

A New Kind of Terror: Radicalizing Youth In Canada**Abbee Corb¹****Renee Grozelle²**

The term “radicalization” has become a hot and sexy topic as of late. Radicalized youth of all genres, be they Jihadist, radical Islamist, Left-wing, Right-wing, White Supremacist; have proven to be of concern to law enforcement, government officials, intelligence groups, and the Diaspora at large. Concerns also resonate in the communities of those affected by the radicalization process.

The radicalization of young people, it should be noted, is not a new thing. It has however, garnered International attention in the recent years, partially due to the propensity of the actions of those involved.

When looking at the issue of any genre of radicalized youth or of individuals of any age for that matter, it is imperative to look at the etymology of the word and a proper definition of the term.

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2013) defines radical as having extreme political or social views that are not shared by most people. Its synonyms are extremist, fanatic (or fanatical) rabid, extreme, revolutionary, revolutionist and ultra. The term radicalize has been defined as to make radical, especially in politics. Therefore, radicalization, it is safe to say is the process by which individuals adopt extreme political, social or religious views and ideals. It is the process and by which these individuals (generally youth) implement these ideals and views into their daily lives.

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The steady rise in radicalized young people on a global scale, along with the changes in social and political environments, as well as, the flourishing of various global groups has been propagated or advanced in many cases through the use of the material housed on the Internet and the dark web.

In the past decade or so, we have seen a great many changes and advances in technology. These changes have led to a definite increase in controversial websites, questionable material and to say the least, dubious users. The dogma being represented is available to anyone with access to the Internet. The impact of those doing the radicalizing is far reaching. Despite their geographic location, the purveyors of extremist rhetoric have been utilizing the latest technology and available tools, in all forms, to reach out, network, recruit, and further their influence and inclusive impression. These radicals are using their Internet voice for the propagation of tools and whoopla that aid in the process of radicalizing those that are ripe for the adopting of extremist views (Corb 2008, 2011, 2013).

When examining the road map to radicalization, several moderately consistent factors arise.

The first of these factors is the social environment of the individual in question. The social environment incorporates economic and social conditions, or a specific political climate. These factors are crucial for the expansion of extremist ideals and in short the milieu for the radicalization of individuals or groups. These can be closely linked with one's personal motive for joining a group (Corb, 2011, 2013).

Another critical, and amongst the most common causes leading to radicalization are the micro-social factors affecting the young person. Micro-social factors and the interaction assessment of the individual are of utmost importance. It is these interactions that describe the social world and underlie social structures that create and maintain societies.

Meso-sociological factors are those dealing with issues like stratification by income, age,

gender, race, ethnic origin, and sexual orientation; and are an additional factor of importance when examining why young people become involved in these groups. These factors include but are not restricted to: inherent family issues, influx of immigration, and poverty.

It is the group dynamics, social networks and their corresponding patterns that become important to the recruitment and radicalization process. Extremism is for the most part organized by groups, the settings by extremists are based largely on ideologies of the group and the actions take place in the primarily in these groups (Beelman and Jonas, 2009).

Additionally, the status of the minority groups and economic climate can play a pivotal role in the radicalization process. In short, many perceive the increased presence and visibility of minority groups as an economic and political threat (Blalock 1967). This effect is often reinforced by a strong sense of nationalism in the affected group or in the broad social context (Mummendy & Simon, 1997). It appears the specific effect of the rivalry is closely related to various social, economic and political factors.

Distrust and loss of faith in government and public institutions, and the perception that those in power cannot effectively solve new arising problems such as immigration, globalization, unemployment etc., can lead some to engage themselves in radical and extreme politics (Ignazi, 1995).

Socio-economic change is a relevant factor in explaining the rise of extremism and radicalization. Political messages appearing through conventional media and other non-mainstream sources, focus on the double demarcation of people. The elite on the top to the outcasts at the bottom of society easily find a resonance with extremist movements. An additional pattern has at its core the fear and insecurities emanating from feelings of political powerlessness. The experience of being a plaything of trade and industry can be clearly linked with extremists addressing their followers as a passive response for

overpowering the opponents' victim (Corb, 2011).

