

EGWU OKANGA ROYAL INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC ENSEMBLE: AN APPRAISAL

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Abstract

African instrumental music ensemble is a structured form of instrumental music characterized by definite rhythmic patterns. The *Okanga* instrumental music in Umu-Iyida, Enugu-Ezike, in the Igbo Eze North Local Government Area of Enugu State, Nigeria, is a unique royal instrumental ensemble. This music is performed only during chieftaincy title coronations, funeral ceremonies of members or their relatives, and housewarming events. The problem is that no written documentation exists on the *Egwu Okanga* instrumental music in Umu-Iyida, Enugu-Ezike. The objective of this paper is to document this music for further research and to prevent it from going extinct. Inquiry into its background and the changes it has undergone from its inception to the present forms the basis of this study. The study employed both descriptive and historical research methods, including observation, oral interviews for data collection, and direct participation. Findings from the study reveal that *Okanga* instrumental music is performed as a symbol of royalty and prestige. Additionally, the music serves as a means of cultural preservation for the people of Enugu-Ezike. This study will be significant to music researchers, particularly in the areas of documentation and preservation of traditional musical forms in the region.

Key words: *Okanga* instrumental music, Chieftaincy, Coronation, Documentary, Significance.

Introduction

Egwu Okanga, often referred to as the “Royal Dance of pride”, is a significant cultural traditional music in the Enugu-Ezike community of Enugu state, Nigeria. This dance, which has been passed down through generations, is not only a vibrant expression of the community’s heritage but also a profound symbol of royalty, identity, and a social status. The performance of *Egwu okanga* is typically marked by intricate movements, colorful attire, and a ceremonial atmosphere that evokes feelings of pride, honor, and strength. It is performed during important cultural events, such as coronations, celebrations, and special gatherings, where it is believed to strengthen the community’s ties to its traditional leadership and ancestral roots. The dance is accompanied by distinct rhythmic music, often produced by indigenous instruments, which adds to the sacredness of the ritual. This appraisal explores the historical significance, cultural meaning, and social impact of *Egwu okanga*, highlighting its roles, and promoting cultural continuity in Enugu Ezike. It also considers the evolving interpretations of the dance in the face of modernization, addressing both challenges and the resilience of traditional practices in the contemporary world.

Music is found in every known culture, past and present, varying widely between times and places. Music notation has been adapted to many kinds of music including traditional and ways of writing music developed independently in various times and places.

Okanga as a special dance for prestige invokes spirit procession on the initiates when played and danced during ritual festival like *lgba ofala* festival. This why Koster (2011:177) asserts that “the community in this ritual is the victim, while other observers in the ritual serves as the symbolic representation of the community that needs healing, while simultaneously serving as witness to the ceremony”, Music sound like that of *Okanga* drum dance is a “powerful medium for connecting to and accessing the effective power of spirit “(De Witte, 2008:692). Nevertheless, Ohadike (2007:10) argues that “it is hard for Africans to go into spiritual procession without the help of instrumental or vocal music”.

Okanga music making in Enugu Ezike of Igbo Eze-North local Government Area in Enugu state is a communal event like many other African societies. Music features in their day-to-day social and religious lives. No festival in Enugu Ezike culture could be imagined without music accompaniment. Response to Enugu Ezike traditional music in culture is so amazing. Both young and old cherish their cultural music immensely. Enugu Ezike people are rich in culture and their community is one of the communities that modernity has taken little impact on their musical culture. One’s first contact with Enugu Ezike *Okanga* music performance may not give a clear understanding of what the people cherish so much in their traditional music. The reaction is not farfetched; as they can be attributed to the Enugu Ezike dialect of Igbo through which the songs are rendered

On the contrary, it will not take long time before the new person begins to appreciate musical content of *Okanga* music. Although, it takes intelligent listening to be able to interpret the instrumental accompaniment of *Okanga*

music of the Enugu Ezike people, yet when one actually accomplishes this task, he will understand and appreciate the complexity of instrumental performance or accompaniment of Enugu Ezike music.

