property worth millions of dollars. Historically, periarticular in the pre-colonial Nigeria, practical modalities were put in place and monitored the welfare of the Almajiri children. Unfortunately, this beautiful system was later shortened by western colonialism. The paper x-rayed the nexus between Almajiri and internal security in Niger State, Nigeria.

Objective: The paper x-rayed the nexus between Almajiri and internal security in Niger State, Nigeria.

Method: The paper used a survey design in which data were gathered through personal observations by the authors and also the use of an in-depth interview of selected respondents.

Findings: The study discovered that the cultural practice in which parents especially from the country side send their children at a very tender age to the cities under the Almajiri school system pave way for the concentration of a large youth cohort with strong sense of identity in those cities, in which factors such as unfavorable economic, poverty and political atmosphere combines with the prevailing cultural resistance against western education and value system to facilitate the process of radicalizing these youths.

Implications/Originality/Value: The study argued that it is important for the Nigeria state to comes up with a policy for compulsory and free primary and secondary school to all the Almajirai and not in separate schools as it is at present being practice but in an inclusive one.

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Introduction

It is no longer a debate that the types of education practice in northern part of Nigeria is historically different, unique and designed in line with the cultural and religious beliefs of the people, when compared to the
southern part of the country. According to Hansen, Aliyu and Musa (2013), one peculiar characteristic of the northern part of Nigeria that has shaped education in the north before the coming of colonial masters in the late 19th century, was the already existing Islamic laws and religion, which debatable served as a resistance to the western culture. Thus, the colonial cultures, made a significant progress in the South part of Nigeria when compared to the north. This resistance took the form of the Almajiranci system and the Qur’anic schools operate as separate areas and also had a differently aims and objectives with the Nigerian state in the provision of education for the millions of Muslim children who development scholars have continued to use the term ‘out of school children to described (Baba 2014).

Baba (2014) sees the above as part of a broader state's history of isolating Islamic educational entities, first as a result of European colonial exploitation and then as a mirror image of the government's inability to meet its obligations to citizens having a hard time dealing with both their religious beliefs and cultural values taking a backseat as Western ideas became more commonplace. Such Qur’anic academic institutions offer a soft landing for young kids who are barely able to profit from Western secular education for a variety of factors, in the manner that they 'softened' the consequences of the lack of cheap and viable options available. These Qur’anic schools must also be understood within a wider social and historical context. Islam came into Hausa land in northern Nigeria in the early 14th century and the Tsangaya educational system originated around the 16th century (Aliyu & Umar, 2019), when it was promoted and reinforced in urban centres in order to spread literacy. The rulers at that time found it honourable to host such schools. Historically, therefore, Almajiranci was a thriving system of education (Idris, 2016). Sule-Kano (2008) as cited in Gofwan and Emmanuel (2021) noted about the ‘glory days’ of Almajiranci which offered the ‘peasant’ or ‘Talaka’ (commoner) one of the few routes for achieving upward mobility, as a Malam, a scribe, or a minor official in the state’s patrimonial bureaucracy. Almajiranci thus changed from an otherwise pragmatic system whereby young boys were sent off to get an education that was fit for purpose and were socialised into becoming productive and responsible members of their communities, into what is arguably a system that sees boys roaming the streets and begging for survival (Joda, 2021).

