Immigration Policy and Research in Canada: Pure or Applied?

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A key question in policy studies concerns the utilization of research in policy making. Dobuzinski (1996:118-9) notes that there has been a "burgeoning literature" on the utilization of social science research in policy making, but "not much has been written on the Canadian case." However, Brooks and Gagnon (1988; 1990) have traced the changes which have occurred since World War II, comparing the experience of Quebec with English Canada, concerning social scientists, policy and the state. They note the growing importance of the "expert". Economists, particularly, have become what they call a "clerisy linked to the dominant segment of the capitalist class" (Brooks and Gagnon, 1988:104). Lawyers with special qualifications in the fields of corporate and international law may play a similar role. The activities of the expert may be contrasted with that of the disinterested researcher, on the one hand, and the "social critic" on the other. The latter may question the fundamental beliefs and values determining policy decisions, whereas the policy critic shares the dominant values and goals pursued, questioning only the means proposed for their implementation.

Much of the so-called "policy research" (whether undertaken by government departments, academics or the private sector) carried out in the past has been simply an information gathering process, including the study of public opinion. The information may be related directly, or indirectly, to the policy decision-making process, or the administration of publicly supported immigration, health, welfare and other social programs. Very little of the work undertaken in the so-called "strategic", applied or policy oriented fields, contributes to the advancement of science. New theoretical advances, methodological break-throughs, or fundamental contributions to our understanding of human behaviour are rarely achieved as a consequence of such studies. This is not to under-estimate their importance, but it must be understood they can never be a substitute for more basic or "pure" scientific research, whether in economics, demography, sociology, or any other field.

Immigration is one field where planning and programming have been associated with the government's own "in-house" research, designed to study the effects of immigration on the economy, and the adaptation of immigrants in their first few years in the country. At the same time there has been extensive academic research on various aspects of the immigration process, together with a growing influence of independent "think-tanks" and
policy institutes. Therefore, it constitutes an interesting case-study to consider the contribution that such research has made to the policy and planning process.

Policy Issues in Immigration

Among the major policy questions facing the government in the later 1980's and early 1990's were those generated by global forces. The demise of the Soviet Union, which had maintained a strict control of emigration, together with political unrest in Asia, Latin America, Africa and, in due course, eastern and central Europe, were contributory factors to a substantial outflow of refugees, as well as economic migrants. Border control became a major preoccupation not only of Canada, but of all advanced industrial countries. New legislation (Bills C55, C84 and C86) was passed in Canada, and similar laws and regulations in other countries, empowering immigration officers to interdict and refuse admission to undocumented arrivals, to require the departure of or to deport those who overstayed visas, or otherwise failed to meet immigration requirements or satisfy asylum eligibility criteria. This led to the setting up of an "Informal Consultations Group" of senior civil servants and politicians from major receiving countries, whose purpose was to "harmonize" immigration policies (Widgren, 1991). There was much debate concerning the need for temporary asylum, on the one hand, and the longer term resettlement of refugees on the other (Adelman and Lanphier, 1990). The idea of "humane deterrence" dominated the policy agenda. There was a growing concern with the need for "early warning" of any future mass movements of population (Richmond, 1994:221; Schmeidl, 1997).

Other policy issues in this period revolved around the question of immigration levels, the appropriate balance between the categories of "independent immigrant" (including business and investor classes), "family reunion" and "humanitarian" immigration. Backlogs of applicants in the "family class" and delays in processing visas in some posts abroad caused concern. In this connection there was much discussion of the economic "cost-benefits" of immigration generally, and also of particular categories of arrivals (Akbari, 1989; Akbar & DeVoretz, 1993; Coulson & DeVoretz, 1993). The use of temporary employment visas for certain categories of worker was generally treated as separate from the 'landed' or 'permanent' immigration movement (Boyd et. al., 1986; Michalowski, 1993).

