

LINGUISTIC CONVERGENCE IN CENTRAL VANUATU

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Two Polynesian Outlier languages, Emae and Mele-Fila, are spoken within about 80 km of each other in central Vanuatu (see Map). Whereas the majority of Outliers in the north are spoken on truly isolated islands, the Emae and Mele-Fila speakers are nowhere more than about an hour's travel (on foot or by canoe) from speakers of non-Polynesian languages. The close cultural ties among the peoples of this region have been well documented. Allen (1981:5) describes Efate and the small islands to the north as "a single cultural area characterized by the presence of dispersed matrilineal clans and an hereditary titular system". Guiart (1973) provides abundant evidence of the similarities in social organisation and the complex network of political and mythological connections. Other writers (Nevermann 1953, Simmons et al 1954) have observed the lack of any clear physical difference between the Polynesian speakers and their neighbours. All this indicates a long period of physical and cultural assimilation. The present paper deals with the results of the corresponding process of convergence in language.

The languages in question are:

EMAE (Polynesian), 200 speakers,¹ in Tongamea and Makatea villages at the eastern end of Emwae Island;

MELE-FILA (Polynesian), 1800 speakers, in Mele (Imere) village, north-west of Vila, and on Fila (Ifira) Island, at the entrance to Vila Harbour. Mele-Fila and Emae both belong to the Samoic-Outlier subgroup of Polynesian (Pawley 1967, Clark 1978), but do not appear to be closely related beyond that. They share between 40 and 50 percent cognates on the Swadesh 200-word list.²

NAMAKURA (Melanesian),³ 2000 speakers, on Makura, Mataso, Buninga, Tongariki and part of Tongoa, as well as at Sangava and nearby settlements on the south coast of Emwae;

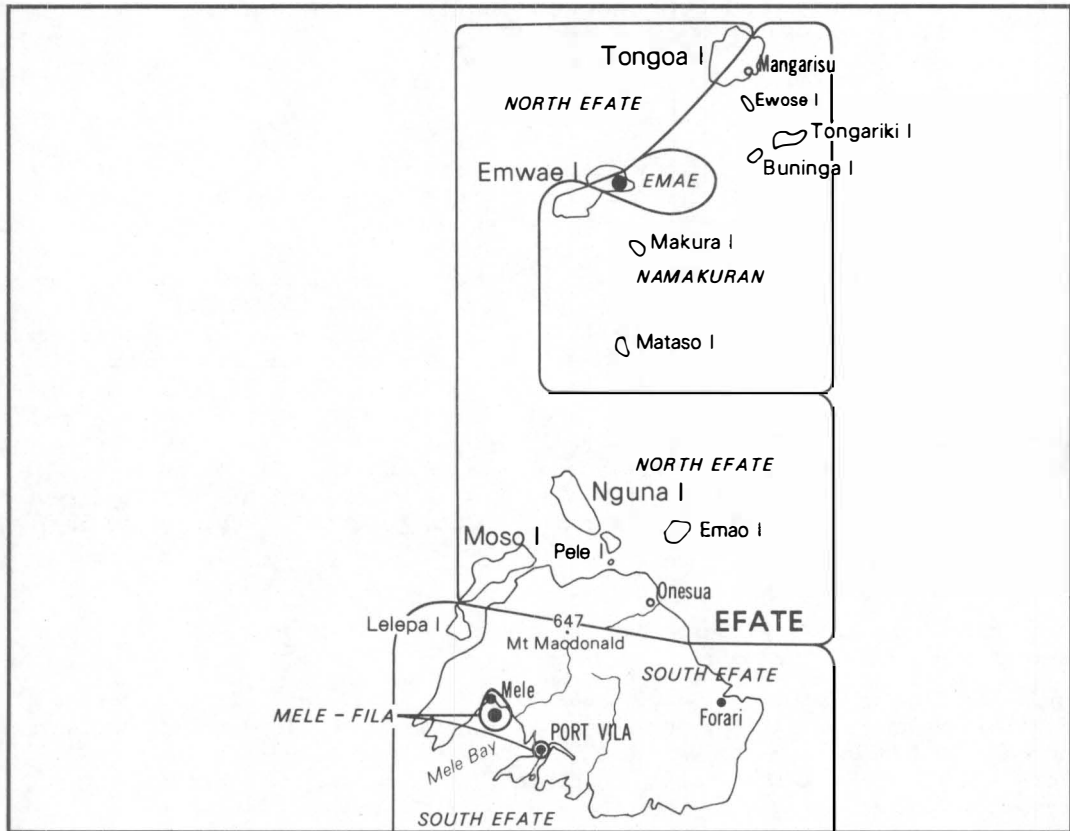
EFATE (Melanesian), 4700 speakers, on Efate and its offshore islands, part of Tongoa, and in Sesake and Marae villages on the north side of Emwae. Tryon (1976, 1981) treats Efate as two languages, but I prefer to consider it as a single dialect chain. Namakura and Efate are linguistically next-of-kin, sharing 50-60 percent cognates in basic vocabulary. They make up a distinct subgroup within the North and Central Vanuatu subgroup of Oceanic (Tryon 1976, Clark 1985).

