Imitation and Traditions
Evaluation the effectiveness of ethnic identity culture on Architecture

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Abstract

This paper discusses the phenomenon of rapid urbanization and modernity that has omitted communities' traditions. It evaluates the effectiveness of closing in on the sentience of ethics identity, it also presents solutions and instructions that create the balance between tradition and imitation, to conserve the history of our cities and social behaviors.

1. Introduction

As the number of technological options increases, so does the complexity and senseless of identity also increases.

The last few years have rightly witnessed a growing debate among the Arabian developing countries, especially those that which their economies had been enriched, and through the architecture development process they missed the thinking about their identities and imitated the western models of architecture and urban planning which were not very suitable to their resources of ethnic identity or climatic circumstances and socio cultural, they also required themselves had been forgotten to look into their own past heritage to understand the architecture and planning practice to develop it with acceptable new techniques instead of blind imitation, the cloning of the western architecture techniques without care of ethnic identities led to critical questioning about the next danger if the sense of identity will razing or lost.

Searching for architectural identity, our societies should rethink about the real meaning of built environments, this is the that some architects found and they are contentious calling to win the debate on the functionality of architectural vocabularies and fixed the fact that each symbol in architectural design should have a function, other architects neglect this fact and moreover they deliberately imitate in blind action, they drifted and vested interest with post- modernism and technology which make them forgot their identity.

In addition, some of foreign developers who investing in our Arabian area had been imposed their identity within investing in real estate, confirming with their interests, then this case became as dreadful infection on our heritage and identity.

The sense of identity usually reflects in two levels, one at the physical level such as elevations, materials used and method of construction. the second, At the sincere level, such as harmonization with the lifestyle and or honours of the own past heritage which describe the social, cultural, and religious inspiration.

At first glance, the inspiration of architectural styles should be from the sense of society and its own history, with no inhibition to mix this inspiration with compatible technologies and techniques. Through this research, the study will rise gradually to evaluate the effectiveness of cloning these techniques in our social life, and define the acceptable imitation for our ethnic identity. Some examples will be focussing about the refashioning in architecture in the entire world, and especially in gulf areas, which have changed their intellectual methodologies, replicating them in Egypt, and focusing in Alexandria city, which may have more clarity.

1.1. Problem statement

The problem statement is divided into two major parameters. One begins with the role of imitation and cloning techniques, and its acceptability within an environmental context. The second, begins with more tangible issues, reviewing current design practices vis-á-vis the traditions and resource parameters in the Arabian zone, and focussing on Egypt, which seeks to express the built form as a manifestation of socio-cultural institution, which is lokced into a dynamic relationship that nurtures, and complements the sense of ethnic identity.

1.2. Aim of the research

There is an urgent need to resolve the argument about the identity, and how architects, people, and decision makers should respect it. Therefore, it is important to define how identity influences people, designers, and authors, as well as discovering the lack of identity in contemporary architecture in the Arabian area. This raises the following questions:

What is the meaning of identity, and how should public awareness be increased to preserve its meaning? And how do they define their social and cultural identities?

The preservation of identity and management, by using technologies is critical, and difficult in these days, so this research

Aims To:

1. Clarify the importance of identity and its denotations with architectural heritage.

2. Maintain the identity when enabling a higher level of technology or using new materials.

3. Decrease the applications of blind imitation and complicated technologies.

4. Create the usage of parameters of imitation within acceptable applications.

1.3. The research methodology

The Research begins with outlining the definitions of identity, traditions, and context. Firstly, the research discusses the importance of respecting of heritage symbolism. Secondly, offering some excerpts about imitation, before focusing on the Egyptian situation, especially in Alexandria. Finally, an extract of studies is used to recommend methods of fixing the scale of cloning techniques, through a synthesis of parameters for elimination of imitation.

2. Definitions

This definition is for how one can identify identity and traditions, and how people should look after them. This definition does not only address the behaviours, but also social contributions to the behavioural guidance for new generations.

Identity is defined as a (noun) in the dictionary which describes the distinctive character or the behavior of an individual, it is the roots upon which one is brought up and the origins that extend to ancestors (Liberty Alliance Project, n.d.).

