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## IMPACT OF GOVERNMENT ENGAGEMENT IN DIASPORA POLITICS

Maj Edward Jun

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***Exercise Solo Flight***

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EXERCISE *SOLO FLIGHT* – EXERCICE *SOLO FLIGHT*

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## IMPACT OF GOVERNMENT ENGAGEMENT IN DIASPORA POLITICS

### INTRODUCTION

Canada is one of the most multi-cultural nation in the world comprised of over 250 different ethnicities living in harmony. Increasing proportion of foreign born Canadians and ethnic groups have been accompanied by greater pressure on the government to align Canada's foreign policy to the interests of their countries of origin. This effect was further amplified through globalization and advances in communications technology. This paper will examine government engagements in diaspora politics that has had both positive and negative impact on foreign policy and Canadian society. Some of the implemented measures enhanced Canada's position in the global arena, while others were adopted at odds with our greater national interests. Determining the overall net effect (whether it is good or bad) of diaspora politics is a broader and perhaps inconclusive issue that requires further academic research, and is outside the scope of this essay. Rather, the manner in which the government has participated in diaspora politics and its second order effects will be the focus of this paper. This paper will argue that *future government engagement in diaspora politics with partisan agendas could have negative consequences for Canada's global significance and national identity.*

### BACKGROUND

Globalization and development in communication technology has brought diaspora politics to the forefront. New Canadians and their subsequent generations were able to maintain stronger ties to their states of origin and constantly stay relevant with respect to ongoing political

events.<sup>1</sup> Until recently, state actors, major media outlets, and high profile Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) were essential conduits for transnational mobilization. With the rise of social media, diaspora groups found leverage for lobbying the government and influencing public opinion.

Ethnic groups in Canada have always demonstrated foreign-policy interests. As new Canadians became more established, pressure on the government increased with respect to liberalizing immigration, enhancing trade linkages, and securing aid for their countries of origin.<sup>2</sup> These were natural and understandable actions demonstrating loyalty to their countries of origin, which is not necessarily incompatible with allegiance to Canada. Statistics Canada survey found that 69% of immigrants had strong sense of belonging to both Canada and their source country while only 24% identified as having a strong sense of belong only to Canada.<sup>3</sup> Diaspora politics therefore can be treated as a reflection of the “normal response to concerns of citizens” by the government.<sup>4</sup> Canada’s immigration policy and demographic trends will result in between 44% to 50% of the population being immigrants or second generation by year 2036.<sup>5</sup> As the diaspora community in Canada grow in proportion to the relative population, there will be a need to adopt a balanced approach between responding to the needs of new Canadians while adopting policies

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<sup>1</sup> The McLeod Group, “Diasporas and Development - A Cautionary Note,” 2015, <http://www.mcleodgroup.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/McLeod-Group-Policy-Brief-6-Diasporas-and-Development.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Riddell-Dixon, “Assessing the Impact of Recent Immigration Trends on Canadian Foreign Policy,” in *The World in Canada: Diaspora, Demography, and Domestic Politics*, ed. David Carment and David Bercuson (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008), 34.

<sup>3</sup> Statistics Canada, *Study: Patterns and determinants of Immigrants’ Sense of Belonging to Canada and Their Source Country, 1980 to 2012* (Ottawa: Canada Communications Group, 2016), 6. According to the survey, immigrants reported a higher sense of belonging to Canada than non-immigrants. Only 3% identified as having a strong sense of belonging to their countries of origin only.

<sup>4</sup> Andrew Griffith, “Policy Reflections and Implications,” in *Multiculturalism in Canada: Evidence and Anecdote*, ed. Andrew Griffith (Canada: Anar Press, 2015), 279.

<sup>5</sup> Statistics Canada, *Study: Projections of the diversity of the Canadian population, 2006 to 2031* (Ottawa: Canada Communications Group, 2016), 6. The range band of 44% to 50% represents the gap between the low-immigration scenario and the high-immigration scenario used in the model.

that reflect national interests.<sup>6</sup> After all, diaspora politics can result in net benefits to everyone involved if conducted in a proper manner with the right issues.

