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Addressing the Youth: Emerging Youth Publics in Late Colonial Uttarakhand

Leah Koskimaki

This essay discusses the formation of political youth publics in the late colonial period in Kumaun and Garhwal in the northwestern Himalayan region of India. More specifically, it highlights forms of address to youth and students in the Hindi press in the period of nationalist mobilization. In published speeches and editorials, educated youth were a target audience for newly fashioned political roles; they were asked to spread regional awareness over rights, to travel to the countryside, to make sacrifices, to make use of time, and to demonstrate their duty towards national causes.

Overall, the paper argues that the notion of youth as a form of solidarity and as a distinct public emerged in Uttarakhand at this time, drawing from a regional imaginary. This vocabulary of politics continued in later forms of youth mobilization in the region post-independence.

Keywords: India, youth, politics, public sphere, colonialism, Hindi, identity.

To obtain knowledge of politics, and to view the political situation in our country, is the duty of every student.

-*Tarun Kumaun*, July 1923

Today we can live our lives as independent citizens... With this come many responsibilities for the youth and students who have always taken part in movements with great triumph... They have to lift society out of the deep hole of decline and carry it to the heights of success.

-Sri Bansilal Pundir, *Yugwani*, Dehradun, 15 April 1948

Introduction

In 1923, an article in *Tarun Kumaun*, a small Hindi language newspaper published in Dehradun, made an appeal for regional youth and students to become involved in political life. Referring to politics as “a discipline and a science (*shāstra aur vijñān*),” the article stressed, “It is of prime importance (*paramāṅśyāk*) for students to obtain knowledge of politics.”¹ Furthermore, it argued, “to make such a rule – that students should remain separate from political movements (*rājnitik āndolan*) – would be national suicide.” While in the early 1920s *Tarun Kumaun* had to make the case for youth to join politics at a life stage usually reserved for internal reflection and study, by 1948, a mere fifteen years later, the newspaper *Yugwani* described students in more lofty political terms. An essay titled, “An Appeal to the Youth of Tehri,” stated that youth and students were

those who had “always taken part in movements”² and those upon whom the nation depended. “We can organize full participation in the political life (*rājñaitik jīvan*) of the state. I hope that the student community (*vidyarthī varg*) will agree,” the article implored.³

The two opening quotes of this essay, translated from Hindi-language newspapers in Kumaun and Garhwal and spanning the period of nationalist mass politics, reveal the role of “youth” as it emerged as a political category in the regional public sphere in the late colonial period. How were youth discursively situated in this new “political vocabulary of modernity”⁴ in the growing print culture of urbanizing hill towns? How did migration and education inform this regional political scene? And finally, how did engagement with regional and agrarian issues set the stage for youth politics in Uttarakhand post-independence? This essay explores these questions further, arguing that reformists and aspiring nationalists sought to capture what one regional newspaper from the 1920s termed *sañgh-śakti*—the “unified power” of youth.⁵

My examination of regional politics during the late colonial period developed initially from questions raised during an ethnographic study of youth publics in Uttarakhand post-statehood (Koskimaki 2011).⁶ In the mid to late 2000s, I found that youth involved in public life often drew inspiration from the movement for independence, referencing its ideals and methods in vernacular print media and in the content of speeches given in street rallies. The language of contemporary youth politics focused on themes of sacrifice and duty, drawing on the exceptional and rural aspects of the mountain region. While not necessarily claiming an “origin” to these political genealogies, I began to consider what role young people played in political publics during the late colonial period when print media began to grow in circulation. This search led me in 2007 to the home of Lalita Chandola Vaishnav, the daughter of Vishwambhar Dutt Chandola, who was the editor of the colonial era newspaper, *Garhwali*. She had preserved some of *Garhwali* and other newspapers’ texts in two volumes, which she shared with me (cf. Vaishnav 1994). She also confirmed that regional youth activism did exist in the colonial period, influenced by Pahari students’ experiences while studying in universities in the plains regions.