It is a process, and not a found object, it is the linking between the generations, it acts as a connecting link between them to transit the culture and civilization through history, people cannot be fabricated, but they can develop it. The sense of identity needs the sense of belonging to deepen the meaning of identity. This strengthens the citizens' adherence to their identity, and increases their ability to preserve their culture and heritage (Powell, n.d.).

Identity Management is applying technologies to the identity, there is no theoretical approach or specific requirements to manage the identity, the strategy of each case could be inspired from the context of a certain community, and the technology used in each project.

Traditions:

A tradition is a behavioural practice of ethnics groups; it is acted repetitively over years; it reflects the social behaviour of individuals, and the degree of their engagement with their homeland and communities (Fragaszy, 2003).

Context:

It is the environmental information for the surrounding space, all information is important to operate environmental aspects of the context around a project. people are always the important factor as well as their activity, identity, and tradition. Physical aspects are also needed, such as the location, and geographical information related to the environment (Dey and Abowd, 2000).

3. Ethnic Identity and Diversity Resources

Ethnicity is the affiliation to a certain group, it depicts the quality of the group's social life, it characterizes a group of people, and defines and distinguishes them from other groups. When ethnicity is added to the identity, it means that there are many specific elements, resources, and facts, such as geographical aspects, nationality, origins, domesticity, culture, history, religion, and language (Phoenix College, n.d.).

The representation of ethnicity through architecture has more clarity in Traditional architecture; it is well suited to transmit a sense of appreciation for the cultural values of a society. This claim is equally valid for the house, which is still found in its traditional style.

The change from traditional to modern in dwelling architecture can be either very abrupt or more gradual, as revealed in intermediate forms of living in the city. Some traditional houses are no longer inhabited and have fallen into a state of disrepair. Others have been changed by the addition of walls between the posts at the ground level to provide additional living space and room for economic activities, the several generations of architects identified in this essay understand that they contribute to the shaping of an ethnic and regional identity.

By selecting special traits from traditional architecture and incorporating them in modern private and public buildings, they try to solve the problems raised by the translation of the principles of wood construction to brick structures. They have shown great dedication in doing so and have created a new branch of ethnic architecture. Despite their exertions, they are not completely satisfied (Bowen, n.d.).

3.1. Architecture and society

Societies must present the facts for its members, and explain the dimension of interactions to create the complex reality, called "The Contemporary Society", among these facts is: social, economic, culture, political, institutional, religious, and other dimensions.

The physical environment is one of these dimensions that must interact and reflect that all this mixture is formatting the structure of the society's ethnic identity (Serageldin, n.d.).

The members of societies must express their societies in the physical world, architects and developers should have an explicit vision to the resulting building, and the urban fabric must include ideological aspects which define the society's objective reality, according to its cultural identity, and to its future inspirations, Figure 1.

Figure 1A depicts the Municipal Building , NewYork, figure 1B depicts the Stockholm City Library, Germany, figure 1C depicts the Harraz mountains - Manakha, Yemen and the figure 1ddepicts the Himeji Castle in Himeji, Japan

The form of architectural expirations is rooted in the geographical location of that society. It must reflect their aspirations, their artistic sensibility, their economic wealth, their levels of technology, the elements of climate, topography, and the structure of their social organization. The net result of all the requests that the society embodies and helps shape the vision for itself, and reflect its activities, and it is the instrument shaping the identity for the society.

3.2. The Technology Form and Culture in Architecture

Modern technology can be guaranteed only through the sustainability system, which guarantees the continuity of skilled craftsmen, and passes on and improves on the needs of our identity. As if militating against tradition, technology has decreased the social and occupational stability of traditional society. The depletion of craftsmen, and the loss of expertise that has resulted, has proven the advantages of modern technologies when combined sensitively with traditional technologies rather than traditional technology alone (Porter, 1986).