## DIASPORA POLITICS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Diaspora politics could be powerful tool when the government consults ethnic communities to develop policies in-line with Canadian interests. Diaspora groups can provide valuable insight and guidance on cultural perspectives to Canadian officials with respect to events and issues.<sup>7</sup> From a secure and peaceful environment, members of diaspora groups can support democracy and contribute to peacebuilding in fragile regions of the world.<sup>8</sup> They can also contribute to the development of their countries of origin by enhancing trade linkages, remittance transfers, and circulating skilled knowledge.<sup>9</sup> Such arrangements can help Canadian society and national interests by fostering awareness with respect to global issues that may otherwise have been forgotten in the background.

Government engagements with ethnic communities in the past have resulted in positive outcomes for humanitarian aid contributions and disaster relief. Following the 2004 Tsunami, Asian communities in Canada lobbied the government and worked with the media to bolster the relief effort.<sup>10</sup> The Canadian government made significant financial and material contributions to affected regions in a very short time. The Pakistani-Canadian community, likewise, appealed the

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<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Riddell-Dixon, “Assessing the Impact of Recent Immigration Trends . . .”, 39.

<sup>7</sup> J.M. Brinkerhoff, “Creating an enabling environment for diasporas’ participation in homeland development,” *International Migration* 50, no. 1 (2012): 77.

<sup>8</sup> David Carment, Dacia Douhaibi, and Milana Nikolko, “Canadian foreign policy and Africa’s diaspora,” in *Canada Among Nations 2013: Canada-Africa Relations – Looking Back, Looking Ahead*, ed. Rohinton Medhora and Yiagadeesen Samy, (Waterloo: Centre for International Governance Innovation, 2013), 73.

<sup>9</sup> David Carment, and Joseph Landry, “Diaspora and Canadian Foreign Policy,” in *The Harper Era in Canadian Foreign Policy: Parliament, Politics and Canada's Global Posture*, ed. Adam Chapnick and Christopher Kukucha (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2016), 220.

<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth Riddell-Dixon, “Assessing the Impact of Recent Immigration Trends . . .”, 36.

government for disaster relief after the 2005 earthquake. Canada responded with financial and material relief, and deployed the Disaster Assistance Relief Team (DART) to the region.<sup>11</sup> By engaging with the diaspora communities in Canada, the government was able to make informed decision on how and where to focus the relief efforts, responded quickly, and generated media attention which propagated personal donations from the Canadian public.

Diaspora politics complemented Canada's international contribution with respect to humanitarian intervention. The Haitian-Canadian community, concentrated in urban parts of Montreal, actively engaged the government to sanction the abusive regime in Haiti in early 2000.<sup>12</sup> This resulted in Canada's public criticism of corruption and authoritarianism in Haiti, and application of international pressure against the ruling regime. In 2004, the South Sudanese community in Canada, with NGO support, successfully lobbied the government to stop the mass killings and torture in Darfur. Prime Minister Paul Martin publicly and strongly condemned the atrocities, and Canada positioned itself as the leading voice working to stabilize the region.<sup>13</sup> Government of Canada was also the largest financial contributor, committing \$150 million to the cause.<sup>14</sup> The diaspora communities, in effect, were able to influence situations within the safety of a host nation in ways they would not have been able to, without compromising their lives and the lives of their families, back in their countries of origin.<sup>15</sup>

The examples provided in this section highlighted the positive impact of diaspora politics. Constructive foreign policies were developed and general public awareness on global issues were enhanced, thus amplifying Canada's global influence. Efforts to deal with tragic

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<sup>11</sup> "Disaster Relief: Canada's Rapid Response Team," *CBC: In Depth*, Last updated 14 March 2011, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/disaster-relief-canada-s-rapid-response-team-1.866930>.