Vidal (2002) observes that musical expressions in Nigeria reflect social functions, occasions and activities with the day-to-day life of the average Nigerian. He opined that such activities are connected with rituals, ceremonies, occupation, recreation, and entertainment. Through music the social way of life of Enugu Ezike people are regulated and transmitted orally from one generation to another as a means of ensuring the preservation and survival of their society like any other African community. Adeogun (2005) opined that ‘the quality or the effectiveness of indigenous African musical work, as an oral art, is dependent on the musical, interpretative skills of the music makers’. The writer explained that the creative music makers use their skills to vary the systematical and non-syntactical musical patterns to suit the occasion. Every effort geared towards the preservation of the knowledge of African music and African musical instruments is preservation of the culture.

Some traditional musical instruments in Enugu Ezike are titling towards extinction. This could happen as a result of death of last member of such genre in case of living thing or destruction of the last member of such non-living thing, that is, musical instruments.

Music instrument abound in Enugu Ezike culture. They range from membranophones musical instruments that produce sound through the membranes (animal skin), aerophones (instruments that produce their sound through air columns) to idiophones (instruments that produce sound through vibration of their bodies). Most of these instruments feature together as an ensemble in Enugu Ezike music performance during festivals, social engagements or religious activities. Most sons and daughters of Enugu Ezike communities who live beyond the shores of their home land have devoted festival period as the time to visit their communities even if it is for once a year. They enjoy every musical aspect of the festival. The technology of the musical instruments during these festival rests still in hands of music makers who are becoming old and most of their children are not showing interest in their fathers’ or family trade. This study therefore investigates *okanga* instrumental music ensemble in Enugu Ezike with a view to documenting it so as to rescue *okanga* instrumental music ensemble from going into extinction.

Statement of Problem

Despite its cultural significance and unique role in royal and ceremonial events, *Egwu Okanga* instrumental music in Umu-Iyida, Enugu-Ezike, has not been the subject of any documented academic research to date. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no scholarly work has been undertaken to examine, preserve, or analyze this traditional musical form. As a result, there is a risk of the music being forgotten or lost over time, especially in the face of modernization and declining oral traditions.

Literature Review

The related literature is reviewed under the following headings: previous studies, theoretical framework, and summary of literature.

Previous studies

Some scholars have carried out research on the various aspect of instrumental music ensemble in Igbo and African communities in general. Such scholars include Madukasi (2016), Omotosho (2017), Madukasi (2020), Nwobu and Umuezinwa (2021), and to mention but few. Madukasi (2016) investigated the meaning Aguleri people of the south Eastern Nigerian attribute to the *Ikolo* as a sacred drum. In the perception of Aguleri people, the sacred sound of the *Ikolo* is an aspect of African indigenous religious practice which they engage with through the mediation of its symbolic functions in order to create meaning for life. In this regard, *Ikolo* sound plays a significant role in nurturing, structuring and shaping their religion and culture. The objective of the study is to investigate the symbolic functions of this indigenous sacred drum as it concerns aspect of its use in Aguleri society to bring out its religious, cultural, political, ethical and economic significance. The referent point of *Ikolo* as an instrument of indigenous sacred sound is loaded with the ritual symbolism it evokes, which imbue it with mystical power and a sacredness that is played out in the gendered nature of Aguleri rituals. Data for the study was collected through oral interview and fieldwork. The finding of the study revealed that it enables the indigenous people of Aguleri to bridge the gap between the seen and the unseen world and thus bring them into contact with all those forces that are believed to control the destinies of man. The study also found that through its auditory authority the *Ikolo* makes possible the invocation and possession by ancestral spirits in a highly ritualized context. More so, the study found that the *Ikolo* sacred sound provides a channel through which the indigenous Aguleri community activates and sustains unique religious communications with their deities and ancestors.

Okoye (2013) examined *Ubo-aka* music in Igbo culture. Traditional music is vital and beneficial aspect of Igbo culture. All activities ranging from birth to death are integrated with music making. The presence of western

culture in Igbo land and beyond influenced the traditional music in such a way that some aspects are gradually becoming extinct. For instance, some of the makers and players of indigenous music instruments like *Ubo-aka* have died without the youths taking over. As a result of this fact, gradual extinction of the *Ubo-aka* in Igbo culture is discussed. The objective of the study is to identify the roles of the *uba-aka* and its music, and problems facing *uba-aka* and its music.