Recruitment and radicalization is shaped by personal motives and one's environment (Alexander, 2010). Nationalism, at times, plays a significant role as motivator for possible recruitment and radicalization (Ignazi, 1992). It is this sense of nationalism that acts as a basis for ideological superiority, linked to the home nation, race, ethnic group or religion.

The conditions of one's belief have a direct impact on the extremist group radicalization. Additionally, the attitudes towards immigration, violence, the nation, exist with other culture-specific incidents specific to the radicalization extremists.³ This can include a dedication to one's culture or heritage. Stereotyping and perceptions of specific cultural social or religious generally portrayed in a negative light are consistently illustrated through their literature and websites and of course, not without effect on individuals susceptible to these ideas (Ohlemacher, 1998). Their ideologies provide central patterns of interpretation and notions for specific action patterns. They provide the motivators and essentially the driving instructions for the individual (Borstel & Wagner, 2006).

Individuals involved in terrorism often come from a diversity of social backgrounds and have undergone rather different processes of violent radicalization. This is evidenced as of late, with the massive global influx of youth reporting for duty to fight amongst the radicals in locations such as Syria. "Profiles of terrorists do not work as a tool to identify actual or potential terrorists because profiles such fail to capture the diversity and how people change when they become involved in militant extremism" (Bjorgo, 2011).

Social inequality and a sense of injustice are considered very strong motivational factors. Extremist groups by means of various psychological mechanisms have effectively exploited these factors. Deprivation, as well, is widely used and referenced as explanatory factors for extreme attitudes and violence.

³ Vera Husfelds; Extreme Negative Attitudes Towards Immigrants: An analysis of factors in five countries; Prospects, Volume 36, Number 3, p. 355-374

Misanthropy, the dislike, disdains or hatred of a specific people, and the growing social divide is corroding the sense of community, and society is poisoned. Social disintegration is dangerous, especially for disadvantaged groups. Substantial segments of society believe that they are more valuable than others. Only those who achieve something, who are useful and efficient, count for something (Heitmeyer, 2011). This concept is ever apparent in the evolving western ideals of Islamophobia and in the radicalization of young people (Corb, 2011).

Young people are impressionable. There is therefore a higher risk of them being swayed by non-conventional rhetoric. In many cases, these young people are disenchanting by society. They find themselves disoriented, uncertain and on occasion lack self-esteem and self-identity. For these, the misanthropy presented by websites of extremist groups and other entities may seem appealing and may attribute to their membership and ultimate recruitment.

The effect of disintegration within the family unit, issues like abuse, death and divorce can be contributing factors to why someone becomes involved with a movement. Those feeling disconnected and lacking in family connections may seek to fulfill that need elsewhere (Fuchs, 2003).

Another important influence in the promotion, support, and enforcement of extremist ideologies is group dynamics (King & Mohamed, 2011). Peer-relations and the dynamics of a group have been noted as the main pathway for radicalization (Sabo-Walsh, 2013). In numerous cases the process of radicalization is collectively illustrated and completed by individuals who share similar beliefs, such as friends or acquaintances (Sabo-Walsh, 2013). An example of this can be seen in the high-profile case of the Toronto 18 (Mickolus & Simmons, 2011). Many individuals, it has been documented, have joined groups to fulfill basic social needs (Bjørgero, 2011; Zittel, Fuchs et al. 2006). In many cases, the joiners lack self-esteem and self-identity. Many find group membership is integral and fulfills these

needs (Bjørge, 2011; Ferber 1998). The need for power and recognition can play a distinctive role in the motivation to join a group (Ezekiel 1995). As well, systemic failures and barriers can be attributing factors to some joining the groups (Corb 2008).

All of these factors are common and can play an integral role in the collective pre-radicalization and radicalization processes of those joining right-wing groups, terrorist entities, gangs and even cults.

Canadian youth are not precluded from this phenomenon. As such, Canadian government officials have begun to take the recent phenomenon more seriously. Government and police publications, think-tanks, research opportunities and the like are becoming more prevalent in Canada in reference to the concept of radicalization and deradicalization. In fact, in February 2014, Federal Officials held a conference dealing with the concept of Countering Violent Extremism. This was amongst the first steps of presumably many for Canadian law enforcement and intelligence officials, at putting radicalization under the magnifying glass.