Thus, during this period, since the teachers and students under the Almajiri school system are not being taken care of by the emirate system, the burden shifts to the society. This practically explains why “bara or roko” (begging culture), social dynamics and political implications that resulted in the promotion of neglect of this system that is very widely practice in Northern Nigeria. At the same time, Western education was historically associated with Christian missionaries and British colonialists. Its emphasis on literacy in English as opposed to Arabic and its association with Christianity raised suspicions that have persisted, leading to some resistance to its acquisition. The fear amongst many rural northern parents was that their children would be converted to Christianity through such education. This attitude still exists among the rural populations, especially those who have not had access to Western education themselves. Baba (2011) observed that the above contributes to school avoidance and adds that Western schools, with their emphasis on Western or elite values, languages and behaviours have become foreign islands to rural, poor, migrant or nomadic children, increasing their sense of alienation and rejection. This resistance has continued, according to Hansen, Aliyu and Musa (2013), justified by the failure of the modern Nigerian state to deliver on promises of providing and funding alternative schools. Indeed, Nigerian public schools have become a last resort for those without alternatives. They are often riddled with poor infrastructure, poor teacher quality and supply, poor learning outcomes and poor delivery (USAID, 2020). This poor quality of secular education acts as a disincentive for school attendance, with one in every five of the worlds out of school children in Nigeria and 10.5 million of the country’s children aged 5-14 years ‘out of school’ population living in Nigeria (UNICEF, 2020). This system of education has increasingly been perceived to be a problem given that boys are seen to suffer from neglect and to be living with the constant threat of exploitation that comes with life on the streets (Aghedo & Eke, 2013). In this context, the relevance of Almajiranci is often questioned by many for whom the system seems backward and damaging. The question asked is: why the schools have been sustained and even continued to thrive in many parts of northern Nigeria? Hence, Ngbea and Hillary (2014) asserted that the Almajiri system has “outlived its purpose and has become a breeding ground for child begging and potential terrorist’s camps in Nigeria.” as it
institutionalized "child abuse, social exclusion and chronic poverty” in that Almajiri pupils substitute begging for learning.

**Statement of the Problem**

No doubt, the effects of Almajiri school system on internal security in Niger State cannot be over stated. As such, Aghedo and Eke (2013) in their submission argued that the activities of insurgent and other radicalized groups can be understood better as an offshoot of youth bulge syndrome, predominantly due to the daily availability of youths that are ready to serve as foot soldiers amongst the Almajiri students at a very low cost. These children who are in most cases uncontrolled by their parents and other relevant stakeholders, the travelling Quranic students often engage themselves into street begging for alms and survival. Hence, “street life” provides the children with a harmful opportunity themselves into social vices like: the abuse of drugs, theft and successive mobilization for violent causes, which includes but not limited to banditry, kidnapping and terrorism. This paper argued that that unless the practices of rampant child abuse and societal neglect of the Almajirai and other vulnerable groups are checked through the provision of education, prospect for employment and formulation and the implementation of poverty eradication programmes, northern Nigeria is probable to remain a breeding ground of conflicts.

It is imperative to note that in spite of the existence of huge body of works related to terrorism in Africa quite number of important questions remained unanswered, because quite numbers of important areas are yet to be explored. For instance, why does the Almajiri school system continue to attract new students and enjoy the support of some religious leaders? How do the Almajiri students become exposed to extremism? When and how the Almajiri students do undergo transformation from harmless innocent citizens to an embodiment of violence? and what prevent other Almajiri students who are exposed to same socio-economic and political conditions from subscribing to violence? These are other relevant questions remain to a large extent unanswered. It is in line with these posers that this paper attempted to interrogate and Almajiri school system and the challenges of internal security in Niger State, Nigeria.

**The Concept of Almajiri**

The Almajiranci system of Islamic education is not unique to the Northern parts of Nigeria. Educationists and social researchers including Tibenderana (1983), Reichmuth (1989), Brenner (2001), Iddrisu (2002), Ware (2004), Fuseini (2016) and Boyle (2006) point to a similar system of education across Islamic West Africa, especially in Senegal, Mali and Niger (Joda, 2021). The practice of young boys being sent to study the Qur’an under the auspices of a Qur’anic teacher has existed in various forms since the 16th century. Usman (2011) identifies these traditional Qur’anic schools as public agencies for the production and promotion of Islamic knowledge. Their aim is to promote religious and moral education along with literacy and numeracy skills. Yusha, Tsafe, Babangida and Lawal (2013) describes Almajiranci as a semi-formal non-secular education in which male children between the ages of four and eighteen are assigned to wandering teachers called Malams to learn the Qur’an and acquire some form of Islamic knowledge. Female children are not traditionally sent for Almajiranci and Baba (2010) argued that, the existence of females in the public domain of Almajiranci knowledge production process is rare amongst the Hausas, adding that females are well represented in Koranic schools but they are generally underserved. The study observed that girls are pulled out of Qur’anic schools (often Makarantun Allo) as soon as they have learned portions of the Qur’an needed for devotional duties or when they reach the age of marriage at the onset of puberty. So, while these females could continue learning and performing teaching functions, in traditional Hausa societies, they operate within their homes. This paper argued that the Almajiri heritage is restricted almost exclusively to boys; girls who attend Qur’anic schools are not classified as Almajirai as they normally attend schools nearby and for relatively short periods. Most Malama are themselves products of the system and do not receive any salary but live off the support given by the local community. These are often alms received in exchange for spiritual services offered (Hoechner, 2014).
Empirical Review of Related Studies