<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth Riddell-Dixon, "Assessing the Impact of Recent Immigration Trends . . .", 36.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> J.M. Brinkerhoff, "Creating an enabling environment for diasporas' participation in homeland development," *International Migration* 50, no. 1 (2012): 77.

events and atrocities, which may have faded internationally due to threats to personal security, were kept in the headlines by those who lived in a peaceful and harmonious environment. It is important to note that the aforementioned cases were relatively non-controversial, in other words *they reflected the general interest of Canadian society*. Also, decisions made by the government did not pit one ethnic community against another. They represented issues that would reasonably have been supported by any of the federal parties in power, not necessarily motivated by political leverage.

## **DANGERS OF DIASPORA POLITICS**

Evidence suggests that some of Canada's most controversial diaspora-driven foreign policies possessed a common factor: partisan pursuit of electoral gains. New Canadians and ethnic communities have continued to lag behind non-ethnic Canadians in terms of wages and representations in all levels of government.<sup>16</sup> While most are thankful that they live in harmony in a country that embraces diversity, there are tangible socio-economic and opportunity inequities which are not entirely unnoticed. Combined with the fact that ethnic communities are concentrated within specific urban ridings,<sup>17</sup> conditions have formed for these groups to be influenced by partisan politics as an outlet from their relegated position.

The government under Prime Minister Stephen Harper actively engaged in diaspora politics, and “showed favouritism towards some groups at the expense of others”.<sup>18</sup> Jason Kenny, the former minister of Immigration routinely organized “friendship days on the hill” up to ten

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<sup>16</sup> Andrew Griffith, “Policy Reflections and Implications,” in *Multiculturalism in Canada* . . . , 257-258.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 259. In 2015, 33 federal ridings had visible minority populations over 50%. Most of these ridings were composed of multiple ethnic communities.

<sup>18</sup> David Carment, and Joseph Landry, “Diaspora and Canadian Foreign Policy,” . . . , 211.

times per year, where leaders and highly influential members of particular ethnic communities were invited to meet cabinet ministers of their choosing.<sup>19</sup> Such exceptional access were extraordinary gestures welcomed by diaspora groups,<sup>20</sup> but were presented to only specific communities of Jason Kenny's choosing. Such favouritism played a key factor in the conservatives winning a majority government in 2011, with support from diaspora groups mostly in the suburban ridings of Toronto.<sup>21</sup>

There were unintended consequences as a result of the government's engagement in partisan diaspora politics. Since the strategic end-state was to bolster partisan support on a riding-to-riding basis, there were numerous national and foreign policies that had to be adopted in order to entice targeted communities. They also had to be momentous and impactful enough to make a difference in the outcome during an election. This in turn produced policies that were often controversial, pitted one community against another, and created a patchwork conflicting and incoherent set of policies.<sup>22</sup>

The government's recognition of the exodus of Vietnamese refugees<sup>23</sup> were gestures intended to garner support from the diaspora communities in Canada. However, the move only provoked Vietnam's Ambassador to Canada to respond: "this bill will have an adverse impact on the growing bilateral relations between our two countries. Despite claims of being non-political, this bill clearly incites national hatred and division, not unity."<sup>24</sup> The government's stance

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<sup>19</sup> "The inside story of Jason Kenney's campaign to win over ethnic votes," *Maclean's*, 2 February 2013, <http://www.macleans.ca/news/canada/welcome-to-my-world/>.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> David Carment, and Joseph Landry, "Diaspora and Canadian Foreign Policy," . . . , 211.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>24</sup> David Carment, "Diaspora Politics: When domestic votes trump foreign policy," *OpenCanada*, 24 June 2015, <https://www.opencanada.org/features/diaspora-politics-when-domestic-votes-trump-foreign-policy>.

endangered existing trade arrangements and diplomacy, and did not reflect Canada's overall national interests.