Further policy questions concerned government assistance toward settlement in early years, in which Provincial and Municipal governments, as well as voluntary agencies, also had concerns. Levels of support for official language training classes, citizenship education, health and welfare services, skill retraining were all under review, and were subject to the fiscal restraints that characterized the period. Many of the immigration policy questions merged with those of other government departments. They included Multiculturalism, Health and Welfare, Status of Women, and Justice. Some opponents of immigration focussed on security issues, and the dangers of admitting war criminals, terrorists, or those involved in organized crime. Others were more concerned with the economic consequences of immigration at times of high unemployment. A few raised environmental issues in relation to population growth rates.
A previous article (Richmond, 1987) reviewed the demographic and sociological research on Canadian immigration from 1950 to 1979 and concluded that “the direct impact of this research on policy and practice has been limited. Although the results of academic research may have filtered into the decision-making process in certain accidental, remote and indirect ways, its influence was muted by the more strident voices of those with special interests. The "in-house" researchers who were part of the bureaucracy itself hardly fared any better. Their findings (like those of the academic social scientists) generally had, at best, a peripheral influence on government policies and programs” (Richmond, 1987:614). The present article is intended to update the conclusions of the earlier study by reviewing more recent researches, particularly those published 1980-1995. A complete inventory of immigration-related research conducted in this period is not possible here. However, some of the more important contributions will be considered.

The decade of the 1980's saw a wide range of studies from government and non-governmental sources, although delays in analysis and publication made questionable their relevance for practical policy making. For example, the longitudinal surveys conducted by the Immigration Department in the 1969-76 obtained information from a sample of immigrant respondents after six months and up to three years in Canada. These data remained virtually unanalyzed by the Department until they were resurrected in 1981. At that time a contract for their analysis was awarded to researchers at York University (Ornstein and Sharma, 1983; Ornstein, 1982). The studies related selection procedures and the "points system" to the outcomes in terms of employment. Among other conclusions, it was found that the occupational demand score was ineffective as a predictor of subsequent employment. After controlling for age, sex and education, there were substantial differences in occupational status and income between immigrants from the USA, the UK and western Europe, and those from other countries. A review of twenty-five empirical studies of the economic adaptation of immigrants undertaken between 1969 and 1981 concluded, among other things, that "visible minorities" experienced additional problems due to prejudice and discrimination (Richmond, 1982). This finding was confirmed in subsequent economic analyses (Richmond, 1989). However, some research attributed the lower levels of achievement of more recent cohorts to changes in admission criteria and to self-selection rather than to post-migration discrimination (Duleep and Regts, 1992; DeVoretz, 1995).

The detailed analyses of 1971 census data on immigration for Canada were not published until nearly a decade after the census (Richmond and Kalbach, 1980). These studies were undertaken in close co-operation with Australian researchers. The Canadian and Australian censuses had included a question on "birthplace of parents". This enabled a three-generational analysis to be made. Despite some formidable technical and methodological problems in ensuring comparability in the definition of variables, some important similarities and differences in the experience of immigrants and their descendants in the two countries were found. They were reported in three monographs published 1984-85. They dealt with demographic, educational, economic and urban aspects of the immigrant experience in the two countries (Rao, Richmond and Zubrzycki,
A survey conducted in metropolitan Toronto in 1982 further analysed the generational dimension in immigrant absorption, comparing educational achievement and occupational status (Kalbach, et al., 1984; Richmond, 1986). These studies highlighted the long term impact of immigration on the receiving countries.

Surveys were carried out, some in cooperation with voluntary organizations concerned with immigrant settlement (Sharma, 1980; 1981). They demonstrated the need for settlement assistance that went beyond the three-year limit of government funding for voluntary organizations assisting immigrants. The 1981 census gave rise to a number of shorter monographs dealing with immigration in terms of demographic and economic variables (Beaujot et al., 1988), including a special study of Caribbean migration (Richmond, 1989).

Other surveys conducted in 1970-1980 were academically initiated and not published in book form until much later, although some articles and monographs appeared earlier. They dealt with issues related to economic achievement, ethnic identity and equality (Boyd, Goyder et al., 1985; Breton, Isajiw et al., 1990). Policy oriented studies based on 1981 and 1986 censuses data were conducted by the Institute for Research on Public Policy in Ottawa (Seward, 1990; Seward and Tremblay, 1989). The latter focussed on the structural changes taking place in the Canadian economy and the implications for immigrants in the labour force, including the difficulties facing women with little knowledge of either of the official languages. Further studies of gender differences highlighted the adjustment problems facing immigrant women (Boyd, 1987; 1990). Indirectly, the latter studies did eventually lead to some modification of government regulations regarding accessibility to language and training programmes for women, but only after the issue had been taken up by women’s groups and political pressure brought.