Akubor (2016) using primary and secondary data investigated the relationship between poverty and terrorism in northern Nigeria: Reflection and notes on the manipulation of the Almajirai system and its implication for national development. The study adopted an analytical and narrative historical method. Hence, the study revealed that in the case of Nigeria, with explicit acknowledgement of the northern part of Nigeria, these variables (repeatedly wealthy, and aggrieved politicians with adequate economic resources) purposely employed and utilize some of the Almajirai children for evil act. The study correspondingly indicated that the relationships that exist between theses sets of politicians and some of the Almajiri students have affected the development of economic and social activities in the north. Sadly, those that have been manipulated, together with the scarce economic resources would have been used to better the living standards of Nigerians.

The research argued that unless more radical measures are carried out, the country may face even more severe dangers.

The main purpose of a study by Zakir, Abubakar, Lawal, Imrana, Habibu, Hassan and Harand (2014) was to identify the practice, prospect and socio-medical challenges of Almajiri in Sabon Gari Local Government Area of Kaduna State, Nigeria. To achieve this objective, the study adopted and utilized a survey model to gather the relevant data for the study. Similarly, the paper using a cluster, administered a well-structured questionnaire to 300 male Almajiri. The findings of the research indicated that majority of the people sampled were aged 8-14; whilst, few of them were identified to be between the ages of 15 years and above. Likewise, many of the students sampled have no single knowledge on western education. It was also discovered that the beliefs of their parents, objectives of the Almajiri system, which is also coupled with abject responsible for the high support for system. Most of the respondents spent their time begging for food and money. Correspondingly, many of the children were not provided with any form of toilets and as such often patronises open defecation, which has continued to be harmful to their health and the country at large.

Context of Security in Niger State

Recently, Niger State, which used to be seen as one of the most peaceful states in Nigeria, just like many states in north central Nigeria has been faced with the challenges of banditry. Notably, before now, ethnic conflicts, herders and farmer’s tension; and kidnapping which were uncontrolled in the north central states were nonexistent in the state. Unfortunately, the state has been hit by banditry attacks of recent; with Shiroro as the focal point of these acts that terrorize public peace and unity. Bandits have been laying siege on Niger State for about seven years now. Eighteen out of Niger state’s 25 Local Government Areas have come under attack by bandits with Local Government Areas like Shiroro, Munyan, Rafi, Mashegu and recently, Paiko and Lapai frequently being attacked and almost completely overrun by said bandits (Dipo, 2021). In 2020, the attacks took on a different dimension. Excluding Bosso, Chanchaga, Suleja, Gawu Babangida, and Tafa, the remaining local government areas in Zone B Senatorial District of Niger state have been taken over by bandits (Dipo, 2021). This development worried political leaders within and around the affected areas and led them to protest to the senate which caught President Muhammadu Buhari’s attention who then ordered air strikes on locations believed to have been the hideouts of bandits in the state. However, residents of the affected areas have claimed that the bombings have not brought the desired effect because the Air Force, according to them, are bombing wrong targets or areas that the bandits have already fled from (Abdulaziz& Mac-Leva, 2021). It is also important to state that a school in Rafi Local Government Area was on February 17, 2021, attacked by armed gangs who abducted 27 students, 3 teachers, two non-teaching staff and 9 family members of some of the staff (Abdulaziz& Mac-Leva, 2021). In the same vein, 47 passengers on a State Transport Authority bus were reportedly kidnapped at Kundu village in Rafi Local Government Area by about 40 armed bandits. Eight of the victims were freed four days later after unconfirmed reports stated that the ransom demanded for their release was paid by their families (Abdulaziz& Mac-Leva, 2021).
Theoretical Framework
Youth Bulge Theory
There is no single and unanimously settled meaning of the term “youth”. Nevertheless, the term is repeatedly adopted to define people between the ages of 15-24. However, in majority of African countries, the age range that is viewed as higher range is 35 and the people within the age range of 12 are classified under the lower range (Joda, 2021).