In 2013, Jason Kenny publicly stated that the "Canada acted against its own interests in listing the Liberation Tamil Tigers of Eelam (LTTE) as a terrorist organization".<sup>25</sup> Canada is home to the largest Tamil diaspora in the world estimated at 400,000.<sup>26</sup> Kenny's statement was an attempt to gain political support from a grieving community, who were dealing with losses and sufferings of family members at the hands of the Sinhalese majority in Sri Lanka. Kenny's statement positioned Canada at odds with the anti-terrorism policies of its allies, and undermined the complexities of the situation faced by the Tamil-Canadians. While the LTTE fought for Tamil independence in Sri Lanka, it had a history of persecuting its own people which ironically was the root source of the diaspora. LTTE developed an active network in Canada, and many Tamil-Canadians have been coerced into supporting the LTTE financially for the sake of safety of their family members left behind.<sup>27</sup>

When Putin annexed Crimea in 2014, Canada demonstrated unequivocal support for the Ukrainian government. With a Ukrainian diaspora of 1.2 million in Canada, the government chose to respond aggressively.<sup>28</sup> Canada sent troops, equipment, fighter jets, and a ship to Eastern Europe as deterrents and committed to a training mission in western Ukraine. Diplomatically, Canada was taking a much tougher stance against Russia than most other middle power states. Prime Minister Stephen Harper made headlines in Brisbane during a G20 summit

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<sup>25</sup> Michelle Zilo, "Canada Acted Against Own Interests in Listing LTTE as Terrorist Group: Kenny," *iPolitics*, 11 February 2013, <https://ipolitics.ca/2013/02/11/canada-acted-against-own-interests-in-listed-ltte-as-terrorist-group-kenney>.

<sup>26</sup> Daphne Jeyapal, "Regarding the Protest of Others," *Social Movement Studies* 15, no. 1 (2016): 66.

<sup>27</sup> John La, "Forced Remittances in Canada's Tamil Enclaves," *Peace Review* 16, no. 3 (September 2004): 379.

<sup>28</sup> David Carment, and Joseph Landry, "Diaspora and Canadian Foreign Policy," . . . , 216. While the Ukrainian diaspora is concentrated in Western Canada, the current generation of younger and educated Ukrainians have been observed settling into urban centers such as Toronto.

when he reluctantly shook Vladimir Putin's hand and uttered: "I guess I'll shake your hand but I have only one thing to say to you, you need to get out of Ukraine".<sup>29</sup> Canada's strong condemnation of Russia was well received by the Ukrainian diaspora, but given Canada's global standing as a middle power, the saber-rattling had no bearing on the outcome of the situation. It only agitated diplomatic tensions between Canada and Russia, and unnecessarily disrupted Canada's commercial interests for no reason other than to gain domestic support. Worse yet, the empty threats and benign policies placed Canada in danger of being regarded as inconsequential in the international stage.<sup>30</sup>

Most of the examples presented in this section were controversial policies implemented in a calculated manner for the purposes of domestic political endorsement. At best, the end results were foreign policies that were at odds with the greater interests of Canadian public. Unfortunately, some of the more controversial decisions resulted in a series of inconsistent foreign policies that compromised Canada's integrity and merit in the realm of international diplomacy. Canada's immigration and demographic trends towards greater diversity will place further pressure for the government to engage in diaspora politics.<sup>31</sup> With no federal regulations regarding diaspora engagement<sup>32</sup>, the onus is on future governments to resist the temptation to exploit ethnic communities for short term partisan gain. Canadians should also recognize that such divisive policies will only benefit a small sub-set of the population while compromising the greater national interests, and must be prepared to hold the government accountable at the ballots.

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<sup>29</sup> Steven Chase, "Harper tells Putin to 'Get Out of Ukraine' in G20 Encounter," *The Globe and Mail*, 14 November 2014. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/harper-and-g20-leaders-confront-putin-problem-at-australia-meet/article21603599>.