I will first consider the influence of the Melanesian languages on the Polynesian, which has been extensive in all areas. I then turn to the much more restricted Polynesian influence on Melanesian, and finally consider explanations for the observed convergence effects.

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Map 1: Central Vanuatu

1. MELANESIAN INFLUENCE ON POLYNESIAN LANGUAGES

1.1 Lexical

A sample of general vocabulary in Mele-Fila and Emae shows the following origins:

	MELE-FILA	EMAE
Polynesian	36 percent	52
Melanesian	20	12
Equivocal	12	10
Other	6	8
Unknown	26	18

The 'Polynesian' and 'Melanesian' categories include only words for which clear etymologies are known. 'Equivocal' items are those for which PN and MN forms converge (e.g. MF *Em manu bird*, cf. PPN **manu*, Ef *manu*), or which contain two morphemes of different origins (e.g. MF *vaisara stream*, from PPN **wai water*, Ef *sara flow*). 'Other' consists of modern borrowings from English, French and Samoan. The 'Unknown' component can be expected, with further research, to be reassigned mainly to 'Melanesian' rather than 'Polynesian'.

Mele-Fila obviously has a stronger lexical component of Melanesian origin than does Emae; the latter at once gives one the impression of being 'more Polynesian'. The picture does not change markedly if we restrict our attention to core vocabulary. The following figures are based on the 292-item list used in Tryon 1976:

	MELE-FILA	EMAE
Polynesian	56	70
Melanesian	24	7
Equivocal	10	10
Other	- ⁴	0
Unknown	10	13

Contrary to normal expectations that core vocabulary should be relatively impervious to borrowing, the Melanesian percentage in Mele-Fila actually appears to increase. This is probably an accidental effect resulting from the smaller number of 'Unknown' items. If we compare just the unequivocal Polynesian and Melanesian items, the expected decrease appears. Nevertheless, in both languages the Melanesian component is of the same order of magnitude in core as in general vocabulary.

Lexical influence without borrowing of actual forms, i.e. calquing or re-modelling of semantic fields, is less easy to detect, but seems to be fairly common. For example, MF *nifo tooth, seed* is formally derived from PPN **nifo tooth*, but has apparently acquired its additional sense from Ef *na-pati tooth, seed*. Emae *matua old man, husband* combines the form of PPN **matu'a elder, parent* with the meaning of Ef *maariki, Nmk ma'arik*. For the same semantic field, Mele-Fila has *nuaane* - apparently an analogically created counterpart to *nuufine old woman, wife*, from PPN **nu(a)fine old woman*. The PPN form **afaa hurricane* is replaced by MF *matagi taa*, evidently modelled on Ef *na-lagi atu*, both analysable as *wind + hit*(intr.). Adjustments of this sort tend towards a state in which the different languages are simply, as Grace (1981) puts it, different "lexifications" of the same set of fields.

1.2 Phonological

There is little scope for convergence in the vowel system, since all four languages have the same set of five vowel qualities /i e a o u/. Length appears to be contrastive in all four as well, though with a lower functional load in Melanesian than in Polynesian.

A much clearer contrast appears in the consonants. Table 1 compares the Polynesian consonant inventory (common to Emae and Mele-Fila) with those of Efate and Namakura. It will be seen that the Melanesian systems have additional contrasts at almost every point - the one exception being the contrast of voice in the labial fricatives, which is found only in Polynesian.