In the light of the above, the term “youth bulge” as propounded by German social scientist Gunnar Heinsohn and promoted in the 1990s by American political scientists Gary Fuller and Jack Goldstone deals with communities and states that are has a peculiar characteristic of a youth bulge. This means a growing population; while at the same time, faced with partial resources and, in specific, a shortage of significant positions for ‘surplus’ youngsters i.e. the third, fourth, fifth etc. born children that are much more opened to societal conflict and acting aggressive towards their neighbours than those communities having a practical absence of these demographic stressors (Schomaker, 2013).

The basic assumption of the youth bulge is that societies with weak political organisations that are passing through demographic transitions are susceptible to communal disorder, uprising, and fierce conflicts because of the possibility that the youths without a job seek socio-economic development through other illegal means. It is therefore, imperative to state the insecurity presently in Niger State explains the phenomenon of youth bulge, driving young Africans to seek escape from “confining structures and navigate economic, social and political turmoil” (Kandi, 2019, P.3). This disenchantment has been further accentuated by a pervasive negative culture which Abdullah (1997) cited in Kandi (2019) called “lumpen youth.” This street-based culture positions the youth against mainstream culture with attendant negative consequences.

Method and Data
This paper adopted survey study in which data was collected through direct observations, in-depth interview, face-to-face and as such a total number of 30 informants were interviewed cutting across the students from Almajiri School, Islamic clerics, parents of the Almajiri cohorts, the Mallams (teachers of Almajiri School) and members of the academics. The study was conducted between November 2021 to April 2022, the study was conducted in Rafi Local Government, Shiroro Local Government and Munya Local Government; these local government population were selected based on the fact that the aforementioned are presently battling with the problems of banditry and internal security challenges in Niger State. The information from the interview was translated, transcribed and analyzed qualitatively.

The Nexus between Almajiri School System and Insecurity in Nigeria
In 1980 Kano State faced a major disturbance by the Maitatsine sects, with their members observed to be recruited amongst the Almajiri youths. A study carried out by Shehu (2012) showed that the primary followers of the Maitatsine sects were majorly almajiri’s who the leader of Maitatsine effortlessly programmed through his teachings and fake capacities. Thus, the lack of human needs pushed the Almajiri’s to accept the promise that is associated to their social-economic development, which to many of them will provide a better welfare and afford them a better living condition. During these periods, it has been argued that properties worth millions of naira were destroyed; humans were reportedly killed, especially members of the police and the armed forces (Shehu, 2012) This shows a direct influence of social network on juvenile delinquency among Almajiri in Kano State. Worrisomely, the Maitatsine crises also affected some northern states outside Kano, states like Kaduna, Yola and Gombe were respectively affected by it.

As observed by Aghedo and Eke, (2013) the crises began in in Kano on the 16th December 1980. According to them, the conflicted broke out in Shahuchi playground and later blowout to areas such as Koki; Fagge;Yan Awaki and down to Kofar Wambai and, advanced to the whole Kano State. Another group that has been linked by some scholars to have a link with the uncontrolled Almajiri children are the Yandaba.
The Yandaba groups or gangs are majorly seen by many as youths who are usually recruited for political purpose. As observed by Yau (2000), majority of the Yandaba gangs are often recruited from the Almajiri children lacking parental and state controls on the streets of Kano State. Hence, this present paper argued that thuggery life of this identified groups has without doubt affected peaceful coexistence of people in the state and the wanton destructions of valuable properties and lives of human.

One of the major debates amongst scholars of conflict in Nigeria has to do with tracing the origin and ideas of Boko Haram, else referred to by some as Jama’atu Ahlis Sunna Ladda’. Two probable arguments traced the sect back to 1995, when it was called sahaba which was led by one Abubakar Lawan, who advanced to University of Medina for studies, paving way for Yusuf’s take over. The second foundation traced the sect to Maitatsine of the 1980s (Ahizih, 2014). The nexus between the activities of Boko Haram and the potential recruitment of some Almajiri children is not too debatable, as established by Nigerians. The belief of almost all Nigerians is that Boko Haram is an Islamic sect who argued that Western education is a sin. The above is vindicated by the fact that the Almajiri children do have little or no knowledge about western education. Onochie (2011) argued that Almajiri and Boko Haram can be likened to a primary school student graduating into a tertiary institution. Accordingly, one could argue that the two have been inseparable and Boko Haram cannot completely exist without an opportunity to recruit new members from the Almajiri children begging on the streets (Odoemelam, Kidafa, Onyebuchi, & Agu, 2014).