A policy forum on immigration and Canada's future (Beach and Green, 1989) included some discussion of Quebec's position on immigration questions, which differed from the rest of Canada in being preoccupied with the cultural and linguistic consequences on immigration to that Province. In 1978 Quebec negotiated an agreement with the federal government, extended in scope in 1990, which gave that province special powers to recruit immigrants and to provide settlement services. This occurred in a context of low rates of natural increase and fears for the future of the French language in Quebec. Demographers debated the relative importance of pro-natalist policies over encouraging francophone immigration (Henripin and Pelletier, 1986). Research on the ethnic demography of other immigrant groups and their descendants in the rest of Canada were reported in Halli and Trovato et al. (1990).

From a political science perspective, Freda Hawkins (1989) published a comparison of Canadian and Australian immigration policies. She noted the dominant influence in both countries of the public service as policy decision-makers, but considered that Australia benefited more than Canada from the expert advice of its own advisory bodies. "The Canadian advisory councils in this field have not been trusted by the government, have not operated at a sufficiently senior level, and, so far, have not been allowed to play any
significant role" (ibid., : 254). Dirks (1995:40) examined the process of public consultation that preceded the annual determination of intended immigration levels, and also noted that the Advisory Council's influence was limited. The advisory bodies had no research budget and relied upon reviews of secondary sources. The Canada Employment and Immigration Advisory Council conducted a number of studies and submitted reports with recommendations to the Minister (CEIAC, 1991). Few of these were implemented. The Council was disbanded in 1992.

In the mid 1980's Health and Welfare Canada created the Demographic Review which enlisted the Royal Society of Canada and other distinguished academic researchers to examine long term population trends in Canada, including the implications of declining fertility and the ageing of the population. Immigration was also a topic for research under the auspices of this programme. Historical, demographic, geographic and economic questions were considered, but the terms of reference and budgets permitted only a review and summary of existing research findings. No new research was undertaken. The final report of the Review noted declining fertility rates would have a long term effect on the population, leading to an eventual decline, unless immigration made up the difference (Beatty, 1989). As in the case of most other demographic studies, no attention was paid to the possible effects of emigration. An exception was a study prepared for the Department of Employment and Immigration (Beaujot and Rappak, 1989). As noted by Dirks (1995:120-21) there was rivalry between Health and Welfare Canada and Employment and Immigration Canada concerning demographic research and policy, and an apparent indifference to these issues among Parliamentarians and the public.

Health and Welfare Canada, and the Ministry of State for Multiculturalism jointly instituted a Task Force on "Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees" which reported in 1988. As well as drawing attention to the need for more empirical research on the need for, and effectiveness of, health and welfare services for immigrants, the Task Force made a total of 27 specific recommendations, including the need for more effective pre-migration orientation and improved services after migration (Beiser, 1988). Unfortunately, due mainly to fiscal constraints, few of these recommendations were implemented.

The Economic Council of Canada undertook a major study of the economic and social impacts of immigration (Swan, 1991). It recommended avoiding sudden increases in immigration levels but proposed a gradual rise in immigration from the average of the preceding 25 years (i.e., 168,000) to 1% of the population by the year 2015. However, the government had already announced an increase in targeted levels to 250,000 for the next five years! The ECC was concerned that such high levels might "run the risk of provoking social problems" (p.35). A number of other recommendations were made by the Council. These went beyond purely economic considerations to include the socio-cultural impact, and the need to combat racism. These recommendations were largely ignored, or received only a token response, and, shortly afterwards, the Economic Council of Canada was dismantled, ostensibly as part of a package of budget cutting measures.
Concurrently with the burgeoning research output from academic, government and other sources, there were some fundamental changes taking place in Canadian immigration policy and legislation. Business immigration was promoted without prior research, or subsequent monitoring, until serious difficulties with the programme revealed themselves (Borowski and Nash, 1994). Refugee issues came to the fore nationally and internationally. Little research had been done on this question, after the initial interest immediately following World War II. Funded by CIDA, a Centre for Refugee Studies was established at York University, with an initial five-year grant. The research included studies of countries from which refugees were coming, as well as the experiences of refugees in camps, and after settlement in Canada, following selection abroad, or successful asylum application (Adelman, 1991). Further comparative studies of Canada and Australia were undertaken (Adelman, Borowski et al., 1994). Canada and the United States were also compared in respect of their immigration policies, and the economic adaptation of immigrants (Borjas, 1988; Chiswick, 1992), and also with regard to their increasingly multicultural character (Reitz and Breton, 1994).