When examining radicalization of youth in Canada (particularly those influenced by radical and extreme interpretations of Islam), there are a number of significant cases that illustrate the recruitment and participation of impressionable young Canadians engaging in acts of terrorism.

The past 10-years have shown a noticeable increase in the recruitment of Canada's youth. The recruits are primarily male, aged 13 to 24-years-old (Saunders, 2014). Overall figures provided by the government, on the number and identification of individuals who have left Canada to support terrorist groups and causes, are only estimations and not sufficient in providing a proper figure on the issue (Amble, 2012). This presents numerous problems in terms of tracking and analyzing the recruitment and radicalization of Canadian youth. Although publically accessible and open source information released by government officials to the public remains limited, in terms of identifying individuals who are under the age of 18,

some youth can be identified by reports made by the individuals' family, the media, and independent reports. Therefore, the cases presented are based on alternative avenues of gathering information in attempt to provide a more holistic review of Canadian youth recruitment and radicalization that is not given by government reports.

There is no single explanation or process that leads to radicalization. There are however, some common factors that seem to contribute to promoting, supporting, and enforcing extremist ideologies (King & Mohamed, 2011). These factors are based on traveling abroad, the influence of peer-relations, family, Mosques, and the Internet (Sabo-Walsh, 2013).

Since the events of September 11th 2001, reports show that there has been an increase in the number of youths who are recruited to travel overseas in order to engage in battle (Sabo-Walsh, 2013). A large majority of Canadian youth, after being recruited, are often sent to training camps abroad and soon after are fighting alongside or contributing in some way to aiding extremists groups (Hamilton & Rimsa, 2007). This is what happened to 23-year-old Windsor, Ontario resident Jamal Akkal in 2003 (ADL, 2004; CBC News, 2007). Born in Palestine, Akkal moved to the Windsor area in Canada with his family in 1999 (Mannes, 2004). In 2003 he left Canada and traveled to Gaza Strip, Palestine where he was then recruited by the military wing of Hamas' (ADL, 2004; McElreath, et al., 2013). Shortly after his recruitment, he was arrested by border officials whilst enroute to Egypt (Mannes, 2004). Brought before Israeli military court Akkal was convicted for planning to carry out attacks in North America and in Gaza (McElreath, et al., 2013). He was subsequently released from prison in 2007 (CBC News, 2007).

Once an individual travels overseas to engage in terrorist activities the enforcement of Canadian laws becomes difficult (Hamilton & Rimsa, 2007). Although Canada passed the Anti-Terrorism Act in 2001, it was not until 2004 that the first Canadian was charged under this law (Schwartz, 2012). Since the enactment of Canada's Anti-Terrorism Act (2001), a total of 24 individuals have been charged under it (Leishman, 2013). Of those 24 charged, a large

majority of them were Canadian citizens, representing 75% of the total cases (Leishman, 2013). Mohammad Momin Khawaja was the first Canadian who was charged and convicted under the Canadian Anti-Terrorism Act (2001). In 2004, at the age of 24, he was sentenced to life in prison (Coll & Glasser, 2005). Born 1979 in Ottawa, Canada Khawaja was described by family and friends as a normal kid (Schwartz, 2012). As a child he had moved numerous times with his family, living in such areas as Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Libya (Quiggin, 2010). In 1991 he and his family returned to Canada (Coll & Glasser, 2005). In 2001, Khawaja had graduated from Algonquin College for computer programming and worked for Spectra FX which had a contract with Ottawa's Department of Foreign Affairs (Schwartz, 2012). In 2002, he traveled to Pakistan and participated in a Mujahedeen training camp (Coll & Glasser, 2005). After his return from one of the trips he had taken to Pakistan, Khawaja made connections with five men in the United States and United Kingdom and started working on a transmitter device to activate bombs (Quiggin, 2010). It was reported that Khawaja, along with the other men, were planning to participate in a number of bombings in London (Schwartz, 2012). It was not long until the group was under surveillance by authorities. Khawaja was arrested on March 29, 2004 (Schwartz, 2012). At trial he was convicted of 5 charges in relation to Canada's Anti-Terrorism law (Coll & Glasser, 2005). Officials in their areas, also arrested the other five men, and all were given a life sentence (Quiggin, 2010).