However, political activity was often hidden due to the threat of British authorities, and thus one would find a scarcity of sources covering formal youth organization at the time. Still, reviewing political commentary and news from various prominent Hindi-language sources during the 1910s to 1940s, such as the regional newspapers *Almora*

Akhbar, *Garhwali*, *Tarun Kumaun*, and later, at independence, *Yugwani*, youth and student issues begin to appear with more frequency.⁷ For example, one finds discussions of youth events and organizations, political appeals, the texts of speeches addressing youth and students, and articles regarding the role of education in both political and nation-building endeavors. While young people certainly participated in diverse forms of associational life in rural and urban spheres for some time, what is of particular interest in this article is the way in which they began to be portrayed as a political force in print culture generated by educated and literate Paharis. Thus, as I will argue further, the notion of youth as a form of solidarity and as a distinct public emerged in the late colonial period in Uttarakhand, drawing from a regional imaginary. To elaborate, I situate these publics in the context of a “regional modernity,” drawing from Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal’s (2003: 16–21) description of modernity that encompasses earlier “regional formations” of patriotic and cultural mobilization (cf. Bayly 1998) upon which the nationalist movement depended, which involved “interlocked physical, discursive, or socio-spatial expressions of struggles about place-making.”

Contextualizing Youth in the Regional Public Sphere

Texts such as vernacular newspapers have been a vital source for investigating social change and political life in colonial South Asia (cf. Dalmia 1997; Gupta 2001; Naregal 2001; Orsini 2002) at a time when print capitalism and the circulation of newspapers helped to generate “imagined communities” of readership and national affiliation (Anderson 1991). These and other works have drawn from aspects of a Habermasian model of an emerging public sphere in the seventeenth and eighteenth century in Europe to examine the rise of democratic and associational life in the context of Indian nationalism (cf. Freitag 1989; Joshi 2001; Gupta 2001; Naregal 2001; Orsini 2002; Rajagopal 2009).⁸ As has been well reviewed, Habermas (1989) examines its transformation, starting with the growth of a bourgeois public sphere of literate, landowning men who gathered in salons and coffee houses and participated in political debate in urbanizing European cities. For example, Habermas (1989: 58–61) historicizes the emergence of “a new climate of political criticism” of the press in late seventeenth century London and the lessening of censorship, allowing for “rational-critical arguments into the press,” while Parliament began to view coffeehouses as places of “political unrest.” As an ideal, critical debate and public information, “which once had to be fought for

against the arcane policies of monarchies” (Habermas 1974: 50) could grow into a scene with wider accessibility outside of the influence of the state. This “public” aspect thus requires an audience; as Warner (2002) argues, publics are characterized by a common addressee and “mediate the intimate theater of stranger-relationality” (57).⁹ Publics also have “material limits” and “social conditions of access” (Warner 2002: 54). Translating such ideas in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century North Indian context, Orsini (1999: 409) characterizes “a normative attitude that interprets public in terms of jati or community” and public “as a space where norms and consensus are questioned in the name of reason or of particular interests and subjects.”

As these political publics had heterogeneous, regional and vernacular forms, here I briefly review their emergence in Uttarakhand’s history. While Uttarakhand became a new state in 2000, in the colonial period its contemporary boundaries did not officially exist on a map. As part of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh since 1901, the colonial period in British Kumaun formally extended from 1815 to 1947, following the East India Company’s acquisition of the western Himalayan region in the Anglo-Nepal War. Colonial Kumaun Division constituted the districts of Nainital and Almora, as well as British Garhwal. A smaller northwestern princely state, referred to as Tehri Garhwal after 1815, also joined Uttar Pradesh in 1949 in search of improved livelihoods and the potential benefits of a larger state administration (Kumar 2000: 3).

