

# Marital Status and Fertility Among Sub-Groups Within Canadian Jews

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Research on the demography of the Jews in Canada (and the United States) has firmly established today's situation with regard to fertility and population size. The historical change from a traditional, high-fertility population to an extremely modern one has been well documented by Louis Rosenberg (1939, 1959) and others (Henripin, 1972; DellaPergola, 1980; Davids, 1981), who show that Jews in Canada have moved within two or three generations to a situation characterized by late marriage, low fertility, and rising divorce (Davids, 1982). Whereas the earlier generations of Jews had very few never-married people, and almost all of them became parents of at least enough children to replace themselves, the younger age groupings of Canadian Jews, almost entirely born in Canada, are characterized by a high age at marriage and very low fertility, which is far below the population replacement level (Davids, 1985). This is the trend in almost all Jewish communities outside Israel (Bachi, 1976; Schmelz, 1984).

In this respect, work on the Canadian population scene today indicates that the Jews were 'ahead of their time' in moving toward negative population growth, since the general populations of the United States and Canada are now clearly moving in that direction (Statistics Canada, 1984, pp. 73-79). In any case, this research has established the population scene for Canadian Jewry as a whole, but there have been few attempts, in recent decades, to go inside that totality so as to look at variations among different sub-groups of Jews. We shall find that Canadian Jewry is not homogeneous in the marriage and birth areas.

This was not the case when place of birth was a key variable in research on Canadian Jews, when many comparisons were made between Jews born in Europe, vs. in Canada, and those coming from other places. It is argued here that interesting and important findings can be obtained on the condition of the Canadian Jewish population and on its probable future composition by studying the major sectors within Canadian Jewry, but we must go beyond the traditional focus on place of birth and generational categories.

There has been some interest in looking at the population structure and variations within Canadian Jewry in recent times, but little literature. James Torczyner and associates (1984) have conducted some research (on behalf of the Council of Jewish Federations, Canadian Office) in this vein. That work focused on intermarriage, as well as economic and household structure characteristics. Our focus in the present paper is on the linguistic and fertility areas, and we try to avoid some of the definitional decisions that Torczyner et al. have become involved in. We prefer to take only those of

Jewish religion as our encompassing category, rather than add to the persons of Jewish religion those of Jewish ethnic origin but of no religion, as has been done by Torczyner.<sup>1</sup>

### Data Base

Whereas very few countries outside of Israel supply highly credible statistics on Jews, the Canadian Census provides an excellent resource for population research on Jews (see Millman 1983; Davids, 1985). Some 300,000 Jews live in Canada today identifiable by religion, and in many cases by responses to Census questions concerning ethnic origin and languages.

When one has identified Jews through the religion response on the Census, it is simple enough to obtain many other characteristics of the Jewish population from the responses to the appropriate census questions. In this paper we will examine a number of findings one can obtain in this way from the Canadian Census of 1981 (with occasional reference to corresponding data from the 1971 Census, to show change over the ten-year period) and examine groupings within the Jewish population of Canada in terms of age or generation, and languages. We shall focus in particular on the marriage and divorce situation, as well as the fertility or family-size variables, to assess the population 'health' of these groupings.

Language, as a basis other than age or geography, has recently been used in an *American Jewish Year Book* overview (Davids, 1985) to examine the Jewish population. One can compare Jews by city or generation, but in order to discover differences in the area of subculture or group lifestyles, it is also necessary to study cultural variables which can differentiate substantial groupings within the total Jewish population. Census data on mother tongue and language spoken at home provide an opportunity to do that. We can then identify which sectors of Canadian Jewry are likely to increase in the coming decade, which are likely to shrink, and which seem to be holding their own.

Regarding the sources of the tables that this paper examines, in addition to a few published Statistics Canada reports from the 1981 Census (which are referred to in the tables), certain tabulations have been prepared on special order with the aid of funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and the Ethnic Studies Research Program of Multiculturalism Canada. Where our tables do not list a Statistics Canada publication as source, the raw data come from these special tabulations prepared by the Census Customer Services branch of Statistics Canada.

We now proceed to the tables themselves, which have been selected and 'trimmed' to present their message clearly and with very little extraneous information. Therefore, it will be enough to sum up the principal message of each table in a few sentences.