Nwobu and Umuezinwa (2021) carried out a study on Igbo-Eze instrumental ensemble of Anaku people. There is something wrong with the ways some scholars in ethnomusicology have considered archiving and documentation of musical material among cultures. Some of these come as prejudice or bias regarding the very essence of traditional music. This study is an attempt to review the common approach to documentation of traditional music, which makes a reduction in the vital value of a people's music. The music thus, reduce to artifact, satisfies only the whims of academic scholarship. Here the musical data gathered from the living music of Anaku people are carefully transcribed as a common practice. This however raises issues bothering on the essence of musical notation for traditional music. This notation is often of little or no use to the culture or music owners except to academics. This study employed a descriptive research design. Musicological tools which include participant observation, field recordings and interview of informants formed the methods of data collection. The usual explanations which claim to project local music to the world, to protect them from going extinct, or to preserve them for further generations are all found in the study to be off the mark for overlooking the inner workings of the traditional music and its transmission medium from time immemorial.

Madukasi (2020) investigated *Okanga* royal drum of Anguleri people. The study explored a unique type of drum with mystifying ritual dance in Omambala river basin of the Igbo and its compositional features. Oral tradition has it that the *Okanga* drum and its style of dance in which it figures originated in Aguleri. The ritual festival of *Ovala* festival where the *Okanga* royal drum features most prominently is a commemoration of ancestor festival, which symbolizes kingship and acts as a spiritual conduit that binds or compensates the communities that constitutes Eri kingdom through the mediation for the loss of their contract with their ancestral home. The festival is usually an occasion for jocundity and thanksgiving. People appear in their best and give of their best. Such occasion serves as a catalyst in cementing people's solidarity, and in other words making the Aguleri as a community of "one people-one destiny".

Theoretical Framework

This study is premised on the theory of deconstruction. Deconstruction arose in France in 1967 as a reaction to structuralism and existentialism. It has been attributed to Jacques Derrida, Paul de Man and other thinkers. It relates to the activity of reading to address the concern raised in the way the texts are interpreted. Its application is, however not limited to literary texts. It is good to understand the principle on which the theory operates. This theory states that "texts, institutions, traditions, societies, beliefs and practices do not have unambiguously definite meanings, as they do not have very strict and rigid boundaries.

It is good to understand that structuralism sought to explain how a system works. It was roundly criticized for being static and lacking dynamism. That is why some writers describe deconstruction as a post-structuralism theory. Deconstructionists hold that written words are inadequate to express meaning fully. It seems that their maxim is David Rehman's statement: "there are no truths, only rival interpretation". The theory has been criticized for leading to uncertainty.

Justification for applying Deconstruction theory

This theory is relevant to this because it advocates that written words are inadequate in expressing meaning fully and that texts, institutions, traditions, societies, beliefs and practices do not have unambiguously undecided definite meanings.

Summary of the Revered Literature

The reviewer literature has shown that scholars have written on various aspects of traditional music in Igbo land and African communities in general. From the reviewer literature, we can see that no scholarly work has been done on the documentation and function of *Okanga* instrumental music ensemble in Imu-Iyida Enugu-Ezike. It is this gap in knowledge that this study intends to fill to save *Egwu-Okanga* Enugu Ezike from going into extinction.

Objective of Study

The objectives of this study are to document and identify the functions of the *Okanga* instrumental music ensemble in order to prevent it from fading into obscurity. The study also aims to investigate the historical background of the ensemble and the changes it has undergone from its inception to the present day. These inquiries form the basis of the research.

Methodology

Research Design

The study made use of descriptive and historical methods of research employing participant observation, oral interview for data collection. Musicological tools which include participant observation, field recordings and interview of informants formed the methods of data collection.

Data Presentation and analysis

This section deals with data presentation and analysis

Text 1: In Igbo

Onyoko nyoko erigi idagba means Onyoko nyoko cannot consume idagba

O gwuru onu ba achiyima eka — He who has dogged a hole should come and dip his hands

Ne okwu adigi ya — For there will be no problem

Onye nna ya chiri Eze e chiiri ude — One whose father was a king is now being crowned king

Onyi si na ajede na-egbu eri — He who says the hunter kills and eat alone

Ba afuma ajede ne-ekpa-ryikpa — You should come and watch the hunter in a thick forest

Onye si na ajedena-egberyi — He who says the hunter kills and eat alone

Ba afuma ajede ne-egberyi ikpa — You should come and watch the hunter in the thick forest

Odo na-egbu eryl ma okwu adale ozo — Odo kills and eat alone so that there will be no trouble again

Ugwueze chiire anyi ma okwu adale — let Ugwueze rule us so that there will be no trouble again

Text 2: Anyi shi be Attama

Anyi ejere be Attama Je agoma ma — We are coming from the chief priest house to offer sacrifice to the gods.