Historical work touching on political and social life in British Kumaun and Tehri Garhwal in the late colonial period shows that, like elsewhere in the subcontinent, many freedom fighters and reformists mobilized social and nationalist issues via the press (cf. Pathak 1991, 1997; Joshi 1999; Rawat 1999, 2002; Guha 2000; P. Kumar 2000; A. Kumar 2011). While print media in the early public sphere in the hills certainly covered some similar themes to the plains regions regarding language, religion, gender, and nationalism, the overall flavor of political tracts was quite different, focusing on regional problems, local education, agrarian issues and the significance of a geographical homeland as a way to highlight colonial environmental abuse.¹⁰ For example, in October of 1898, *Almora Akhbar* published an “appeal” to the “rich and educated people” to “contribute to the spread of education by opening technical schools and colleges, and the endowment of scholarships, enabling Indian students to study abroad” (Joshi 1999: 58). A representative issue of *Almora Akhbar* from April 1914 contains a debate over the major perceived gaps

in colonial governance, including protest over the issue of forced labor (*begār*), complaints regarding the neglect of education in Kumaun, and the general failure to benefit locally from income raised from the forest industry.¹¹ An elite urbanized public mobilized around such issues, forming a particular set of grievances against the policies of autonomous and paternalistic government officials in a comparatively isolated area.¹² Pathak (1991) argues that the rise in local protest movements in Uttarakhand against *begār* and in favor of forest rights¹³ was an opening into anticolonial politics, and many strands eventually “merged” into the nationalist movements taking place outside of Uttarakhand.¹⁴ During the first two decades of the twentieth century, as social protest increased, “a new multidimensional leadership emerged” who had received education in British missionary schools, and “had come under the impact of Indian renaissance, British liberalism and had been influenced by the nationalist leadership as well” (Pathak 1997: 908). Leaders often traveled to the countryside in order to promote awareness and gain knowledge of local grievances,¹⁵ and in one example evidenced later in this essay, encouraged educated youth to “travel to nearby villages and impart knowledge to the people.”^{16 17} In 1916, leaders set up the *Kumaun Parishad*, a key political association, “to mediate between the state and the peasantry” (Guha 2000: 126). Govind Ballabh Pant,¹⁸ the general secretary, also attempted to form local village chapters of the Parishad (Guha 2000: 111). Fiol (2008: 65) has also noted that in Uttarakhand, “regionalist discourses of lack, decline, and spirituality, emerge out of historically-evolving set of relations between urbanized elites and villagers.” Overall, the public sphere was unique in this regional context, and this setting created a forum for youth politics that carried forth to the present, one that mobilized symbols of ecology and agrarian concerns in a robust regional form of political expression.

However, this novel platform of political life, as it was in Habermas’s account of the public sphere, was often exclusionary—in this case, on the lines of caste, class, gender and influence.¹⁹ Although young women were also involved in social and political activity, in many instances the term “youth” took on a masculine connotation, partly due to the comparatively larger presence of young men traveling out to study in universities and the large numbers of young men returning from service in the military. Furthermore, the content of news and associational life mostly contained concerns and political mobilizations of a local intelligentsia largely consisting of upper caste men, and their writings foregrounded the contemporary political emphasis on a particular vision of Hindu culture.²⁰

The percentage of those who attained literacy and education in the early twentieth century was small, although relatively higher than outside the region— above 10%, as compared to the rest of North India.²¹ In the hills, with the exception of a few newspapers such as *Samta* and *Tarun Kumaun*, upper caste leaders maintained editorship of most of the regional press (Joshi 1999: 229). They also had leadership roles in the protests over *begār* and forest rights (Kumar 2000: 60). This was partly due to the links that hill Brahmin and Rajput families had with British administration and networks of power. An early Settlement Report contends, “the high caste Braman [sic] families have been for generations in the service of the Kumaun Rajas or the British Government and have representatives settled in Almora” (Goudge 1903: 7). Bayly (1996: 102) notes that after the British took over Kumaun, Brahmins such as Pans and Joshis took on positions as writers in British offices.