### Canadian Jewish Mother Tongues

Canadian Jews are overwhelmingly of English mother tongue, but there are still substantial groups of Jews who report other mother tongues; the most important of

TABLE 1. JEWISH POPULATION<sup>a</sup>, BY MOTHER TONGUE AND NATIVITY, CANADA, 1981

Mother tongue	Total	Born in Canada	Percent native <sup>b</sup>
Total Jews	296,425	187,020	63.1
English	206,825	170,590	82.5
Yiddish	30,815	9,805	31.8
French	14,920	4,240	28.4
Magyar (Hungarian)	7,525	240	3.2
Hebrew	7,510	1,020	13.6
Russian <sup>c</sup>	5,915	175	3.0
All others	22,915	950	4.1

a. Religious denomination criterion, not ethnic origin.

b. Percentage of those reporting that mother tongue born in Canada (or, second column above as a proportion of the first.

c. Another 810 Jews report 'Ukrainian' as their mother tongue, of which 145 are Canadian-born; are many of these, perhaps, exit-visa 'Jews' finding this useful as a tool to leave the USSR, but not really Jews at all?

Source: Statistics Canada, special tabulations from the 1981 Census of Canada.

these, numerically, are Yiddish and French. Whereas the vast majority of Canada's English mother tongue Jewish population were born in Canada (as of 1971 and 1981), this is certainly not the case for the other language groups. There is a great difference between the substantial native-born percentage that we find in regard to Yiddish, French and (to a much smaller extent) Hebrew, versus the situation for all other languages spoken by Jews in Canada. That is, Yiddish and French clearly have some vitality as Jewish spoken languages in Canada at the present time, and therefore show a substantial proportion of their mother-tongue adherents as having been born in Canada. Hebrew occupies a much weaker position in this regard, but still appears to have some kind of living speech community in Canada, thus over 1/8th of those reporting Hebrew mother tongue are Canadian-born.

All the other languages reported as mother tongues by Canadian Jews have 3 or 4% Canadian-born speakers, while 96% or so were born abroad. It is a straightforward inference that, since these languages are hardly spoken in Canada (among Jews) at all, the speakers are predominantly first-generation immigrants. Thus, one can hardly predict much of a future for languages such as Hungarian or Russian among the Jews of Canada (unless large numbers of new immigrants with those languages continue to arrive in future), but there are many Canadian-born Jews who speak Yiddish and French, which suggests that these languages may continue to be significant mother tongues among Jews for some time to come.

### Marital Status and Age Groups

Table 2 includes both a comparison between marital status of Jewish and all Canadians in 1981 and a clear look at age of marriage for Jews in general as opposed to

TABLE 2. MARITAL STATUS FOR ALL CANADIANS VS. SEVERAL TYPES OF JEWS, BY SELECTED AGE GROUPS, 1981.

		Never married		Married		Separated or divorced		Widowed	
		M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Total Canada	N	10,736,100		11,478,710		970,590		1,157,670	
	%	44.1		47.2		4.0		4.8	
Total Jews	N	112,405		153,265		12,485		18,275	
	%	37.9		51.7		4.2		6.2	
Age 20-24	%	80.0		19.5		0.5			
Age 25-34	%	26.9		69.3		3.7			
English mother tongue									
Age 15-19	%	99.4	99.1	0.5	0.9	0.1	-	-	-
Age 20-24	%	89.4	74.1	10.3	23.8	0.3	2.0	-	-
Age 25-34	%	36.4	22.1	59.0	70.1	4.7	7.7	-	-
Yiddish home language*									
Age 15-19	%	92.0	93.0	8.0	7.0	-	-	-	-
Age 20-24	%	46.0	26.0	50.0	74.0	4.0	-	-	-
Age 25-34	%	30.0	4.0	65.0	90.0	5.0	4.0	-	-

a. These data are of limited reliability, due to very small sample frequencies; accept only as gross approximations. No tenths of a percent are shown for this group, either.

Sources: Statistics Canada, Reports of the 1981 Census, Catalogue No.

92-901; and unpublished tabulations, with author's calculations.

those of specific language groupings. Comparing the Canadian total percentages for single, married, etc., with those for Jews indicates immediately that the Jewish population is older, and therefore has fewer never-married people in it but a significantly higher percentage of people currently married or widowed. The percentage separated or divorced among the total (all-ages) Jewish population is slightly higher than that for all Canadians.