The result of contact has been an expansion of the consonant inventory of both Polynesian languages:

- (1) Both Mele-Fila and Emae have added /l/ and /w/.
- (2) Mele (but not Fila) has added the labiovelars /β/ and /m̥/.

(3) Emae has added the prenasalised stops /b/, /d/ and /q/. The fact that Mele-Fila, in general much more Melanesian-influenced than Emae, has not acquired these consonants can be explained by the fact that the southern Efate dialects,

with which Mele is likely to have been in closest contact, do not have them. Mele does, however, have a small number of words with /n/ for Efate /d/ (MF *nina*, Ef *liida* *wasp*, with assimilation; MF *peana*, Ef *na-peada* *arrowroot starch*; MF *tāmaaniku*, Ef *tāmaduku* *chiton*). These certainly suggest that the immediate source had a prenasalised /d/, which was assimilated to the nearest Polynesian consonant rather than incorporated as such.

Table 1: Consonant inventories compared

POLYNESIAN	EFATE	NAMAKURA
p	p	p
	ḽ	ḽ
t	t	t
k	k	k
	b ¹	b
	ḽ ¹	ḽ
	d ¹	d
	q ¹	q
f	f ²	
v	v ²	v
s	s	s
		h
m	m	m
	ḿ	ḿ
n	n	n
g	g	g
	l	l
r	r	r
	nr ³	
	w	w

Notes:

1. Prenasalised stops occur only in the northern dialects of Efate.
2. Northern Efate dialects have v, southern dialects have f, but no dialect contrasts the two.
3. Southern dialects only.

In the orthography used in this paper, b, d, and q are prenasalised stops; nr is a prenasalised trill; g is a velar nasal; ḽ, ḽ, and ḿ are labio-velar consonants. Efate forms cited are in the Nguna (North Efate) dialect, unless otherwise indicated.

For the most part, the new consonants just mentioned are found only in borrowed vocabulary (including more recent loanwords from English, French and Samoan), and all borrowed items retain these consonants as in the source language. A few exceptions to both parts of this statement, however, are worth noting. A small number of words in Mele-Fila show MF /r/ for Efate /l/ and plain labials for labio-velars: the names of the two islands, MF l-mere, l-fira, Ef E-ḿele, E-fila, and the homophonous word for the cycas palm, MF mere, Ef na-ḿele; MF panu, Ef na-ḽanu *mat*; MF pokasi, Ef na-ḽokasi *pig*.⁵ It seems most likely that these were among the earliest borrowings, at a period when the new consonants

had not been established in MF, and that they were too common and well-established to be re-shaped or re-borrowed at a later date. Their semantic distribution, too - place names, objects of trade and ritual - suggests an early stage when contact was not as intimate as it was to become.

An equally small group of Emae words, which must be of Polynesian origin, shows consonants which normally occur only in the non-Polynesian vocabulary (Em lasi *big*, from PPN *lasi, where PPN *l normally becomes Em r; Em bakakau *wing*, from PPN *pakakau, where PPN *p normally remains p in Emae). This phenomenon of phonological spill-over as a result of borrowing does not seem to be widely recognised or discussed, though Anttila (1972:168) gives a few examples, and suggests hypercorrection and emotional associations as possible explanatory factors.

A phonological innovation which clearly has spread beyond borrowed words is Mele-Fila stress, which is now on the antepenultimate vowel (as in Efate), rather than the penultimate (as in most Polynesian languages, including Emae).

1.3 Grammatical

Both Emae and Mele-Fila have been extensively influenced grammatically by the Melanesian languages. The following is a summary of some of the major changes.

(1) In major constituent order, both Emae and Mele-Fila are strictly SVO, as are Efate and Namakura. In other Polynesian languages, verb-initial order is either obligatory or at least a normal alternative.

(2) Most Polynesian languages use a variety of verbless predicate structures to assert identity, location and possession (Clark 1969). The corresponding predicates in Emae and Mele-Fila, as in Efate, use lexical verbs which can be glossed *be* or *have*. The forms of these verbs and their origins are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Verbs for 'have' and 'be'

	<i>be (something)</i>	<i>be (in a place)</i>	<i>have</i>
Efate	vei	toko	veani
Mele-Fila	fei (< Ef)	tuu (< PPN *tu?u <i>stand</i>) lawo (? Ef lawo <i>stand</i>) tokoto (< PPN *takoto <i>lie</i>) etc.	lekina (< Ef vei talakea-na <i>be its owner</i>)
Emae	tupu (< PPN *tupu <i>grow</i>)	tuu nofo (< PPN *nofo <i>sit</i>) etc.?	tuni (< ?)