This research is not an aggressive refusal of technologies, but encourages conscious use of vernacular technologies in this day and age, which has all but died out in contemporary life styles, and can only be read as aggressive rejection of modern technology, and that it may represent a native wish for return to a more primitive and ideal condition, or a deliberate action of social reform. When the technology of power, sources of energy, materials, and elements of construction were introduced in beginning of the late eighteenth century, products could be divorced from the places they would be used, and the people who will us them, Figure 2.
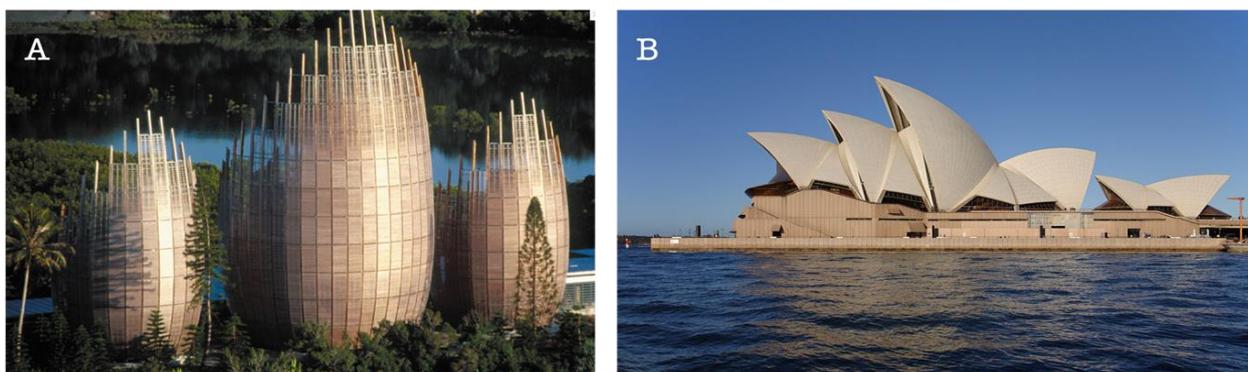

Figure 2A depicts the Cultural Center, Tajibaou and figure 2B depicts, Opera Sydney Australia

Architects who have awareness with the sense of using technologies demonstrated an equality towards all the demands of creating creative designs; they balanced between grandeur of vernacular architecture and heritage, traditions of societies, cultural identities, and using technologies.

4. The Ethnic Identity in Arabian Symbolism

The issue of the identity of Arabian cities has been debated upon in the past three decades. Architects are trying to find the concept of cultural uniqueness and plurality to be considered in their design proposals to avoid the painfulness of architectural symbolism that reflects a specific identity, Figure 3.

Figure 3A depicts the Kuwait parliament building, Kuwait, Figure 3B depicts the Batelco Building and Mosque, Manama, Bahrain

Arab architecture should be inspired from Arabian history, identity, and tradition, it must embody the combined ambitions of societies in this region (Salama, 2006).

In the Gulf area, some practices still seem to be at grips with the issue of identity. Where others do not often address the issue of meaning in relation to the sense of belonging, almost understanding the built environment, and using the modern designs, techniques, and materials which reflect in their mind that they are the friends of the environment.

5. Comparison Examples, does the Arabian Symbolism embodied?

Two examples will be discuss in Arabian zone, were they applying the Symbolism of Arabian identity? The first of them, succeeded in explaining the identity, and the other one, applied blind imitation.

5.1. The hajji's airport terminal, Jeddah

Imitation sometimes is a good thing, when it is from the pith of identity, and when describing the culture of people and their nature. As an example, the hajji's airport terminal in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia illustrates this point.

The design of the hajjis terminal reflects and explains the dialogue between Tradition and Modernity, the designer attached the identity in structural technologies, and successfully indicated the Saudi heritage. The design has been applied with integral form, and an active dialogue. The form has a good shape, which reflects the heat. It looks like a series of huge tents, which gives an expression to the Saudi's forebearers' homes, who lived in tents, and also for hajjis, who came to the holy land for their hajj obligation. They will spend this period inside tents like these, Figure 4.

Figure 4 depicts The Hajjis terminal, KSA

The architectural design of Hajj Terminal in Saudi Arabia has embodied the identity of ethnic Bedouin groups, the design concept depends on the shape of a tent, which is the shelter of the Bedouin people in deserts. The architect (SOM) therefore, purposed a prototype of a tent to create the world largest fabric roofed structure, the architect succeeded in seeking inspiration from the Arabian identity. The concept of the tent brings to visitors a sense of welcoming and hospitality, and it is culturally symbolic, and structurally innovative portrayal for millions of pilgrims annually (O.M.L. SOM architects (Skidmore, Hajj terminal), n.d.).