What the rest of Table 2 indicates is that 80% of Jews aged 20-24 are single. Even among Jews aged 25-34 we find about 27% never-married, which suggests increasingly later marriage among the Canadian Jewish population in 1981.

However, if we compare those who report Yiddish as their home language<sup>2</sup> with the mainstream Jews of English mother tongue, we find that Yiddish-speaking younger Jews have a relatively much earlier marriage pattern by sex. Typically, among the Yiddish-speaking Jews (Table 2) 7-8% are married even before age 20, and a majority of those in the 20-24 year group are already married. Among those of Yiddish home language, married females are fully 90% of the 25-34 year group, and the

proportions single are much lower than they are for all Jews or for those of English mother tongue. It also appears that the percentage separated or divorced among Jews of English mother tongue aged 25–34 years is quite high (about 6–7%), while those of Yiddish home language in the same age range seem to be somewhat less likely to be separated or divorced. Nevertheless, due to the small number of Yiddish-speaking cases that constitute the basis for our percentages one should not make too much of them or their differences from those for Jews of English mother tongue.

All in all, Table 2 suggests that Jews both have an older population than all Canadians, and are prone to late marriage. The small sub-population reporting Yiddish home language (which, we shall be arguing, represents primarily an ultra-orthodox group) tends toward much earlier marriage, with almost all of that population already married (or in a situation of marriage dissolution) by the time they attain age 30 or so.

Table 3 gives us the highlights regarding age structure for Jews as compared with all Canadians, and for those of English mother tongue vs. those who report speaking Yiddish at home currently. The child population (aged 0–14) for all Canada in 1981 was close to 23% of the entire population, but it was not quite 18% for Jews as a whole. Similarly, the percentage of seniors (aged 65+) in Canada generally is about 9%, vs. over 16% among the Jews. However, vast differences appear when we introduce the language factor in the same way as we did in Table 2. Jews of English mother tongue have a child and senior population very close to that of Canada as a whole; the senior population among English mother tongue Jews is slightly larger than it is for all Canada and the child population slightly smaller, but these differences are trivial. However, Jews of Yiddish home language have a very small child population and are mostly aged 65 and over; among those reporting Yiddish home language, the seniors

TABLE 3. CHILDREN AND SENIORS, FOR ALL CANADIANS AND SEVERAL TYPES OF JEWS, 1981<sup>a</sup>

		Total	Child population (Age 0-14)	Senior population (Age 65+)
Total Canada	N	24,083,500	5,474,200	2,184,600
	%	100.0	22.7	9.1
Total Jews	N	296,400	53,100	48,700
	%	100.0	17.9	16.4
English mother tongue	N	206,000	45,300	20,300
	%	100.0	22.0	9.9
Yiddish home language	N	10,500	1,100	5,800
	%	100.0	10.5	55.2

a. Rounded figures.

Sources: Statistics Canada, Reports of the 1981 Census, Catalogue No. 92-901; and unpublished special tabulations, (December 1983), with authors' calculations.

constituted fully 55% (Davids, 1984). If we had only the data in Table 3, we would assume that Yiddish home language is almost entirely a geriatric phenomenon and that Yiddish home language has no future in Canada at all. This impression is somewhat erroneous, as we shall point out when we examine further data.

### The Yiddish-Speaking Young Families

Table 4 gives us a census-based measure of fertility for certain types of Jews. Since we do not have vital statistics data to report Jewish fertility as we have for all of Canada, we use approximations based on the census in the same manner as demographers (e.g. Henripin, 1972) have done in the past. The Table 4 picture is one of approximately 250-300 children aged 0-4 years per 1,000 Jewish women aged 15-44 but for those of Yiddish home language the number of children per 1,000 women is 3-4 times greater. This very surprising high fertility among those of Yiddish home language indicates that the picture based on the previous table regarding the demographic features of Canada's Yiddish-home-language population is misleading.