After the arrest and sentencing of Mohammad Momin Khawaja, the acknowledgment and concern of youth radicalization resonated in Canadian society. Increased concern was evidenced by an increase in the number of media reports. Canadian society on a whole was beginning to take notice.

In April 2004 Suleiman El Merhebi, a 19-year-old Montreal Canadian resident, of Lebanese decent was arrested and sentenced to 40 months in prison (CBC News, 2005; Ellis & Parent, 2011). Merhebi, was charged with participating in the firebombing of a Montreal Jewish School (CBC News, 2005; Ellis & Parent, 2011). After sentencing, he claimed to be a part of

Sheikh Ahmed Yassin Brigades (Ellis & Parent, 2011).

In June 2006, the arrest of 18 Canadian citizens, composed of 4 youths and 14 adults was made public (Falk & Morgenstern, 2009; R. v. Khalid, 2010). The individuals involved, who were deemed the Toronto 18, and their terrorist plot, gained international attention (Gutfeld, 2010). The group of friends were arrested and accused of planning attacks in Toronto (Israeli, 2011; Lowell, 2011). Soon after their arrests, information was released to the public about the individuals, their connections to one another, and the details of their planned attack.

There are numerous links between some of the accused. Six of the members had continuously attended an Islamic center located in Mississauga called al-Rahman Islamic Center for Islamic Education (Chalk, 2012; Falk & Morgenstern, 2009).

Like the Toronto 18, some of the other young Canadians who have been suspected as being radicalized, had social connections to one another and attended the same Mosque. This was true for the cases of Mahad Dhorre, Mustafa Mohamed, Mohamed Abscir, and Ahmed Elmi. These young men were in their early to mid-twenties and had attended the Abu Huriara Islamic Centre: North York Mosque (Aulakh, 2009). In 2009, it was reported that five young Somali Canadians were missing in connection with al-Shabab (King & Mohamed, 2011). Reports indicated that approximately half a dozen ethnic Somalia youth had vanished in Canada (Ellis & Parent, 2011). Fear emerged about the possibility of terrorist violence and radicalization by Sikh extremists in Canada (Ellis & Parent, 2011). These fears continued as reports emerged about the information of the youths who had 'gone missing,' Mahad Dhorre had left Somalia at the age of six, arriving in Canada in the mid-1990s (Aulakh, 2009). It was reported that his biological mother resided in Somalia, where his father had died (CBC News, 2013). Dhorre, who was from a middle-class home and had no prior run-ins with police, disappeared in 2006 (Aulakh, 2009).

Mustafa Mohamed, a 22-year-old male, was another individual who had attended the Abu

Huriara Islamic Centre in North York. His disappearance took place in the same time period in 2006 as that of Mahad Dhorre (Aulakh, 2009). Like Dhorre, Mohamed came from a middle-class home and had no prior run-ins with law enforcement (Aulakh, 2009; Zekulin, 2013). Mohamed Abscir, was another individual who attended the same mosque. His disappearance took place within the same period as the aforementioned (Aulakh, 2009). Like the others, he also was from a middle-class home and had no prior run-ins with police officials (Aulakh, 2009). On November 5th 2009, another individual by the name of Ahmed Elmi attended the same Mosque as the individuals who had disappeared in 2006, had gone missing (Aulakh, 2009; Zekulin, 2013). Elmi was a Somali Canadian from Markham, Ontario. He attended York University and studied history and math (Aulakh, 2009). The same month in 2009, 18-year-old Toronto resident Abdul Karim left for Somalia (Bell, July 1st 2010; Zekulin, 2013). He was reportedly recruited by al-Shabab (Bell, 2010). Another Toronto Ontario resident Mohamed Elmi Ibrahim, who was 22-year-old also left for Somalia in 2009 and was linked to al-Shabab (Zekulin, 2013).

Radicalized youth are venturing out and joining the fight overseas. Whether that conflict is in Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, etc.; government officials are becoming perplexed by this new fangled dilemma. Many feel that the Internet has played a role in encouraging and coercing these young people. Others feel that promotion of their overseas participation, and in many cases death, is vilified online.