5.2. Cyclone of foreign developers in Dubai

Complexity took place in the Arabian sense of identity, different countries left it away, and indulged in imitation. Has Dubai implemented the goals of development in its Arabian image?

Do the modern cities have elements of modernized tradition and historical background? Or can we add or remove wallpaper skin to solve this issue and then it's back again to the lost identity?

Blind imitation distresses the social and cultural aspects our communities. The fast life ignores the relationship between groups, and even between members of the same family. This occurres due to the loss of tradition in Arabian house design, and a lack of representation of the image of the social status of its habitants.

Famous international construction companies were invited to build the public buildings with modern designs, this lead to see these new buildings reflecting the identity of the companies themselves, dismissing the identity of the building's context and surroundings.

5.2.1. Images of architecture

By closely field studying Dubai, and newly developed architectural designs of public buildings, first impression are; social wisdom is surely affected by the blatant modernity of its users. At the urban design level, the traditional neighbourhood is dissolved, and gated communities are widespread, which are composed of an isolation of homes and social groups, although they offer other positive aspects such as services and security.

As the architecture influences people in Dubai, people become influenced by architecture. The estimated percentage of citizens to foreigners is 1 to 4, which is a main concern that produces a sense of weakness of identity. This brought different architectural styles, a composition of Modern, Islamic, Indian, and Arabian appeared.

The use of modern building materials and certain wall glass, and controls, directs the character of public buildings in a way of losing identity.

The famous architectural office of Zaha Hadid designed the Signature Towers in Business Bay. It contains three similar buildings, and it is not far from Burg Dubai, which is the highest tower in the Middle East. They defended the design of these towers and their complex facades and stated that the rotation of the building helps to increase the visibility of the creek and its surroundings. This may be a convincing reason, but it is not as strong as the sense of commitment to the principle of identity. It is a dance, swaying the movement of the towers, no sign to Dubai's people's identity, only an appearance to challenge the principles of engineering.

Burg Dubai has been completed in 2009, as the tallest tower in the Middle East, it is a merely a vertical race, and a dream to have the impossible. A group of architects; Adrian Smith of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, brought this

dream to a reality. The tower is now an icon for the collective aspiration of the people of Dubai to complete the epic of showmanship, they want to say to the world that they are able to achieve incredible works, Figure 5.
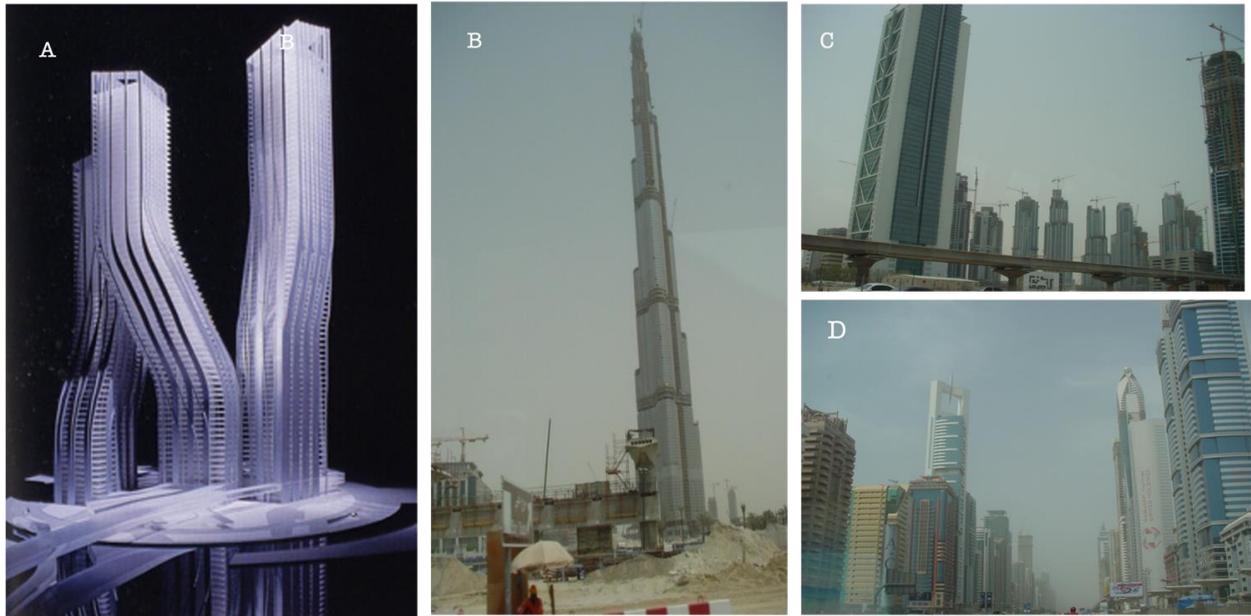