TABLE 4. WOMEN AGED 15-44, AMONG SELECTED TYPES OF CANADIAN JEWS, WITH CHILD-WOMAN RATIOS, 1981<sup>a</sup>

	Total	Women 15-44	Children 0-4	Ratio of children 0-4 per 1,000 women 15-44
<b>Total Jews</b>	296,400	64,250	17,900	279
<b>English mother tongue</b>	206,000	50,625	15,200	300
<b>Yiddish home language</b>	10,500	490	550	1,122
<b>French-Spanish-Arabic mother tongue</b>	19,400	5,225	1,350	258

a. Rounded figures.

The only sensible reconciliation of the great preponderance of seniors among those of Yiddish home language, while at the same time we have found extremely high fertility, is that we have two quite separate sub-populations which share the fact that they are Jews of Yiddish home language.

The larger group consists primarily of Jews who came from Eastern Europe in the early part of this century, who are in 1981 senior citizens, but who still speak their original mother tongue as their current home language. These people had high or moderate fertility during their child-bearing years, but within the 1981 total (of those of Yiddish home language) this older group had very few children enumerated together with them. The other sub-population of Yiddish speakers, however, consists of a young, small but high-fertility ultra-orthodox group which has been discussed in my paper concerning Yiddish in Canada (Davids, 1984). This ultra-Orthodox population has high fertility, as indicated in Table 4, but is at the present time quite small in abso-

lute numbers and therefore does not yet have a large impact on overall child vs. senior proportions, if one looks at both groups with Yiddish home language together. In coming years, no doubt, this ultra-Orthodox group will rise in the pyramid and make the entire Yiddish home language population very different from how it appeared in 1981.

Based on these and other indicators in the Census, I would estimate Canada's total ultra-Orthodox (or Hassidic) population to have been some 2,500–3,000 souls in 1981, living in 600–700 households. These households would be almost entirely families, with an average size of four or more per home, larger than for all Canada and certainly than the average Jewish household size. In the near future, we must expect substantial growth among this group.

### **Canada's Sephardic Jews**

We now turn to the Sephardic<sup>3</sup> population, which is growing larger than Canada's aged Yiddish-speaking group. By and large, these Jews came from Morocco, sometimes via Israel or another country (see Lasry, 1983). The French, Spanish and Arabic mother-tongue category appears in Table 4 for the first time, but does not indicate there anything noteworthy.

Table 5 enables us to take a good look at the Sephardic population, and to separate out those of French mother tongue from those of Spanish and Arabic mother tongue. Table 5 indicates that the Jews with Arabic mother tongue in Canada are quite a small population, with a total just over 1,500; in addition, they are a highly-aged population, recording over 10% widows but a very small percent of single, never-married individuals (i.e. children and youth). However, the Jews of Spanish mother tongue number close to 3,000 in Canada and those of French mother tongue are a still more vigorous group.

Indeed, the Francophone Jewish population in Canada has a very healthy demographic profile, as shown in Tables 5 and 6. With a quite small widowed group but a large single (and child) population, the French mother tongue community is doing quite well now and its outlook is good for the foreseeable future. It is noteworthy that the percentages separated or divorced among those of French mother tongue are the same as, or slightly higher than, they are for all Canadian Jews. However, our tables indicate that the French mother tongue Jewish population in Canada has excellent cultural prospects for survival, which was also shown in Table 1 (where we found that over 28% of Jews reporting French mother tongue were Canadian born).

Returning to the Spanish mother tongue group, Tables 5 and 6 depict it as demographically quite traditional; it is also a much more aged group than the French. Those reporting Spanish mother tongue had a relatively small percentage of never-married people, as well as a much lower divorced percentage than for all Canadian Jews, or those of French mother tongue. The child proportion for the Spanish group, as shown in Table 6, is quite weak. Again, however, we must be careful not to read too much into percentages when the actual number of cases is so small.