Anyi eje be attama, ma anyi je aguma ma — let us go to the chief deity priest, to offer sacrifice to the chief gods

Anyi eje be Attama ma anyi ja aguma ma — let us go to the chief deity priest to offer sacrifice to the gods

Text 3: Anyi abughi kpaakpa oregede

Anyi abughi kpaakpa oregede — We are not akpaakpa oregede

Anyi anaghi akwanu ihe onye ne akwa — We do not cry for another person's property

Anyi abughi kpaakpa oregede — We are not akpaakpa oregede

Anyi anaghi akwanu ihe onye ne akwa — We do not cry for another person's property.

Text 4: O di oyioo

O di oyioo — It is good oo

Ezeocha o di oyioo — Ezeocha, it is good oo

O di oyi abughiochi ma ya bughi ekwa — It is good is not laughing and it is not cry.

Nwa mgbenye — An Orphan

Nwa mgbenye bu okpata ore — Eat from his sweat

Agu kwoore — let the lion roar

Ma ihe wuure gi — So that you will be annoyed

O wuure gi — If it annoys you

Si ya wuure gi — let it annoy you

Mogu na osa ya mejeridi — Because such has been happening

Text 5: Ezi okwu di oyi na obodo

Ezi okwu di oyi na obodo — Truth it good in the community

Ezi okwu di oyioo — Truth is good oo.

Ezi okwu di oyi na obodo — Truth it good in the community

Osọ di gejegeje — Running is show.

Bee onyenye jinu eka ne eraa ne agba oso — And that is why a woman holds her breast while running.

Text 6: Q mara ụzọ

Q mara ụzọ — he who knows the way

Q mara ụzọ — he who knows the way

Gosi na-anyi ụzọ — Show us the way

Ma anyi jeere ejeere — So that we can go immediately

Ma anyi jeere ejeere — So that we can go immediately

Text 7: Ezikeoba ala n igede

Ezikeoba ala n igede — Ezikeoba has gone to the world beyond

Qla n igede — he has died

Ezikeoba ala n igede — Ezikeoba has gone to the world beyond

Si ya la n igede — let him die

Text 8: Anyi abughi kpaakpa oregede

Anyi abughi kpaakpa oregede — we are not akpaakpa oregede
Na akwachitere nwa onye ozo ekwa — that cry for another person's child

Text 9: Onye si na Ezike abughi Eze

Onye isi na Ezike abughi Eze — whoever says that Ezike is not king
Ya jeme Idah — let him go to Idah
Me o mara Idah — so that he should know Idah
Onye si na Ezike abughi Eze — whoever says that Ezike is not king
Ya jeme Idah — let him go to Idah
Me ka o mara Idah — so that he should know Idah
Onye si na Ezike abughi Eze — whoever says that Ezike is not king
Ya je Idah — should go to Idah

Text 10: Enyimenyi

Enyimenyi — Elephant
Eshioma gburu emoro — good luck is better than beauty
Onye o ruru, ya woru — whose turn it is, let him take
Idah onoja — Idah Onoja
O kaa o mee — he who does what he says
Ifesinachi Ugbaiké — Ifesinachi of Ugbaiké
Onu na ekwuru oha be anyi — the spokesman of our people

Text 11: Unu ba ekiryime ihe anyi na-afu

Unu ba ekiryime ihe anyi na-afu — you people should come and see what we are seeing
Ogerenyi afuma ihe anyi na-afu — Elder has seen what we are seeing
Onyeke ba ekiryime ije anyi na-eje — man come and see the way we walk
Onyenye ba ekiryime ije anyi na-eje — woman come and see the way we walk
Anyi agwagokwa Eze kweekele — we have told the king to accept our greeting