Considering this context and background, here I examine the nascent formation of regional youth publics. When addressing the youth as a public, to whom did newspaper editors and leaders refer? These publics were often composed of educated “audiences” made up of age cohorts with affiliations to regional and local symbols, provoked by the environmental and social concerns of a new generation on the cusp of independence, based on a shared social horizon for mobilization and action, and sustained by a rhythmic circulation of ideas. I define youth here as constructed by “social circumstances rather than chronological age” and as influenced by “historical changes” (Bucholtz 2002: 526, 527). Taking up liminal positions, youth are “social shifters,” culturally constituted and “relational” (Durham 2000: 116-7).²² “Far from constituting a universal category,” Comaroff and Comaroff (2006: 267) point to the fact that youth have been defined as the “historical offspring of modernity.” As Lefebvre (1995: 158) argues, the idea of “young people as a group” emerged “with the first symptoms of what we call ‘modernity’” in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, with the development of an educated bourgeoisie and of new rites of passage, especially for young men. Youth came to inhabit a productive contradiction of being “unruly” agents of change needing discipline and guidance on the one hand, and as those ready to be involved in ‘rational’ debate and the study of politics on the other. As Sen (2007: 213) notes on his work on youth politics in colonial Bengal (following Gillis 1974), “Since youth, innocence, dependence and loyalty were interrelated, political activity—interpreted as disloyalty and conspiracy, and signifying acts of will—violated modern childhood.”

Further, a particular language of youth politics developed in the 1920s, drawing upon nineteenth-century roots. The propagation of Hindi created a platform on which a public could maintain circulation of ideas at a time when language politics and nationalism were integrated.²³ In Kumaun, officials employed the Nagri script since the establishment of British rule in the region, using it in “conducting most of their business” by 1835 (King 1994: 57, 199). Kumauni nationalists also worked for the spread of Hindi: Almora’s Badri Dutt Joshi “urge[d] Hindus... to make Hindi the national language,” reasoning that “sound education can never be imparted except through the medium of the mother tongue.”²⁴ As such, I will reflect on how certain Hindi terms related to youth became prominent in what Orsini (1999: 409) refers to as a “political vocabulary of modernity,” such as *navyuvak samāj* (young society) and *yuvak śakti* (youth power). Various narratives in print focused on the duty (*karttavya*) and sacrifice (*balidān*, *tyāg*) required of youth for national progress and development (*unnati*), as those who determined the future role of the region in the larger nation. In addition, notions of time (*sa-may*) informed the content of these tracts, orienting youth into the language of futures.

Regional Youth Politics in the Late Colonial Period

The idea of youth as a social force grew with participation in political protest; a new emphasis on associational life such as clubs, meetings and organizations created openings for political involvement. Altbach (1966) has described the period of the 1920s as a shift in student politics in India. Prior to Gandhi’s non-cooperation movement, he argues, students had minimal political experience, and a “small” group of Indian students focused more on “cultural affairs.” He contends that, “as the nationalist movement grew and was gradually transformed under Gandhi’s leadership from a middle class ‘debating society’ into a militant mass movement, the students took an increasingly active role in politics” (Altbach 1966: 449). He also emphasizes the circulation of international political movements at the time, asserting that the “impact of nationalism was combined with Western intellectual influences, particularly the ideas of the British Fabian socialists and later the Russian Communists” (ibid). This was also a period of student unrest associated with the popular young revolutionary, Bhagat Singh, and the formation of the Naujawan Bharat Sabha on 22 October 1929. As Mittal points out, one of its goals was to “inspire young men with the spirit of patriotism and sacrifice to the end that India might become a full fledged national entity” and “to organise the peasants and workers” (Mittal 1978: 43).