What we can conclude from Tables 5 and 6 is that the Sephardic population of Canada (where we put together all Jews of French, Spanish and Arabic mother tongue) is primarily a French-speaking group, which may be due either to immigration patterns – where French was the original language abroad and has been retained in Can-

TABLE 5. JEWISH POPULATION, BY MARITAL STATUS AND SELECTED MOTHER TONGUES, CANADA, 1981

Marital status		Total	French mother tongue	Spanish mother tongue	Arabic mother tongue
Total	N	296,425	14,915	2,890	1,560
	%	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Never married	N	112,400	6,260	885	250
	%	37.9	42.0	30.6	16.0
Married now	N	153,265	7,420	1,790	1,070
	%	51.7	49.7	61.9	68.6
Widowed	N	18,275	545	120	160
	%	6.2	3.7	4.2	10.3
Separated	N	4,545	270	55	55
	%	1.5	1.8	1.9	3.5
Divorced	N	7,940	420	40	25
	%	2.7	2.8	1.4	1.6

TABLE 6. JEWISH POPULATION, BY SELECTED MOTHER TONGUES: TOTAL, CHILDREN AND SENIORS, CANADA, 1981

	Total	French mother tongue	Spanish mother tongue	Arabic mother tongue
Total Jewish population	296,425	14,915	2,890	1,560
Jewish children, 0-14				
Total	53,095	3,330	380	35
0-4	17,920	1,210	130	5
5-9	17,330	1,155	130	-
10-14	17,845	965	120	30
As percent of their total population	17.9	22.3	13.1	2.3
As percent of total Jewish children	100.0	6.3	-0.7	0.1
Jewish seniors, 65+				
Total	48,700	895	285	315
As percent of their total population	16.4	6.0	9.9	20.2

ada – or to the fact that French is an official language in Canada and therefore has much more favorable conditions for schooling and language retention than is the case for the other languages. However that may be, one would not predict a bright future for Spanish among the Jews in Canada. On the other hand it appears that French

is doing very well among those (in Montreal) who find French both fashionable and useful, and by no means a disadvantage as their children's mother tongue.

It is also useful to look more closely at marital status for young adults in the peak procreative years, in relation to recent concerns about mature 'singles' with concomitant low fertility. Table 7 presents marital status for all Canadian Jews vs. Sephardim (i.e. those of French, Spanish and Arabic mother tongue) in the 25-34 and 35-44 age categories. It shows that this Sephardic population has earlier marriage tendencies and less divorce than the majority Jewish community, and thus a better fertility potential.

However, small sub-groups in Table 7 show variations from the above favorable pattern - e.g. the high percentage of separated in the 25-34 age group of Spanish mother tongue. (With so few cases, these variations are of limited significance.)

Before concluding this examination of demographic prospects for the Sephardic population, note that the French-speaking Jews of Canada are heavily concentrated in the city of Montreal. Although Montreal also has a substantial population of Jews with Spanish mother tongue, the concentration of Jews in that city is much greater for the French and Arabic than the Spanish group. As above, the Arabic mother tongue population is mainly concentrated in Montreal but is a small component of the Canadian Jewish community.

Specifically, 69% of the Jewish population with Arabic mother tongue in 1971 lived in Montreal, while in 1981 something over 76% of Canadian Jews reporting Arabic mother tongue were located there. A still greater concentration is the case for Jewish

TABLE 7. JEWISH POPULATION, BY SELECTED MOTHER TONGUE AND AGE GROUPS, AND MARITAL STATUS, CANADA, 1981

Marital status	Total		French mother tongue		Spanish mother tongue		Arabic mother tongue	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Age 25-34 years</b>								
<b>Total</b>	52,190	100.0	3,040	100.0	685	100.0	3,725	100.0
Never married	13,530	25.9	710	23.4	130	19.0	840	22.6
Married	35,225	67.5	2,150	70.7	510	74.4	2,660	71.4
Separated	1,415	2.7	65	2.1	35	5.1	100	2.7
Divorced	1,950	3.7	115	3.8	10	1.5	125	3.4
Widowed	70	0.1	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Age 35-44 years</b>								
<b>Total</b>	34,085	100.0	2,685	100.0	425	100.0	3,110	100.0
Never married	2,510	7.4	180	6.7	40	9.4	220	7.1
Married	28,050	82.3	2,305	85.8	380	89.4	2,685	86.3
Separated	1,265	3.7	90	3.4	5	1.2	95	3.1
Divorced	1,980	5.8	100	3.7	-	-	100	3.2
Widowed	280	0.8	10	0.4	-	-	10	0.3

Francophones, 77% of whom were residents of Montreal in 1971 and just under 80% in 1981. However, for those of Spanish mother tongue we find that just over 37% lived in Montreal in 1971, while in 1981 only 35% of Jews were residents there, while over 50% (1,460 persons) lived in Toronto. This suggests that the westward movement of Jews which was noted in the late 1970s (Davids, 1985, p. 192) also led to a slight deconcentration of Spanish-speaking Jews from Montreal, but this certainly did not occur among those of French mother tongue.