Note: The different verbs of location in Mele-Fila and Emae are selected by the nature of the subject: *tuu* for persons, *lawo* for large objects, *tokoto* for small objects, etc.

(3) A number of connectives and subordinate clause markers in Mele-Fila and Emae are lexically derived in a way that mirrors their Efate counterparts:

	EFATE	MELE-FILA	EMAE
<i>when</i> (adverbial) = (that) time	(ragi) waina	napoo	turaga
cf. <i>now</i> = <i>this time</i>	ragi waia	napoo naa	turaga ni
<i>because</i> = <i>its base</i> (of it)	na-lake-na	ton-lake (gani)	na tafito (ai)
<i>until</i> = <i>go go</i>	paa-paa	fan-fan	ano-ano

(4) A conspicuous feature of all of these languages is the use of compound verbs. These number in the hundreds in my data, and the process of compounding seems to be productive to some extent. Compound verbs are typically transitive, and the second verb bears the transitive suffix. In Emae the first verb may also be suffixed, but in Efate and Mele-Fila it may not. In Mele-Fila the first verb may have a morphophonemically reduced form, as in *man-saraavia forget*, from *mantua* (PPN **manatu*) *think, remember* + *saraavia miss* (PPN **sala error*). As this example shows, compounding in the Polynesian languages is not restricted to borrowed verbs. A further example will illustrate this for Emae, as well as further exemplifying the greater infiltration of actual borrowed lexical items in Mele-Fila. The original model is Efate *vasa-ṗotae explain, judge* (= *speak* + *divide*). Mele-Fila *pasa-wotaaea* is constructed with the same actual forms, whereas Emae *muna-vaea* uses verbs of Polynesian origin with the same meanings (PNP **muna speak* (*confidentially*), PPN **wahe divide*).

(5) The Polynesian possessive system historically involved two possessive categories marked by *o* and *a*. In addition to what is commonly considered 'inalienable' possession (part-whole and kin relations), the PPN **o* category included certain important material possessions. (See Wilson 1982, Chapter 2, for a full discussion.) In Mele-Fila, the possessive category marked by what are historically *o*-forms is now a more restricted 'inalienable' category agreeing with the Efate category marked by suffixed possessives. In addition, the formal symmetry between *a* and *o* forms which is normal in Polynesian languages has been completely lost, and the historical *a*-forms are now postposed to the noun, like their Efate counterparts:

	<i>my leg</i>	<i>my canoe</i>	<i>my fowl</i>
PPN	*tooku wa'e	*tooku waka	*ta'aku moa
Mele-Fila	tuku-vae	te-paki neaku	te-moa neaku
Efate	na-tua-gu	rarua aginau	tooa aginau

(6) Mele-Fila has lost the productive use of the Polynesian locative preposition *i*, which now occurs only as a prefix on a closed class of locationals (MF *i-ruga above*, *l-mere Mele*, cf. Efate *e-lagi*, *E-mele*). Other locative phrases are unmarked, as in Efate and also in Emae:

Mele-Fila	rat e-nnofo te-panu
Efate	eu taasake na-ṗanu
Emae	tere nofo re bele

They sat on the mat

(7) Two other PPN case markers, *ki (goal) and *ma (comitative) are replaced in Mele-Fila by gaia and soina respectively.⁶ These appear to be historically transitive verb forms (PPN *haŋa-ia *face towards, turn towards* and *soa-ina *be companion/partner of*), and still have some verbal properties: soina can be used as an independent verb (ki to soina maateu *you will be with us*), and gaia can be followed by certain post-verbal particles. Their Efate counterparts are likewise verbal: paki *go to* marks goal phrases, and sikoti *accompany* marks comitatives.

(8) Mele-Fila, Emae and Efate all have a distinction of two 'future' categories, formally expressed in parallel ways. One preverbal particle by itself expresses immediate intention, or an imperative/hortative sense. When followed by a second particle, the meaning is a more general or remoter future.