In colonial Uttarakhand, youth political activity grew as “frequent visits by local leaders to Congress sessions and the effort of Kumaoni students studying in the cities also helped the national movement come to the region” (Pathak 1991: 267). Young villagers with broadened experience had returned from fighting for the British in World War I (Pathak: 1991: 267; Agrawal 2005: 82, Joshi 1999: 62), creating a surge of youth with political potential. In the regional press, “a Kumaoni” wrote a letter published in *Shakti* in 1919 that stated, “In the First World War, Kumaon contributed fifteen hundred soldiers and three thousand one hundred irregulars...but the families of the same warriors are suffering on account of begar and forests.”²⁵ Students who had studied outside the region were also called upon in the press to play a role in politics; an article titled “Social Service” (*Samāj Sevā*) in the newspaper *Puru-sharth* reported in 1919 that some patriotic youth (*desha-prem prerit navyuvak*) who received their higher education in Banaras raised the question of a *Garhwali Sevā Samiti*, mentioning the sacrifices of youth in the military.²⁶ In 1920, a student group called the *Kurmanchal Vidyarthi Parishad*, (the Kurmanchal [Kumaun] Student Organization), held meetings in Almora: *Shakti* published an editorial that reportedly inspired youth in Nainital and Almora to join the Non-Cooperation Movement “as volunteers” and “took out processions wearing khadi caps,” alarming the district commissioner. The editorial read, “Those who say students should not do this and that, are the stooges of bureaucracy...Boys...should learn to serve the nation, to live and die for it. Only then would they be called the true sons of the motherland.”²⁷ Furthermore, in 1921, regional and local issues inspired youth involvement against *begār*, when leaders of the *Kumaun Parishad*, including Badri Dutt Pande, called for a protest at a local temple in Bageshwar, reportedly with the “blessings” of Gandhi. An inspired Mukundi Lal (editor of the newspaper *Tarun Kumaun*) held meetings joined by Garhwali students from Varanasi (Joshi 1999: 85-87). Students from Ramsay School, Almora, also participated in a large protest and strike, wearing Gandhi caps (Pathak 1991: 274-275).

In the Hindi language press, ruminations on the political temporalities of student life further arose in 1923, when *Tarun Kumaun* published the article called “Students and Politics” (*Vidyārthī aur Rājnīti*), mentioned in this essay’s introduction. The newspaper was one of many papers in the region that served as a vehicle for news and politics among the region’s elites despite limited circulation (approximately 300). The newspaper’s founder, Barrister Mukundi Lal from Landsdowne, had taken inspiration from his experiences with youth politics abroad; he studied at Oxford University and spent time in London from 1913 to

1919, where he had met and was influenced by Bertrand Russell, George Bernard Shaw and British labor leader, James Keir Hardie (Joshi 1999: 241). Written in a style of Sanskritized Hindi, the article argued that the region’s young people should become involved in political life and national concerns:²⁸

The aim of a student is to acquire education and increase knowledge (*vidyā upārjan karnā aur apne jñān kī vṛiddhi karnā*). To obtain knowledge of politics (*rājnīti kā jñān prāpt karnā*), to see what is the political situation in our country, is the duty (*kartavya*) of every student...we believe politics to be a life science (*jīvan vijñān*) of human society... To make such a rule that students should remain separate from political movements (*rājnitik āndolan*) would be national suicide.

This telling excerpt reveals the tension between the Hindu ideal of student life being reserved for internal study versus that of student life being a time for political expression. Politics as something to study and meditate upon was a novel idea at the time, and grew as students at universities became involved in political movements. In fact, the article also compared regional aspirations with student life in England, where Lal stressed that one finds active political debate in the colleges there, stating that in “independent nations,” students present their opinions regarding political issues. He described the way in which youth from ages sixteen to twenty one have their own opinions (*sammati*) and discuss various bills passed in parliament. “Not only that,” he stated, they “invite big politicians and ministers” in their discussions over political matters. He also reported that students at Oxford and Cambridge debated whether or not Ireland and India should get independence. On holidays, he observed students outside the college taking part in political movements and giving speeches. Such reports regarding student politics in England provided a justification and inspiration regarding the possibilities for youth publics and political life. Colleges and universities in India became spaces for potential politics, and many of the region’s elites studied in Allahabad, Calcutta, or Banaras and then returned to the hill regions to take on leadership roles.²⁹ Importantly, university life for youth can already be seen as a fleeting time for a certain kind of political action.