In short, it seems clear that the favorable environment of Montreal both attracts Francophone Jews and encourages French language retention among Jews there, while French-speaking Jews in Toronto or other Jewish centers outside of Quebec are no doubt far less likely to retain that language in the long run.

There is an unmeasured but substantial Sephardic component among those of Hebrew mother tongue in Canada. Although one can safely say that the origin of many Canadians reporting Hebrew mother tongue is North Africa (or the Middle East), we cannot specify how many of those with Hebrew mother tongue are of Sephardic origin. Nevertheless, it may be noted that about 34% of those reporting Hebrew mother tongue in 1981 were residents of Montreal, which is very close to the Spanish mother tongue proportion. Thus, Montreal is the most important Sephardic center in Canada. When we specify Jews of French mother tongue we find 80% in Montreal, vs. 20% (including just over 2,000 in Toronto) throughout the rest of Canada.

### Summary and Conclusion

Using religion and language data from the Canadian Census, with a few easily defended postulates regarding who speaks what, we have begun to map out the heterogeneous cultural composition of Canadian Jewry. What of the foreseeable future? What is likely to happen, demographically, during the next 10–25 years?

Briefly, it looks as if the major sub-groups we have examined in this paper will increase their proportions in the total Canadian Jewish community of a generation or so hence, while the mainstream Jewish population – of East European descent but now very ‘Canadianized’ – will lose ground both absolutely and relatively. This majority within Canadian Jewry shows all the demographic weaknesses that Schmelz (1984) and others have so clearly indicated in Diaspora Jewry: late marriage, low total fertility, high average age with a large (and rapidly growing) senior population, and consequently, a diminishing parental group and net population shrinkage.

However, the ultra-Orthodox (i.e. younger Yiddish-speaking) and the Francophone Sephardic groups we have focused on show excellent survival capacity (reinforced by high residential concentration) in their tendency to earlier marriage, higher fertility, few seniors, and good in-group retention of children born to them. In a few decades, the expansion of these groups will enhance Canadian Jewry’s heterogeneity, and the consequent population shifts will no doubt have their internal educational, ‘political’ and other ramifications (see Schoenfeld and Davids, 1984).

It hardly needs stating that the strategies we have employed in this paper can and should be used for research on/with other groups and future censuses. This kind of research is very cost-effective and vital both for understanding the past developments

which explain today's realities, and for indicating the likely trends of the hereby foreseeable future.

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### Notes

1. If we include all those who report Jewish religion, whether synagogue-affiliated or 'practicing' or not, but do not include others - which obviously encompasses all sorts of Jews - we save entanglement in some doubtful calculations while excluding few people who would consider themselves a part of the Canadian Jewish community and whose life (and demographic) choices are likely to have an impact on the shape of Canadian Jewry in future years. That is, one may reasonably assume that those not reporting Jewish religion are perhaps not so relevant to the future evolution of Canadian Jewry, as it is doubtful that their descendants will stay part of the Jewish population in Canada. While this assumption would not hold true in certain specialized instances, most notably the Jewish immigrants who have come during the 1970s and subsequently from the USSR (where Jewish ethnic origin may be the more appropriate criterion), it is safe to say that if a person of Jewish ethnic origin reports himself not to be of Jewish religion, then he - or his descendants - are likely to be outside of the organized Jewish community.
2. Rather than Yiddish mother tongue, which indicates a biographical- historical reality that may have no meaning today, we focus on home language and age to locate the currently traditional group, still involved with the *shtetl* (East European Jewish) culture.
3. 'Sephardim', in the narrow sense, are Jews of Spanish (or Portuguese) descent. Most references now use the term loosely or broadly to include all Mediterranean and Oriental Jews. That usage means not only those speaking Iberian languages, but Jews who may speak Arabic, French, Italian, Turkish and other Near- or Middle-Eastern languages. It is impractical (for cost reasons) to research all of these.

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