This paper argued that the failure of the Nigerian State to manage well the Almajiri school system has led to an entire range of illegal gangs which comprises but are not unavoidably limited to the above-mentioned. Example, Aluaigba (2009) discovered that begging provides an Almajiri child with a lot of vile and irregular behaviors and corrupt acts because they interrelate without restrictions with people of low virtue like prostitutes, people addicted to drugs and gamblers. The authors of this present papers argued that the Almajiri children are likewise becomes unprotected kids to various groups which can as well affects their mind set harmfully. The informants from among the Islamic clerics had a thoughtful concern about how poor Governance served as a catalyst in promoting radicalization among the Almajirai cohorts: according to him: presently, the Almajiri system has does not practically provides the students with access to political power or even an opportunity to attain a better economic cum social status in the society, its former economic practicality has principally been destabilized and its religious value has come under attack. The Almajiri children are maligned as alleged committers of conflicts and other social vices. Hitherto demand for the system continues. Yet the enrollment rate in such schools is higher than those of the formal western school system that is the reason we have a large concentration of youth cohorts that are socially excluded and politically marginalized.

A community leader also expressed same view point: As community leaders we do try our best to enlighten those youths about the importance of being law abiding but the Government on their part need to do more to change the perception of those youth about the state. Informant from among the members of the academics also echoed similar concern: The government is not responsive to the needs and aspirations of the Almajirai Cohorts for instance there is no social security and welfare packages for the disadvantage groups such as the Almajirai cohort, they are not employable in both the private and public sector and those with some entrepreneurial skills among them do not have access to any financial assistance from the government this makes them to respond emotionally in support of the Boko Haram ideology. In another response by an academics, he asserted that: The nexus between the Almajirai cohorts and the Boko haram elites are purely cultural and ideological but governance and political factors make this bond even stronger in the sense that the hypocritical attributes of our governing elites towards governance grossly isolate them from the rest of the society which therefore deprived them of all sense of legitimacy.

This becomes clear when we consider the views of the Almajirai cohorts in this study where the significant numbers of them expressed concern about how bad governance confers on them some serious predicaments such as social exclusion and lack of political relevance, which invariably makes them, developed an apathy and antinomianism towards the state. The below exemplified the comments made: In Nigeria today, we the Almajirai are the worse set of citizens we are made politically and economically irrelevant by the white
men in collaboration with our politician…. we must return to the Islamic sharia if at all we need peace and justice because not all of us can fold our arms and keep watching as we are gradually being made slaves in our own country, something needs to be done.

It is therefore clear from the above that the Almajirai cohorts are grossly dissatisfied with their status under the contemporary Nigeria state under which they continue to suffer stigmatization and social exclusion not only from the Government but the society at large. This is because the Almajirai demographic cohorts are excluded youth cohorts, susceptible to stereotyping, criticized for their cultural upbringing, and experiencing a disguised feeling of helplessness and hopelessness, with restricted access to communal systems of mutual assistance. Their purported unhygienic, criminality sexual abuse and intellectual inadequacy are the frequently discussed subjects in the academic literatures. This becomes clear when we consider the following portraits of the Almajirai both in the media and academic literatures.

For example, the life of the Almajirai cohorts is epitomized by poverty and chronic unemployment resulting from lack of education and skills needed for better life, this pave the way for attitudinal changes toward the state. Below response are indicative of this: The government is responsible for our destitution because they do not provide Skills acquisition programs for us so that we can earn a living like those with School certificates. In another interview an Almajiri argued that: I blame our parents but the largest share of the blame goes to the Government because they fail to encourage our parents to enroll us in the western school thereby depriving us a better future like other youth.