What is notable about these studies is that they mostly occurred after Canada debated new legislation in the late 1980's, including Bills C55 and C84, which were introduced in 1987. Various other amendments to immigration legislation occurred in the 1990's. Although some academics were critical of many of the new provisions, their input into the new policies was mainly through submissions at Parliamentary Committee hearings, and consultations with senior bureaucrats who listened to, but did not necessarily accept, their expert advice. As mandated by the 1978 immigration legislation, Citizenship and Immigration Canada conducts annual public consultations on immigration levels and related matters with provincial governments and other "stakeholders" in the immigration process. In 1994, these consultations were quite extensive, and included a number of "working groups" which addressed various questions concerning immigration policies, culminating in the publication of a report titled "Into the 21st Century: A Strategy for Immigration and Citizenship" (CIC, 1994).

Economists appeared to be more influential in the corridors of power than demographers or sociologists. Econometric studies which appeared to show that independent immigrants and entrepreneurs made a greater net contribution than the family class or refugees did coincide with some shift in the composition of government's annual "targets" for immigration (DeVoretz, 1995). After 1994 there was less emphasis on family reunion and more efforts were made to encourage skilled workers and investors.

Suffice it is to say that whether the research was specifically intended to have policy relevance or designed purely as an academic thesis, the findings had to compete with newspaper editorials, public opinion polls, interest groups, provincial preferences, bureaucratic concerns, global pressures and budgetary considerations, all of which probably played a greater part in determining policy outcomes (Dirks, 1995:30). In Canada, as in Australia, officials expressed concern that they may have lost the ability effectively to manage and control immigration, due to pressure from sponsors, advocacy groups and "self-selected" migrants (Burstein, Hardcastle and Parkin, 1994).
**New Research Initiatives**

In 1995, the Department of Citizenship and Immigration announced a new research initiative, originally called the "Cities" and subsequently the "Metropolis Project". It called for closer collaboration between government departments, universities and non-governmental organizations in the conduct of policy related research on immigration. The original announcement even anticipated the possibility of international comparisons and cooperation in immigration research. A year later, after competitive bids from universities were received, four "Centres of Excellence" were established in Montreal, Toronto, Edmonton and Vancouver, each committed to inter-disciplinary and inter-institutional research initiatives. The themes identified by C&I Canada as having priority were ambitious. They included the effects of immigration on urban economies; the impact on government and non-governmental services; the social, cultural and political effects of immigration; the relationship between immigration, enclaves and the urban underclass; the social integration of young immigrants; and the impact of immigration on intergroup attitudes and social harmony. It is not expected that the new Centres will address all these questions but the agenda is a comprehensive one.

Concurrently with the establishment of the University-based research centres, the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, working with Statistics Canada, created a linked data base, using immigrant visa data and tax files, in order to monitor the economic achievements of immigrants. At the same time Statistics Canada planned a longitudinal survey of immigrants to commence in 1997-1998, which will monitor immigrants at intervals, for a period of four years.

In 1997 the government set up an "Immigration Legislative Review", with its own Advisory Group, having a mandate to consult with experts and other interested parties, and to make recommendations for up-dating legislation and policies. The authors of the report (Trempe, et al., 1998) consulted widely with governmental and non-governmental agencies, and with academics who had undertaken research on immigration questions. The report contained 172 recommendations for the revision of Canadian law, regulations and programmes concerning immigrants and refugees. One of the most controversial proposals concerned the higher level of official language ability, which the Advisory Group considered should be a requirement for "economic" or "self-supporting immigrants" before admission. This proposal received much publicity and, following public consultations, the Minister indicated that it was not the government’s intention to proceed with the implementation of this recommendation. In the department’s "Report on Plans and Priorities 1998-99" (CIC, 1998) it was stated that the department would "review the results of the consultative process in conjunction with extensive analysis of the report." Meanwhile, the department would carry out its performance commitments as outlined in the 1997 report to Parliament. At the time of writing the Review has not resulted in any new legislative measures.
Although social scientists are expected to make their research relevant to national concerns and of use to those responsible for formulating public policy and administering social programmes, total real dollar expenditure on social research has declined in the last decade. An increasing proportion of federal and provincial research budgets has been spent on studies contracted out to private and commercial agencies, particularly public opinion surveys. SSHRCC allocates a proportion of its funds to so-called "strategic" areas. It is now cooperating financially with C&I Canada in the funding of projects initiated under the auspices of the new Centres of Excellence.