In Garhwal, Vishwambhar Dutt Chandola, another activist concerned with education and youth politics, took over the newspaper *Garhwali* from 1912-1952,³⁰ which was one of the region’s most widely circulated and long-lasting colonial era newspapers. Using it as a forum, he wrote about various regional social and political concerns. Ensuring youth

readership, he charged students a discounted price of eight *anna* per issue. In 1918, Garhwali published an essay written by an eighth grade student from a rural school in Pauri regarding problems with the education system there.³¹ In August of 1925, Chandola published a statement that the “public was crying out” (*jantā chillā rahī hai*) regarding problems within Garhwal’s education system, yet the British were “not trying to do much about it.” He expressed that it did not help to “merely increase the numbers” of those attending university.³²

In a compelling example of youth mobilization, in 1925 he referenced the concept of time (*samay*) in a printed version of a presidential speech he gave at a Garhwal Youth Conference (*Garhwal Navyuvak Sammelan*) in Dugadda, a town south of Srinagar located on the northern end of what is now the Corbett National Park. There, he reportedly addressed a group of youth, stating outright:³³

Time is life itself, and to waste (destroy) time is to waste life. (*Samay hī manusya kā jīvan hai, aur samay ko naṣṭ karnā, jīvan ko naṣṭ karnā hai.*)

Invoking time in 1925, this expression reflects a newly crafted emphasis on discipline and futures. Considering the earlier example of *Tarun Kumaun*’s discussion of the stage of youth, this is of particular interest considering the way time and youth were configured in the colonial period, as “disciplinary time” manifested in new educational institutions (Sarkar 1997: 188-190). One recalls E.P Thompson’s (1967) reflections on “time and work-discipline” here; he cites Oliver Heywood in *Youth’s Monitor* (1689): “time ‘is too precious a commodity to be undervalued...the loss of time is unsufferable, because [it is] irrecoverable’” (Thompson 1967: 87).

A close reading of Chandola’s speech reveals the unique cadence of his political language. He asked the youth to be “selfless” in their pursuits and to dedicate this time of youth to national causes. He invoked Gandhi in his speech, telling the youth, “Mahatma Gandhi presented the nation with an ideal of self-sacrifice (*svārth tyāg*) and spiritual force (*ātmik bal*).” He emphasized this work to be the duty of youth, hinging prosperous futures on their selfless actions:

Cohesion (literally the “power of unity” or “union-power”) is the key to victory (*Vijay kā mūl-mantra saṅgh-śakti hai*.) As long as the reverence of cohesion (*saṅgh-śakti*) remains in Garhwal, its esteem and honor will remain. As long as Garhwal’s youth understand their duty (*kartavya*) towards their motherland (*māṭṛbhūmi*), our Srinagar will be filled with prosperity.

The notion of *saṅgh-śakti* is of particular interest for the formation of youth publics. Such articulations reveal a newly formed sense of youth as a group and as a common reference for political action as they became an addressee in political invocations. Tying this to their role in nation building, he asserted, “The progress or decline (*unnati athvā avnati*) of a people (*jāti*) or of a country (*des*) remains dependent on its youth community (*navyuvak samāj*).” In terms of youth ideals, he stated:

Whichever society’s youth are enthusiastic, cognizant of their duties, laborious, honest, discerning, and patriotic (*deśpremi*), that nation or people’s rise is inevitable. Indeed, the very development (*unnati*) of a society’s youth is the progress of the nation.

In the speech, he discursively linked service to the wider nation with sacrifice, almost in a religious sense:

The path of national service is a difficult one... To come on this path one has to reject one’s own personal happiness. You will have to burn your selfishness in the (sacred) fire (*agni*). You will have to pay attention to the fruits of your actions. You are gathered here today so that you will do something to benefit the nation. This is a good thing, but it will be fulfilled only when you work (*kām*).