Among the Almajirai cohorts, the feeling of deprivation regularly originates from three factors: the loss of historical status as an esteemed group, the annihilation of traditional political and social structures and the ruthless predatorship of the local resources by western educated elites and regimes that frequently leaves its people in destitution. The following responses from some Mallams (teachers in Almajiri School) are indicative of this: Before the advent of colonialism the Almajiri School is the most revered and respected institution but the colonial masters in collaboration with the so-called nationalist have collectively bastardized the entire system thereby transforming it into mere institution for the production of beggars and menial laborers. Another one has this to say: The Almajiri school is not supposed to be treated and regarded as it is today, because its represent one of our religious and cultural heritage but unfortunately modernization and the so-called civilization have all contributed in relegating it to the background.

The outcome is a class impression of comparative social and economic deprivation. At every level the fear of many individuals is to be marginalized politically, socially and economically. This means that the Boko Haram leaders originate from the same social group. These group have truly been, and keep on being, the ones that live in constant dread of economic downgrading and stand to lose the most in the downward of wealth allocation that regularly comes about because of economic modernization. Consequently, the enmity towards Western education persisted in several northern Nigerian communities particularly these with reasonable Muslim population, which have challenged government efforts toward revamping the formal school enrolment rate to this day. Against the above background the founder of the Boko Haram insurgency the late Mohammed Yusuf essentially restored and developed his radical ideologies from the existing historical narratives which continue to plays a significant role in attracting host of new recruit to the group to date. Responses from some parents of the Almajirai cohorts conformed this: The western education does not create any positive changes in our society it has rather corrupt the minds of our people, you see them siphoning resources and glamourizing evil of all sorts......so I will not enroll my children in these schools. Another parent expressed his concerned in the following words: I cannot enroll my children in the western school system because am not too comfortable with the behavioral patterns exhibited by those who attended these types of school. Same viewpoints were also expressed by some of the responding Almajirai: I know you will disagree with me but believe me there are lots of heretical practices in the western school system which make us reject it. Another one proclaimed that: All the societal ills we are experiencing today such as corruption and abuse of power were introduced into our society by the so-called western education that is the reason behind the reluctance of our parents to get us enrolls therein.
The Boko Haram ideology thus serves as an important bonding mechanism between the Almajirai cohort and the Boko Haram elites through the institutionalization of the linked fate phenomenon which provide a means for social mobilization in which verbal persuasion and vicarious means are utilize by the promoters of the Boko Haram ideology to indoctrinate the Almajirai cohort by revering martyrdom and by idolizing extremist such as Bin Laden, Ayman al Zawahiri and Abu Mus’ab al Zarqawi, who are seen as reference group for the Boko Haram members, which therefore, boost their sense of self-efficacy in adopting the extremist way of political struggle thereby having them fully radicalized. This paper therefore argued that the more complex the identity of an Almajirai is the less prone he is to be radicalized into violent extremism; he becomes less-concern with the predicaments of the Almajirai as a social group by virtue of his membership to other social group (the yan Boko) but for those Almajirai with no other identity than that of an Almajirai display a higher propensity to be violent against the state due to the existence of a weaker ties, cultural threat and the link-fate phenomenon.

Conclusion and Recommendations
All said and done, it is the contention of this paper that the youth bulge syndrome is very relevant in understanding the process of the Almajirai cohort’s radicalization. More so, as the cultural practice in which parents especially from the country side send their children at a very tender age to the cities under the Almajirai school system pave way for the concentration of a large youth cohort with strong sense of identity in those cities, in which factors such as unfavorable economic and political atmosphere combines with the prevailing cultural resistance against western education and value system to facilitate the process of radicalizing these youth. However, as revealed by the focus group discussion even among the Almajirai cohorts some have higher tendency for radicalization than others, because those with strong affiliation to the Almajirai school system have higher tendency of supporting the Boko Haram ideologies than those who have the opportunity of enrolling in the western school system after graduation from the Almajirai school system. This paper therefore argued that the complex identity of the Almajirai the less prone he is to be radicalize in the sense that the feelings of linked-faith does not seems to work on the psyche of those Almajirai that have the privilege of enrolling in western school, in fact, they do not consider themselves as Almajirai, hence their expectation from the state and their perception of the government tend to be positive and optimistic despite their present predicaments.
To this end, it is therefore, paramount for the Nigeria state to comes up with a policy for compulsory and free primary and secondary school to all the Almajirai and not in separate schools as it is at present being practice but in an inclusive one.

References