Inevitably, several questions arise. Firstly, will there be opportunities, in the future, for academic researchers to pursue knowledge and research "for its own sake," i.e., in pursuit of theoretical and scientific questions, not of immediate practical value? Secondly, will the researches commissioned under the auspices of the "Metropolis Project" have any obvious and direct impact on immigration policies and administrative decision making? Thirdly, will there be a role for the "social critic," who questions the fundamental premises of contemporary global capitalism, including its political, demographic, economic and environmental consequences?

CONCLUSION

Academic social scientists continue to work closely with government officials in the conduct of research having a direct relevance to immigration questions. In addition, various government departments fund economists, sociologists and other researchers whose work is believed to have practical implications for immigration policy, and for the subsequent economic, socio-cultural and political integration of immigrants. However, in the period 1980-95, as in previous decades, the direct impact of research on immigration policies was limited. Academic, "think-tank", or commissioned research may have filtered through the media or other channels, but the findings had to compete with the influence of lobbyists, political parties, and senior bureaucrats, and had only a peripheral influence. The "in-house" researchers who were part of the bureaucracy itself had a similar experience. Their findings (like those of the academic social scientists) were often ignored, or rejected as politically impractical.

A clear example is the problem of non-recognition of the foreign qualifications of skilled and professional immigrants, and the difficulties thus created for their integration. This was first identified by federal government researchers in the 1950's, and by almost every report by academic and other researchers since, but little action has been taken. The issue comes under Provincial jurisdiction, and involves the interests of professional associations and labour unions.

Other recommendations that have been made by more than one report and not fully adopted include the need for pre-migration orientation, more effective official language training before and after arrival, greater efforts to combat racism, public education concerning the benefits of immigration, improved community and mental health services for immigrants and refugees, and cross cultural training for education, health and welfare practitioners. A combination of fiscal constraints, together with shifting responsibilities
between federal, provincial or municipal levels of government, and the private sector, have led to frustration. A conservative and neo-liberal climate of government cut-backs and devolution has given rise to what has been called "post-multiculturalism". In this context immigrants and refugees, and the non-governmental organizations that endeavour to assist their settlement in Canada, are obliged to fend for themselves to a much greater degree (Lanphier, 1997).

These conclusions, based on a review of Canadian experience with regard to immigration policy, concur with those of Carol Weiss who has undertaken extensive studies of research and policy formation in the U.S.A. and elsewhere (Weiss & Bucavakis, 1980; Weiss, 1982; 1990). In Wagner et al., (1991:307-332) Weiss wrote, "From the outset let us recognise that policy research, or any other kind of research, is not going to determine the major direction of policy..." Ideologies and interests determine the course of events. "...Policy research is a supporting player in the drama of policy making. The empirical question is under what conditions research gets on stage at all, and when it does, what consequences it has for the unfolding of the action" (ibid., :308).

Why has research made so little impact on the policy formation process and the implementation of programs? The answer lies in the nature of the process itself, as applied both to the generation of research and the dissemination of findings. Wittrock (1991:341) distinguished several possibilities for the way in which social scientific findings may enter the decision-making process, including the technocratic, the bureaucratic, and the enlightenment models. The technocratic model assumes a direct link between pure or applied research and the policy formation process (see Figure 1). The bureaucratic model (Figure 2) recognises a less direct and more complex and selective process whereby research may influence decision making. The "enlightenment" model assumes no direct link, but recognises that the findings of research may be disseminated through academic conferences, journals, classroom teaching and occasional journalistic highlighting. Its influence is long term and eventually becomes incorporated into "conventional wisdom". To these models may be added another which is the "systems" model (Figure 3). The latter recognises that research emanates from a variety of sources, and must compete with the special pleadings of interest groups, political parties, and the media for influence on the officials and politicians who determine the policy outcomes. Lindquist (1990:21-51) draws attention to the rise of a "third community", i.e., policy institutes, government councils and commissions, consultants and interest groups, all of whom contribute information and endeavour to influence policy decisions. In considering particular policies, it is important to recognize that any program necessarily competes with others for recognition, for priority, and for the allocation of resources. Budgets are seen as enabling by bureaucrats and politicians but, at times of government cut-backs, are more likely to be perceived as constraining effective action by practitioners and users of social programmes.