	<i>let's go</i>	<i>we will go</i>
Mele-Fila	tu tee-roro	tu too-roro
Emae	tu ka ano	tu ka po ano
Efate	tu ga vano	tu ga wo pano

MF tee and Em ka are formally of Polynesian origin (PPN *te 'non-past', *ka 'anticipatory'), but MF too and Em po are not.⁷ If we assume that too < *te + wo, it seems at least possible that in both cases the second particle is borrowed from Efate, though the Emae consonant is unexpected.

(9) Another apparent example of borrowing of a verbal particle is the Emae conditional marker pe: Em kere pe ano *if you go*, cf. Ef ku pe vano. Although this may be connected with PPN *pe *or, whether*, its exact syntactic and semantic properties agree better with Efate than with any other Polynesian language.

2. POLYNESIAN INFLUENCE ON MELANESIAN LANGUAGES

The idea of 'Polynesian influence' in Melanesia has a long and not entirely happy history. The whole question is still haunted by 19th century racial assumptions, under which any trace of lighter skin, hereditary chieftainship or straightforward sound correspondences in Melanesia was interpreted as indicative of 'Polynesian admixture' into a basically quite distinct Melanesian race, culture or language. Perhaps the development of a clearer idea of Melanesian-Polynesian relations, and the accumulation of better descriptive material, in recent decades, may now make possible a fresh assessment of the situation.

In the present case, all I am able to show here is a list of words from Nguna, a northern Efate dialect (Table 3) which I believe have a good chance of being Polynesian borrowings. The criteria for this judgment are various, and are not set out in detail here, but they are basically of two sorts: distributional and phonological. A word is considered a likely PN loan if it is widely distributed in PN languages outside Vanuatu, but not in NCV languages; or, if it shows sound changes which would not be expected in Nguna but could be accounted for by inheritance via a PN language. An instance of the latter is Nguna voonu *turtle*, from PO *poñu. As Nguna regularly shows w for PO *p before o, this form cannot be directly inherited. However, a reflex of PPN *fonu would be borrowed by Nguna in just this form. Here the conclusion of borrowing is supported by distributional evidence, since Nguna is the only NCV language which has a reflex of the Proto-Oceanic form.

Table 3: Probable Polynesian loanwords in Efate (Nguna)

peao	<i>wave on the open sea</i> (PPN *peau, Em piau, MF peau)
na-raki	<i>cold wind</i> (PPN *laki <i>west wind</i>)
rarua	<i>canoe</i> (PPN *laa rua <i>two sails</i>) cf. Futuna-Aniwa rarua <i>two-masted canoe</i>
ta(v)ura	<i>whale</i> (PPN *taf(o,u)raʔa, Em MF tafuraa)
na-tira	<i>mast</i> (PPN *tila, Em tira, MF jira)
vonu	<i>turtle</i> (PPN *fonu, Em MF fonu)
vorau	<i>to sail</i> (PPN *folau, Em MF forau <i>travel by canoe</i>) cf. directly inherited Ef wowolau <i>steer a canoe</i>
kaaka	<i>fibre at base of coconut frond</i> (PPN *kaka, Em kaka, MF mukaka)
kavekave	<i>kind of basket</i> (MF kavekave, cf. PPN *kawe <i>carry</i>)
kokovu	<i>cook food wrapped in leaves</i> (PPN *kofu, MF kofu-a)
koovu	<i>laplap with fish inside</i>
na-moega	<i>kind of mat</i> (PPN *mohega <i>sleeping-mat</i> , MF moega)
na-pora	<i>woven coconut-leaf wall panel</i> (PPN *pola, Em MF pora) cf. directly inherited Ef polo <i>coconut leaf basket</i>
rekei	<i>to decorate</i> (PNP *laakei, MF fakarakeia)
na-roro	<i>coconut oil</i>
roroi	<i>to squeeze coconut cream onto</i> (PPN *lolo-ʔi, Em roro-i, MF rroi)
na-tara	<i>bottom end of thatched roof</i> (PPN *tala <i>end of house</i> , MF tara <i>eaves</i>)
mori	<i>to accompany, escort person to a place; to pay</i> (PPN *mori, Em MF mooria <i>escort</i> , MF mmori <i>wages, pay</i>)
sosori, soria	(Em MF soria)
vakotovi	<i>buy, pay</i> (PSO *fakatau-ia, Em fakatauvia, MF fakatawia)
vono	<i>talk, discuss</i> (PPN *fono)
voroa-ki	<i>assign inheritance or succession</i> (PPN *poro(aki) <i>give (parting) instructions</i> , Em poroaki-na <i>say goodbye</i>)
na-tipua	<i>kind of spirit, dwarf</i> (PPN *tupuʔa, MF tupua <i>supernatural being</i>)