As noted earlier in this essay, educated youth were also asked to be the conveyors of knowledge. Once a year, Chandola’s speech requests, youth should assemble in a forum in which they give and listen to lectures and pass resolutions. Herein we also find hints regarding the link between educated town youth becoming leaders and the mobilization of those in the rural areas:

You also will need to travel to nearby villages and impart knowledge to the people there on how to maintain the cleanliness of their villages and show them how not to get stuck in litigation (*mukadme-bāzī*). Tell them about the role and work of panchayats. Give them instructions on how to maintain the forests nearby their villages. Let them hear about the glory of *saṅgh-śakti* ...If educated youth take this as part of their daily work, awareness will come quickly to the nation.

Such emphasis on youth continued regarding the role of education. In 1928, *Garhwali* published an article titled, “Education and Garhwal” (*Shikshā aur Garhavāl*), quoting Gandhi as stressing education as a way to attain the victory of truth (*satya*) over falsehood. The paper also criticized Macaulay and a colonial education system meant to serve British interests; it stated that the British education system

did not “build the nation,” rather it brought it down (*bigāḍnā*), and that “the purpose of such [British] education is not to awaken *Ārya sanskr̥ti* (Aryan culture), but rather to wipe it out (*lupt karnā*).” Further, the essay commented that “proper” education was necessary for national progress (*unnati*).³⁴

Education was something that also happened organically through the circulation of texts and literature. Here the figure of Sridev Suman enters the scene. Still a popular and revered “freedom fighter” in present-day Garhwal, Suman was a Gandhian and youth activist born in 1916 who fought for independence for Tehri State. He was also a member of the Indian National Congress and led the Praja Mandal in 1939. Suman gave speeches and wrote articles in the regional press, served as editor of the newspaper *Karmabhumi* (Joshi 1999: 42) and “invoked the spirit of Bhagat Singh” (Guha 2000: 80). Furthermore, he “had a strong influence on the students at the college in Tehri,” inspiring them to go on strike in 1940. Expelled students “continued to be in close touch with Suman and with Garhwali students at the Banaras Hindu University” (Guha 2000: 80). Since those in Tehri State faced greater censorship, the Mandal formed in Dehra Dun as a hub of political activity. An article in *Yugwani* in 1948 recalled Sridev Suman as follows: “There was a time when it was considered evil to wear the Gandhi cap and repeat the name Suman,” but now “times have changed” due to “the martyrs and to that public power, on behalf of whose force we are enjoying the fruit of independence.”³⁵ Suman spent his time traveling to villages and organizing discussions, and along the way met and inspired the young Sunderlal Bahuguna (who held a leadership role in the Chipko movement against deforestation in the 1970s), giving him a Hindi translation of the booklet, *An Appeal to the Young*, published in 1880 by the Russian author Kropotkin (James 2013: 19).

After being jailed for his political activities, Suman undertook a hunger strike in jail and died in 1944 at the age of 28. Sunderlal Bahuguna also mentioned this booklet to me—which he described as an appeal to young men written by a Russian anarchist³⁶—when I met him in his residence near Tehri, Uttarakhand in 2006. Questioning even the most respected professions, the booklet, as Bahuguna narrated to me in Hindi, stated that society needed to change its very foundations to see real social change. Bahuguna described his own involvement in Congress politics at the age of twenty-one, after which he was persuaded to leave “active” politics in order to get married. As we continued our discussion, he remarked, “youth always move forward when they find an ideal.” He then pointed to a picture of Sridev Suman on the wall and asked, “do you see this

picture on the wall behind me? It is a picture of my Guru. At the age of twenty-eight, in Tehri jail, observing a fast for eighty-four days, he acquired martyrdom because he had the ideal before him that he will achieve independence.”³⁷