Figure 5A depicts Twist towers, Dubai, figure 5B depicts Burj Dubai, and figures 5C and 5D depict some other modern buildings in Dubai

The tallest building, Burg Dubai tower, the Signature Towers and most recent towers in Dubai, have helped in killing the Arabian identity completely.

The foreign developers also aided this crime, they were carrying their technology which connected with their identity, and they did not seek inspiration from of the Arabian traditions. This does not mean that this research is challenging the technologies, or defying modernity, rather, it is standing strongly for protecting the Arabian identity.

5.2.2. Dubai and weakness of Arabian identity

The people in Dubai became aboulias in retrospect to their traditions, mainly because of many reasons that carried their country to a big bubble of stolen development. Firstly, The captialistic western entity has dominated real estate in Dubai. They bedazzled the people to win their support about attaining their desires, these developers did not understand the cultures and traditions of Dubai's people, even if they did understand, they still enacted subversive works upon the Arabian identity. Secondly, the littleness of nationals number in Dubai and large quantities of foreigners, has drafted the priorities in life for the foreigners, whom variegated the identity in western colour. Thirdly, the absence of domination on the developers, and non-existant rules, make them serving and maintaining the Arabian traditions in their real estate investments.

6. The Cloning Negativity in the Sensation of Ethnic Identity

Modernization and the Dilemma of technologies in rapid architecture, is making people interrelate with changes in buildings' atmosphere, they maybe desire to modify their existing identity to be adapted with changes, this could be considered as one of the reasons of losing the social mechanisms by which society creates, and thieves a new identity, which has negative effects on our identity, the aspects of this negativity is appearing in the lack of the Sensation of Ethnic Identity, the shapes of this negativity can be abstracted as::

- The first backlash of identity cloning to the blandness between citizens and their neighbors, communities, and their homeland.

- Lack of affiliation and bonding of community members to one another within the neighborhood, despite its importance in acquiring identity.

- Increase of visual monotony, wherein everything in our surroundings becomes the same glass and tall buildings.

- The increasing of the cloning of different technologies causes the lack of the sense of belonging to the community, whereas the main sense of citizenship will be as a stranger within these different identities.

- Loss of tradition, which characterizes our identity, and imposes upon our history at the concept of architectural works, this was as the result of the importing strange traditions.

7. Focusing in Egypt

7.1. Egypt between Mediterranean's and Middle East

Mediterranean culture has influenced people in Egypt for a long time, this came politically over three decades ago, which opened new opportunities for economic reform, and considerable developments.

Between 1974 and 1981, a new policy has appeared regionally, as well as on international levels regarding the private sector to play its role in new investment plans.

The Egyptian government decided to strongly encourage international investment, and engage the private sector into future development plans. This influence on the urbanization process and sustainable development, which is clearly apparent in the investment of the private sector in housing and industrial development in the last 40 years.

Obviously, the private sector aims to develop strategic locations in core cities, this of course harvests much more profits when the product is large-scale luxury commercial and office buildings. In new cities, they also target the middle class, because this class has a wide range of customers and they are a larger segment of society.

The culture of the Mediterranean and the Middle East has constructed political ends, added featured characteristics and great value. It helps in sharing the deeper meanings of cultural and human existence levels. Fortunately, the Middle East shaped a rich soil for architectural and urban development, where a considerable number of architects have developed the idea of conserving and maintaining the identity and work behind its meaning (Salama, 2007).

7.2. Egyptian Historical Renaissance

The historic features of Egyptian cultures, the Pharonic, the Coptic, and the Islamic is always used in designs, they add a kind of richness and artistic perspective to new buildings. Architects believe that imitating the old features in new buildings increases the sense of belonging and strengthens the sense of identity between people and their societies, this positively affects the built environment. The argument represents the attitude of Egyptian architects toward using historical features in architecture.