<sup>30</sup> David Carment, and Joseph Landry, "Diaspora and Canadian Foreign Policy," . . . , 213.

<sup>31</sup> Elizabeth Riddell-Dixon, "Assessing the Impact of Recent Immigration Trends . . . , 38.

<sup>32</sup> David Carment, "Diaspora Politics: When domestic votes trump foreign policy," *OpenCanada* , 24 June 2015, <https://www.opencanada.org/features/diaspora-politics-when-domestic-votes-trump-foreign-policy>.

## EFFECT ON NATIONAL IDENTITY

Canada is one of the most successful multicultural societies in the world where immigrants make up 20% of the population.<sup>33</sup> While Canada is not completely immune to systemic racial barriers and hate crimes, racial intolerance is largely ignored in mainstream politics and no anti-immigration policies resembling those in Europe exist.<sup>34</sup> Recent data suggests that immigration is socially accepted by majority of Canadians, and that multiculturalism is viewed as one of the most important symbols in Canada's national identity.<sup>35</sup>

Yet, a closer examination of Canada's multiculturalism reveals a much more fragile balance between support for immigration and pluralism. There exists discrepancies between the true definitions versus the popular notion of what Canadians consider as multiculturalism. The federal multiculturalism policies, conceived through the Canadian Multiculturalism Act of 1988, are based on inclusion and protecting the right to maintain cultural heritage of one's origin.<sup>36</sup> However, polls conducted suggest that most Canadians are unaware of the true intent of the policy and are overwhelmingly in favour of immigrants integrating fully into the mainstream Canadian society at the earliest opportunity.<sup>37</sup> Popular multiculturalism in Canada is actually "enthusiasm for immigration and its cultural, and economic benefits"<sup>38</sup> and has gained traction as a symbol of distinction from the American approach.<sup>39</sup> While popular multiculturalism helped to

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<sup>33</sup> Statistics Canada, *Immigration and Ethnocultural Diversity in Canada* (Ottawa: Canada Communications Group, 2011), 7. Canada has the highest immigrant population within the G7, and is second in the world only to Australia.

<sup>34</sup> Andrew Griffith, "Policy Reflections and Implications," in *Multiculturalism in Canada*. . . , 264.

<sup>35</sup> Jeffrey G. Reitz, "Multiculturalism Policies and Popular Multiculturalism in the Development of Canadian Immigration," in *The Multiculturalism Question*, ed. Jack Jedwab (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014), 116.

<sup>36</sup> Canada. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship. Annual Report on the Operation of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act 2015-2016 - Diversity and Inclusion in Action. Ottawa: Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, 2017, 6.

<sup>37</sup> Jeffrey G. Reitz, "Multiculturalism Policies and Popular Multiculturalism . . . , 117.

<sup>38</sup> Jeffrey G. Reitz, "Multiculturalism Policies and Popular Multiculturalism . . . , 122

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 117

foster an inclusive environment for newcomers, it also concealed the awkward issue regarding preservation of culture amongst the ethnic communities. The very idea of ethnic communities and enclaves does not sit well with most non-ethnic Canadians, but is tolerated only as a second order effect of progressive immigration policy. This is the true state of multiculturalism in Canada, and partisan meddling will only erode this fragile balance.

Canadians generally do not object to newcomers advocating with respect to events and issues happening in their states of origin, but are less tolerant if those concerns are in contrast to the general interests of Canada.<sup>40</sup> The long term consequence of partisan diaspora politics affected all ethnic communities and cultures as the Canadian public viewed such moves as special-interest lobbying. The foundation of Canada's diversity and preservation of culture has been placed further into the shadows of popular notion of multiculturalism, as troubling aspects of "diaspora politics has helped to erode civil society by encouraging Canadian voters to organize along ethnic lines".<sup>41</sup>