What is striking about the list in Table 3 is first its small size - only a couple of dozen borrowings out of 1500-2000 lexical items in my file⁸ - and second its semantic concentration in certain areas: the sea and navigation, material culture, politics and trade. This is almost archetypal 'cultural borrowing', and even fits the traditional idea of Polynesians as more expert seafarers than the Melanesians.

It would be premature to say that there has been no phonological, grammatical or semantic influence of Polynesian on Melanesian languages in Central Vanuatu. Our reconstructed baseline for the Melanesian languages is not nearly so clearly drawn as PPN. It may be that influences in these areas will yet be detected. But they will certainly be of a relatively minor and subtle sort, compared with the rather drastic effects of Melanesian on Polynesian.

3. DISCUSSION

How are we to account for the asymmetry in the convergence effects observed in the two directions we have been considering? To do so we must make a clear distinction between 'cultural' and 'intimate' borrowing.⁹ Cultural borrowing requires only some type of contact between the two speech communities. It is basically lexical, and is concentrated in areas where the two cultures differ (including flora and fauna in situations where one group is immigrant). Intimate

borrowing requires that second-language speakers (trade partners, in-marrying spouses, etc.) play a major part in the life of the borrowing community. It affects all areas of the language at once.

We have seen (Table 3) clear evidence of cultural borrowing from Polynesian into Melanesian. Almost certainly cultural borrowing also took place in the opposite direction, but its effects have been all but swamped by the massive intimate borrowing from Melanesian into Polynesian. However, as noted above, a small group of words suggestive of the earliest period of contact (on the basis of deviant sound correspondences) are in fact semantically concentrated in typical cultural-borrowing areas.

The reason why Melanesian shows no signs of intimate borrowing from Polynesian in this case is probably to be explained simply on numerical grounds. We can safely assume that the first Polynesian-speaking immigrants were few in number and found an established Melanesian population. Even today, there are more than three times as many Melanesian as Polynesian speakers in the Efate region. If, as this suggests, Polynesians have always been a minority, they would, in establishing trade contacts or seeking spouses outside the village, have had to deal with Melanesian speakers more often than not, whereas Melanesian speakers, on average, would have had only a minority of Polynesian contacts. Melanesian wives, in particular, marrying into Polynesian villages, bearing and rearing children, speaking a Melanesian-influenced second-language variety, would have accomplished both the physical and the linguistic assimilation of the immigrants.

NOTES

1. The numbers of speakers are as given by Tryon 1981.
2. This smooth phrase actually covers two rather discrepant computations. 38 percent by Peter Ranby (personal communication) and 51 percent by myself. I have not looked into the reasons for this difference.
3. With apologies, I use the word 'Melanesian' to mean 'non-Polynesian Oceanic'.
4. The word *soolo* was given by my Mele informants for *salt* on the Tryon list.
5. Na-*ṽ*okasi actually appears to mean *meat* in all Efate dialects today, being replaced in the sense *pig* by Proto-Efate *waaqo. Cognates in other closely related languages, however, all mean *pig*; and the name of the mountain peak in south-west Efate - *ṽ*pau-na-*ṽ*okasi *pig's head* - makes no sense unless the word had this sense in Efate in the not too distant past.
6. *ki survives only as an older-generation variant form with a few locational bases, e.g. *kiaro* = *gaia iaro downwards*.
7. Niuean has a future particle *to*, but to connect this with the MF form would seem to raise more problems than it solves.
8. I am indebted to A.J. Schütz and Ellen Facey for use of their unpublished lexical files.
9. I take these terms from Bloomfield (1933: chapters 25 and 26), though my definition of the two processes would not agree with his in every respect.

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