Text 11: Ogbenye ka okwuike

Ogbenye ka okwuike — the poor is stronger than trouble
Ogbenye ka okwuike — the poor is stronger than trouble
Ogbenye ka okwuike — the poor is stronger than trouble
A si na eme, emewera ---- it is said that revenge
Abughi okwu ---- is not an issue
A si na emeemewuru ---- it is said that revenge
Abughi okwu ---- is not an issue

Text 12: Ogbo o woruije nwa Ayigwa

<i>Ogboo o woru je nwaAyigwa</i>	--- One who kills and walk leisurely
<i>Ala man'ala</i>	---- Has gone to the grave
<i>Ga na-ata enya oji</i>	--- Is now chewing the eye of a kola
<i>Umu medome m</i>	-- Treat me well
<i>Me m ka manu gi</i>	--- So that I will tell you something
<i>N'diokpu onwu</i>	--- People on red cap
<i>Dika okpu ozara enyi</i>	--- like Ozara enyi cap

Text 13: Omadere eteghi egwuna-efu

<i>Omedere eteghi egwuna-efu</i>	----	Omadere does not dance for nothing
<i>Kama egwu onwu</i>	----	Unless dance for death
<i>I biara be ekiryi ekiryi</i>	----	Did you come only to watch
<i>I biara be ekiryi ekiryi</i>	----	Did you come only to watch
<i>Ezeji na Ogbaje mere agaa</i>	----	What did the king say that Ogbae did
<i>Onye ji gimedomeya</i>	----	Whoever tells you to do him favour
<i>Me mu kamanugi</i>	----	So that I will tell you
<i>Eshu ne je m</i>	----	My cow and my movement
<i>Anyinya m soore ye</i>	----	My horse followed it

Data Analysis

Egwu-Okanga is a mixed ensemble dance found in Enugu Ezike in Nsukka. The *Egwu-Okanga* music consists of a number of performers and instrument. *Okanga* music is highly admired by both old and young in Enugu Ejike. It is regarded and sacred music which is performed during the funeral ceremony of one's father to bid him farewell. In Enugu Ezike dialect, it is said, *Okanga adagi n' ogbenye*, which means that the *okanga* music is not for the poor but for the great men. This statement portrays the class system in Igbo society. In Igbo land, we have the rich and the poor, that is, there are those that have and there are those that have not. The acquisition of material wealth is held in high esteem among the Igbo. Those who are unable to acquire enough wealth are regarded as referents

and are looked down by members of their community as a never-do-well. Hence, an Igbo man is seen in almost all parts of the world struggling to make money.

Okanga is instrumental as well as vocal. The instruments used in *okanga* music are made of wooden drum and goats' skin preferably. These instruments include:

- (a) *Okeregwu* – Small two-sided drum
- (b) *Oke okanga* – Medium sized two-sided drum
- (c) *Okanga anwunye* – big two-sided drum
- (d) *Aryiwa* - a bamboo flute
- (e) *Onye isi Okanga* – Dancer/ cantor

Okeregwu is the smallest tenor drum which is usually handled by a good reputation. *Okeregwu* dictates the tempo of the music and equally changed the rhythm. Its melo-rhythmic sounds often changes the mood of the dancers and listeners.

Oke okanga is a medium sized drum. The player uses a stick to play at one end and uses his left hand to manipulate the tone or melodic beats.

Okanga anwunye is the third drum used in this music. It is a form of bass drum. It has the same feature and character with *Oke-Okanga* except that its sounds or plays lower pitch than *oke okanga*. *Aryiwa* is a local flute made of bamboo. It is a U-shaped at one end where the player places his lips on the round shaped and where the player manipulates by opening and closing. It also has two tiny holes used to vary the pitches. The player can also use it to tell the drummers to increase or decrease the tempo. It can be used change the rhythm and mood of the music.

Onye isi Okanga is usually the owner of the *okanga* ensembles, the lead singer or chanter. He is also the dancer. *Okanga* music does not involve many dancers at a time. In the case of funeral ceremony, the eldest son of the deceased is the only dancers. Palm wine acts as a stimulant to those who play *okanga*. Melor-rhythmic improvisation is usually left for *Aryiwa*, *Okeregwu* and sometimes *oke okannga*. *Aryiwa* player improvises by using the flute to call people's names and nicknames praising the deceased children and relations.