Furthermore, the adoption of a particular policy in a given field, has repercussions on others. All social systems involve interactions and feedback processes in which there
may be entirely unanticipated consequences. Global conditions (including local, provincial and the changing world system) have a significant impact on economic and social policies. This is true in most fields, but is particularly important in the case of immigration, where global demographic, economic and political factors play an important part in determining population movements, and government reactions to them.

In practice, there is a lack of synchronization between the research undertaken and the decision-making process. Research that is to be of any significant value to policy-makers is necessarily expensive and time consuming. There is often a long delay between the initial investigation or data collection and the eventual publication of the results. By the time that a social problem has been identified and academic researchers have begun to investigate it, the need to make decisions has often become urgent. More often than not, the relevant facts and figures upon which a rational decision might be reached are not available. Decisions must be made in a hurry and in anticipation of research findings, which may or may not lend support to the choices made. The findings of research must compete with the often unfounded claims of more vocal pressure groups.

As Simmons and Keohane (1992) pointed out, "Immigration and refugee policies have been hotly contested matters in Canada and are likely to remain so. A wide spectrum of actors are [sic] involved, and they function within a rather volatile field of public views and sentiments.... it is not surprising that policy can change quickly, contain major internal inconsistencies, and appear to vary with the whims of the current government..." (p.444). Studies of other policy communities and networks (such as the poverty lobby, fisheries, banking, etc.) have demonstrated that relatively autonomous state bureaucracies, faced with pluralist or loosely organized interest groups can initiate changes favoured by the government more easily than when faced a concerted or closed pressure network (Coleman and Skogstad, 1990:325-6).

In these circumstances, research comes to be seen by bureaucrats and politicians as a means for the retroactive rationalization and justification of past decisions. The findings of research, whether carried out "in-house", in universities or policy institutes, are used selectively to provide support for policies that have been determined in an entirely different context. Senior bureaucrats, and political assistants to the Minister control the flow of information. Positive feedback in the form of research findings that are supportive of existing policies flow more readily than negative feedback that is critical.

There are a number of lessons to be learned from this review of social research and its contribution to immigration policy in Canada. If academic researchers are to make any impact upon the policy formation process, they must be alert to the identification of problems and issues long before these become fully articulated and defined at the political level. Furthermore, there must be a more expeditious translation of research into published work in a form that will influence decision-makers before special interest groups can take advantage of the vacuum and obscure the reality with ideological invective. Once issues have surfaced and are being debated in the press and on the
hustings, academics must be prepared to make their findings known in as simple and intelligible a form as possible, in order to combat the uninformed and, sometimes, malicious claims of those whose partisan positions stem from ignorance or prejudice.

Finally, the researchers must be constantly alert to the dangers of censorship, or the more subtle forms of editing and selection that go into the presentation of results to those who make decisions. In this respect the "executive summary", so beloved of senior bureaucrats and politicians, is a dangerous instrument. Stripped of all the qualifications spelled out in the main text, such documents are the means by which positive reinforcing feedback supersedes the negative. Critical information emanating from the research is thus diluted.

We must conclude this review of the impact of research on immigration policy in Canada by observing that if the "mills of research" ground exceedingly slow, they also ground too small and too quietly in the past to have had any major influence on the political process. Scientists are faced with a dilemma. They must either withdraw into their "ivory towers" and forego the satisfaction of changing the world, or they must be prepared to become politically active, expressing their views and pressing their conclusions in competition with the many other lobbyists in the "corridors of power".

It remains to be seen if the researchers engaged in the "Metropolis Project" succeed in being more influential than their predecessors. Hopefully, they will not neglect the need for "pure" research as well. An ideal institutional framework might be one in which fundamental research is undertaken but serendipitous discoveries of practical value occur.

NOTES:

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