Ethnic communities in Canada fare very differently based on size, cohesiveness, and socio-economics. Some of the more established communities tend to be more prosperous, able to mobilize, and often represented with a unified voice. Past partisan support by governments have often targeted such groups, where it was determined that there would be higher probability of political payoff.<sup>42</sup> Prime Minister Harper, throughout his tenure, consistently adopted a pro-Israel stance with its Middle East policy. The Jewish-Canadian community who was the benefactor, while small in number, were well organized and concentrated in specific ridings.<sup>43</sup> The Arab-

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<sup>40</sup> Andrew Griffith, "Policy Reflections and Implications," in *Multiculturalism in Canada*. . . , 275.

<sup>41</sup> David Carment, "Diaspora Politics: When domestic votes trump foreign policy," *OpenCanada* , 24 June 2015, <https://www.opencanada.org/features/diaspora-politics-when-domestic-votes-trump-foreign-policy>.

<sup>42</sup> David Carment, and Joseph Landry, "Diaspora and Canadian Foreign Policy," . . . , 212.

<sup>43</sup> Andrew Griffith, "Policy Reflections and Implications," in *Multiculturalism in Canada*. . . , 278.

Canadians and Iranian-Canadians were disenfranchised, but their geographical dispersion and lack of strong representation was viewed as inconsequential for election outcomes.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, decisions such as the closure of the Canadian Embassy in Tehran was an easy one for the government.<sup>45</sup> Such applications of diaspora politics will further alienate the already marginalized groups and damage Canada's democratic process. This will lead to tensions and animosity amongst different ethnic communities, and will work against the grains of a progressive and constructive multicultural society.<sup>46</sup>

While damages caused by such policies have mostly been contained to date, Canada's shifting demographics towards greater diversity<sup>47</sup> will not be able to sustain such disruptive conduct by future governments. Self-serving and selective government engagements with the diaspora communities will test the very fabric of Canada's tolerance of its multicultural footprint, and potentially threaten a delicate component of Canadian national identity.

## CONCLUSION

One should not be alarmed that diaspora politics has influenced Canada's foreign policies in the past. As newcomers adopt Canada as their home, it is a natural human tendency to contribute to the well-being of both the Canadian society as well as their countries of origin. Government engagement with diaspora groups for policy development can be a positive practice that benefits all parties, so long as they are in-line with general national interests. This paper

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 279.

<sup>45</sup> David Carment, and Joseph Landry, "Diaspora and Canadian Foreign Policy," . . . , 213.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

<sup>47</sup> Statistics Canada, *Study: Projections of the diversity of the Canadian population, 2006 to 2031* (Ottawa: Canada Communications Group, 2016), 6.

demonstrated cases where diaspora politics complemented the government's undertaking in humanitarian aid and disaster relief.

Diaspora politics also has an unappealing side with negative second order effects to Canada's foreign policy and pluralism. Canada has witnessed this negative aspect of diaspora politics when the government attempted to garner partisan support from ethnic communities. Vulnerabilities of diaspora groups such as socio-economics and underrepresentation were exploited to harvest partisan support based on electoral boundaries. In order for this tactic to be effective, the government had to take sides in numerous divisive and controversial issues. Canada implemented foreign policies in contrast to the general interest of the nation, and lost diplomatic credibility with incoherent and inconsequential global strategy.

Government pursuit of partisan diaspora politics could be perceived as favouritism and special treatment by the rest of the country, especially with respect to issues that are at odds with national interests. As Canada's diaspora groups increases in size, future partisan engagement from the government will jeopardized Canada's tolerance for diversity. Pluralism in Canada is currently being reinforced by popular multiculturalism in a delicate balance. Therefore future disruption by short-sighted government actions may erode Canada's national identity.

Future governments and voters alike must be aware that harnessing the powers of diaspora politics for partisan gains will come at a heavy cost to the nation. While the potential reward may be difficult to ignore, the unintended consequences and second order effects may produce a regretful chapter for Canada.

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