The architects Moemen Afify and Amro El Halfawy tried to apply the pharonic featuers to the exhibition hall and factory of Oriental Weavers, the building seems to be a temple. Another example in   Maadi, by the architect Ahmed Mito, is the Supreme Court of Egypt which is designed in a monumental scale and style, Figure 6.

Figure 6: The Supreme Court of Egypt, Maadi, Cairo, 1999

Farouk Al Gohary architects used ordered arches and designed the building with the concept of Nubian Houses, that depend on internal courtyards. Openings are covered with stucco screens. It is believed that this has been used to simulate the past with a contemporary image. The building brings special attention to the usage of Arabian features of architecture.

Another example that localized the architecture, and conserved the Arabian tradition, appeared in the works of Ashraf Salah Abo Seif, who didn't imitate any other modern visual features, and always used local natural materials that simulate Islamic heritage.

Like buildings the buildings of old Cairo, some of the other architects didn't innovate in their designs, they copy and paste from the past. As happened in Khan Al Azizia project copied some features of old Cairo such as Mashrabya and its narrow openings, Figure 7.

Figure 7: Khan Al Azizia. A Commercial and Recreational Center, Cairo/Alexandria Desert Road, 1999

However, the overall appearance is not credible, because the building's purpose and its function does not match its activities and users (Salama, 2007).

7.3. Adaptive Reuse and Architectural Recycling

To adapt the reuse of a building, it is useful to define this concept; the adaptation of using historical buildings is a process of transforming dilapidated building, to usable and constructionally safe. On an urban design level, it is transforming uninhibited historical sites that have cultural and artistic value to sustainable firms that create revenues to cover the cost of operation and maintenance, in addition to attracting much more visitors and tourists to increase income.

The Egyptian Ministry of Culture has previously applied a similar concept in several sites and buildings, for example, the huge project of reuse in the open museum of Luxor and the Wekalet El-Ghouri building in Cairo, which is used as a theater of folk arts, conserving both the building as a tangible historical building, and the folk arts as an intangible cultural heritage.

8. Recommendations:

8.1. The parameters to define the acceptable imitation

There should be no inhibition to use and imitate technologies, they are very important to developing our societ. To acceptable technologies, the following diagram depicts how we can measure the performance of imitation for buildings, when a building succeeds and passes these parameters, it will be acceptable for our society, Figure 8.

Figure 8: The diagram depicts the parameter of acceptable imitation

The main criteria of these parameters will judge the building. These criteria, such as environmental, social, and cultural response, will gain from users and people. The buildings with new technologies should be balanced and symbolized with our heritage, ethnicity, and history.

8.2. Sharing responsibility: Moving towards a stable identity for Egyptian society:

The Egyptian identity should be maintained in architectural works. Architects have a wide area of history and heritage to seek inspiration from in their designs.

Policy makers, and architects should cooperate to form a defense against the muddling of identity, they should be united in reflecting a culture of shared responsibility in which everyone plays their part:

The architects should:

- Inspire their designs from our strong identity, by indicating the symbolic meaning of our heritage, this must be the main concept represented in their final products.

- Create culturally and Environmentally Responsive Architecture with our communities, and present acceptable solutions to environmental problems.

- Respect our traditions in their thinking, and disperse between our Arabian ethnic, and other foreign ethnics.

- Balance between globalization and localization, when choosing building materials or construction techniques, the styles should be from the sense of society.

- Search for an architectural identity and build an environment within the current developing and rapid modern-day civilizations.

The students of architecture should:

- Study our historical heritage and know our traditions that will improve the sense of their identity in their thinking.

- Persevere in the limits of our Arabian traditions without drifting to the seductions of globalization.

- Distinguish between cloning and inspiration in their design process, this will helping them to achieve creative designs.

- Study and search extensively to know the physical descriptions of different materials, and prefer the ability for our climate and context.

The policies should:

- Maintain all the areas of heritage and cultural value, it should be maintained and simulated in other new projects if it has a location in the context of this area.

- Prevent any developers trying to confuse our symbolism by importing any incongruous technologies with our identity.

- Recognize acceptable technologies and development in different architecture fields, and improve architectural tourism to announce our inveterate identity.

- Care for including public participation in comprehensive projects, it always gains a good quality of decisions, and presents the chance for people to express their identity.

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