Men also use musical instrument such as *okanga* to stimulate other mourners to dance. The *okanga* musical group sing the dirge in text 1 and transform them into *okanga* drum beats. In the dirge text 1, the mourners are not only full of praise for the deceased's achievement in life, for instance, "onye nna ya chiri Eze, e chireude" (One whose father was a king is now being crowned a king) but he is also calling on the audience to celebrate the value of the hard work with him. For example, the line which reads "onye si na ajede na-egbu eriba-afu ma ajede ne-ekparu ikpa" (One who says that hunter kills and eats alone could better take time to watch the hunter performing in a thick forest). The poet calls on the living to celebrate with the hunter's attitude to work that is worth emulating. The *okanga* drummers recite the song in text 1 and translate them into an *okanga* music. This *okanga* music is accompanied with dancing by the deceased's children and relations. This *okanga* music is only played when a cow is provided for the funeral ceremony of the deceased. It is only those that provided a cow during their deceased's father's funeral that are qualified to dance the *okanga* music. The dirges which are performed on the death of an elderly man are often celebratory, they emphasize the achievements of the deceased on the earth. Thus, the popular *adafe* in Enugu Ezike Igbo that "Okanga adajin'okwu ogbenye", that is *okanga* music is not in the compound of the poor.

The *Okanga* music used during funeral ceremony is not only meant to add meaning and rhythm to the dirge so as to produce a mood for mourning among the audience. Dance becomes part of the dirge when the deceased is an elderly person who the community feels has lived long among to make his departure from this world bearable. However, *Okanga* music can also be played outside funeral context such as chieftaincy title taking ceremony as seen in text 8 and text 9 "onye si na Ezike abughi Eze" and "Enyi menyì" respectively. *Okanga* music can also be played during traditional festival and house warming but the type of *Okanga* music at these occasions differ. While the *Okanga* music for mourning the dead reflects on the philosophy of life and death that of chieftaincy installation and house warming are merely sung for entrainment. In this case, the chief's achievements are recounted and rewarded with praises.

Functions of *Okanga* in Enugu Ezike: The *Okanga* music as a special dance for prestige involves spirit possession on the initiates when played and danced during ritual festivals like Igba Ofala. The *Okanga* drum dance is a powerful medium for connecting to and accessing the effective power of spirit. Ohadike (2007) argues that it is hard for Africans to go into spiritual possessions without the help of instrumental or vocal music. *Okanga* music

provides the people with entertainment. During festival occasion, people dance to the tune of *Okanga* music thereby providing them with entertainment and relaxation.

It is a source of income to the performers. During chieftaincy coronation and house warming ceremony *Okanga* music performers are hired to perform for them. Though this medium, they get money for their livelihood. The Eze (King) and his retinue dance around the open arena with rhythm and music that stir the crowd into unconscious emotion, mudding of heads and waving of hands, a sight which can be better felt than described. The blending vibration coming from the music sways the whole congregation and it is not difficult for anyone, whether member or not, to be moved, while the blending dictates the various steps of the music (Nabofa, 2005).

Furthermore, great *Okanga* music dancers are widely adolized especially by adults. Their idiosyncrasies of dancing and their exploit are talked about widely and in that form, they are searching for spiritual ideal. When the *Okanga* musical instruments are played and danced to, it turns spiritual inspiration and relief to man.

Summary of Finding

The findings of the study revealed that *Egwu Okanga* music in Enugu-Ezike is a structured form of instrumental music characterized by definite rhythmic patterns. *Egwu Okanga* is performed during funeral ceremonies, chieftaincy coronations, housewarming ceremonies, and festivals such as **Igba Ofala**. The music serves various functions, including entertainment, a source of income for the performers, and spiritual upliftment for the dancers.

Conclusion

Okanga music is a symbol royalty and prestige. It is a music that is only played in the compound of a great man; hence, the adage “Okanga adagi n’obi ogbenye” meaning that Okanga music is not played in the compound of a poor man. It is a highly valued traditional music in Enugu Ezike and performs numerous functions ranging from entertainment, economic, religion to political function. However, the performance of *Okanga* music is currently fading away as most of the youths are no longer interested in traditional musical ensemble. The paper, therefore recommends that further in-depth study of *Okanga* instrumental musical ensemble be carried out by further researchers so that this aspect of Enugu Ezike culture should not go into extinct in near future.

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