The Internet plays an intricate part in the radicalization of young people from Canada and elsewhere. The Internet knows no borders, yet problems, which arise as a result of it and its various facets, are indeed ones of international concern. The Internet provides a forum where aged rhetoric can be presented in new-fangled ways. It is a place where political and social agendas can be shared and reacted to in real-time (Corb 2011, 2013). For example, in September 2013, Al Shabab used Twitter to “live-tweet” their deadly attack on the Westgate Mall in Nairobi.⁴ Although the Twitter account used by the group was eliminated multiple

⁴ HSM Press Office https://twitter.com/hsm_pr

times, their message was conveyed and re-Tweeted by individuals and news media alike. Radicals and extremists, it could be said, are using their Internet voice in a similar way that the historic figures have in the past exploited radio and newspapers with the dissemination of extremist rhetoric, tools, and propaganda. They are furthering their message, gaining support and followers, educating and informing the Diaspora of their various causes and goals (Corb, 2013).

In early 2014, young Canadian convert to Islam, Damian Clairmont, who changed his name to Mustafa al-Gharib, died fighting alongside rebel forces in Syria (Logan, 2014). His death was glorified on various online blogs and Twitter accounts. The Twitter account belonging to Abu Turab Al-Muhajir,⁵ who describes himself on social media as an “American ‘Jihadi’ or [whatever] they are calling it,” in a post about al-Gharib read: “My Bro.... Abu Talha al-Canadi Executed by #FSA! InshAllah we will meet in Jannah! May Allah accept your Shahada!” (Logan, 2014). Accordingly, the attention garnered from his actions and ultimate demise, likely lead to others following in his footsteps.

Radical extremists exploit social media and user created content sites for the dissemination of their wares and promotion of their causes. Web 2.0 content areas give rise to much trepidation. Vulnerable young people have been constantly exposed to graphic portrayals of violence in a context that provides ideological justifications for violence. This is a particularly lethal combination. In many cases the portrayed images play with your emotions and expose the young person to dreadful and horrific images (Corb, 2011, 2013). In some instances, the Internet and its many venues have become the cornerstone of communication for a number of groups who might not have a soapbox in the “real world”. On November 22, 2012, the group Tehkreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) posted on their Umar Media Facebook page, “Dear brothers and sisters, ‘the pen is mightier than the sword’. Now you have a chance to use this mighty weapon.” (Shackle, 2013) These messages give further credibility and sustenance to

⁵ Twitter account belonging to Abu Turab Al-Muhajir
https://twitter.com/abu_muhajir1/status/423121184180281344/photo/1 (last visited February 24, 2014)

messages received through real world contacts. The use of Facebook by TPP, to recruit shows how militant and extremist organisations are increasingly aware of the importance of the Internet. Legitimate religious organisations and institutions make regular use of online tools. Networks of religious institutions, madrassas and other schools for example use forums and video platforms to share study materials and resource materials. Banned religious groups – which often carry out social work besides their more unsavory activities – exploit the Internet in the same way. But increasingly, many also see Twitter and Facebook as a chance to change their image and recruit members (Corb, 2013; Shackle, 2013).

Young people are impressionable and therefore at risk of being swayed by non-conventional thoughts and rhetoric. In many instances, these young people are disenchanted by society. They find themselves disoriented, uncertain and occasionally lacking self-esteem. For these individuals, the misanthropy presented by websites of extremist groups and other entities may seem appealing and may attribute to their membership and recruitment. Online hate rhetoric, cyber-hate and hate-bullying can easily impact and influence young people, as well, as aid in the manipulations of their thoughts and views (Corb, 2013).

Extremist group recruitment tactics operate for the most part on a proletarian level. Much recruitment and ideological dissemination takes place through the likes of websites and social media venues the likes of Twitter and Instagram, where words and images come together to reinforce real-world propaganda and vitriol. Prevalent access to the Internet has led to a dramatic increase in distasteful and questionable websites. The Internet “is offensive. It is crude, it is fascist and it mirrors the most infamous of Nazi Newspapers” (Littman, 1996)

A spokesman for terrorist group, Ahle Sunnat wal Jamaat (ASWJ) stated, “We use Facebook, Twitter and our own website for sharing daily news [...] Many people make propaganda against us and say we are a terrorist party. But when people see our comments on the Internet, they say that our agenda is right” (Chao, 2013). Where once the fringe groups and

extremist entities had to depend upon conventional methods to disseminate their messages, such as the physical distribution of flyers and schoolyard recruitment, they now utilize the means of the Internet to communicate with a larger audience base in a more cost effective, personal and private way than ever before (Corb 2011, 2013). Real world extremists run the risk of getting caught, virtual encounters can reach a greater audience on a much broader scale.

Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD) is a major religious organization in Pakistan. JuD is listed by the United States, the United Nations and the European Union as a terrorist entity due to its alleged role in the 2008 Mumbai attacks. Abdul Rehman, of JuD's IT and social media wing, stated that though the group has had an online presence for at least a decade, its focus on social media is new. "Our Facebook and Twitter has the political aim of taking up our narratives," "There is a lot of propaganda against us. Twitter allows us to give our own official statements. The main purpose is to preach our message" (Shackle, 2013).

Extremist factions have historically leveraged technology to target the pre-radicalized and the radicalized. Characteristically, the advent of technology has aided the groups. White supremacists, terrorists, gangs, cults and extremist groups have all realized the complexities and potential of new and emerging technology, and as such have harnessed its power. As dissimilar as these groups are, similarities exist in that there are complex and somewhat anarchic consistencies in their recruitment techniques and propaganda distribution methods. Characteristically they all utilize the Internet for fundraising, recruitment, radicalization, training, instruction, propaganda, psychological warfare and the gathering of intelligence and counter intelligence. Bomb making instructions, warfare how-to's, and the like are aplenty online. A recipe for how to make pressure cooker bombs, which investigators say were used in the Boston Marathon attack, was most notoriously published in the al-Qaeda magazine Inspire. The article was aptly titled "Make a bomb in the kitchen of your Mom" (Spencer, 2013).

A majority of the extremist activity and philosophical views have made the transition to the Internet: refined racist writings; offensive cartoon representations; the advocating of genocide; Holocaust denial and revisionism, violent video game adaptations are but a few of elements found on the pages of the radical and extreme right. Each component of the Internet and related technology plays a role in advancing the groups' agenda; be it propaganda distribution or recruitment. The Internet is a consistent driver and enabler for the process of radicalization across all genres (Corb, 2013). On the freewheeling net, everyone from white supremacists to Islamists and environmental radicals are connecting — then producing, sharing and consuming content that reinforces or encourages extremist views. Even some of the most mainstream social networking sites — like YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter — are host to extremist groups spouting their own narratives (Corb, 2013; Cunningham, 2013).

The Internet provides the impressionable mind of the potential recruit with direct and easy access to unfiltered fundamental and extremist ideology. For example, the Tsarnaev brothers of the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing, reportedly used an instruction manual from the English-language, Al-Qaeda-published "Inspire" magazine to build the crude, homemade bombs they used in the Boston marathon attack. The founder originally published the magazine "as a PDF from the basement of his parents' home in North Carolina," writes (Foreign Policy) J.M. Berger, an author and analyst of extremist movements in the US and abroad (Cunningham, 2013)

Shrouded under a veil of impartiality and potential anonymity, the Internet permits the aspiring member to view the world and global conflicts through an extremist lens thus reinforcing the rhetoric, objectives and political arguments. The Internet and all it holds, has the ability to serve as an enabler, thus, providing broad access to an array of information on targets and their various vulnerabilities. The Internet has in a sense become the single-most important apparatus of the 21st century for the dissemination of propaganda. It is a tool used to provide coaching to youth who might not have otherwise had direct contact with

recruiters (Corb, 2011,2013).

The Internet plays an essential role in creating and stratifying social bonds that are necessary for radicalization and recruitment, as well as providing a setting for perpetuating radicalization among groups of recruits. If youth have begun to explore these areas and have formed bonds with other like-minded individuals (whether they are peers in similar situations or recruiters, online or offline) their radicalization may then progress inside these groups. Researchers have indicated the Internet “can intensify a sense of identity” through the phenomenon of “group polarization,” in which members of a specific radicalizing group perpetuate their own radicalization through continued discussion, perhaps with the facilitation of a terrorist recruiter (Madden, 2008)

Real world collaboration together with virtual consolidation is the ever-present truth facing the pre-radicalized and radicalized alike both in Canada and elsewhere. The extremist narrative is consistently reinforced with an end goal of garnering new recruits.

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