To reference another lesser-known case of youth “sacrifice,” in March 1948, *Yugwani* published an article offering a remembrance of the young communist leader, Nagender Dutt Saklani and Thakur Molu Singh (Molu Ram). Saklani was a youth leader and political organizer, and both were shot after a rally demanding independence for Kirtinagar from Tehri State in January 1948.³⁸ The article stated, “the fruit of these two sacrifices [*balidān*] is the freedom [*svatantratā*] of Tehri. For the Goddess of Freedom, sacrifice is required.”³⁹ Post-statehood, after 2000, youth stressed this notion of sacrifice in various contexts, sometimes in mocking ways or for dramatic flair. Contemporary youth often employed “political spectacle in public space” which drew on “the anti-colonial legacy of civil disobedience” (Hansen 2004: 24). However, there has even been “a certain ‘banalization’ of public rituals originating in the nationalist movement” and “sometimes a tongue-in-cheek reversal of meanings” (*ibid*: 25).

In 2006, while conducting ethnographic research in Garhwal, I met members of the Hindu nationalist student organization ABVP (*Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad* or the All Indian Student Council)⁴⁰ in Tehri the day after Martyrs Day, which honored Sridev Suman. Telling me about Suman’s long fast, one student leader joked that he took inspiration from the event by eating and drinking to become strong. “If I were to become a saint then I could not make progress. I can only make progress if I remain aggressive,” he exclaimed. His companion responded, “Yes, Mahatma Gandhi could not take birth again!” Describing a recent protest they coordinated in the town, another exclaimed, “When they arrested me during the agitation, it was very tough for the administration, just like during the days of independence movement.” In speeches, print media, and rallies in 2005 to 2007, I documented many such cases of young activists often recalling the sacrifices of youth, such as in the military and during the movement for statehood.⁴¹ As one youth leader implored in a rally for employment and local development in Ranikhet in 2006, “why did we make Uttaranchal?⁴² Why did so many youth sacrifice themselves for a new state?” Or, in an essay in a Kumaun University, Nainital student yearbook from 2005, one student sought to inspire political action among the new generation: “Where has that youth gone who, by his own will, had dedicated and sacrificed his youth happily in the noose of the rope for the country and the society?”⁴³

Youth and Post-Independence Concerns

New kinds of formal youth gatherings took place in Tehri State after the Praja Mandal was “finally recognized” (Kumar 2000: 54). The notion of sacrifice carried forward into the post-independence era in terms of nation-building endeavors. Clear references to a regional Pahari youth identity also emerged: in 1946, *Garhwali* printed a small notice titled, “Hill Student Union (*Parvatīya Chātra Saṅgh*),” describing its founding in 1938 by some “inspired students.” The author hoped that students from “the hilly areas” such as Almora and Tehri would “realize their purpose and come together.”⁴⁴ Students continued to express their problems in the press, and in September of 1947, *Yugwani* printed a small article on Pauri Garhwal called “Difficulties of the Students” (*Vidyārthiyom kī Kaṭhināī*). The newspaper often wrote about independence for Tehri State and the issues regarding democratic rule, stating in 1947, “if steps would be taken to bring about democratic rule, then the public would need to be educated for democracy.”⁴⁵ The students of the government school and inter-college held a general meeting, protesting fee increases and discussing problems confronting the “student community” (*vidyārthi samudāy*). They also sent their resolutions to the Education Minister of Uttar Pradesh. Such events reveal that the contemporary practice of meetings, mailing resolutions, demonstrations against education fees, and mobilization had developed a presence in the region by 1947. Furthermore, the notion of a *samudāy* (community) of students — implying the solidarity of a political force — is worth highlighting here.

In an “Appeal to the Youth of Tehri” in April 1948, an activist named Bansilal Pundir published an essay discussing the role of youth in the “new era” of an independent nation:⁴⁶

Democracy has triumphed over feudalism. So many years of hard work have come to fruition... While we have become independent in one sense, we also have to fulfill very heavy responsibilities, especially the many responsibilities of the youth and students, who have always taken part in all movements with triumph.

This passage, part of which I cited at the introduction to this essay, offers a glimpse into how youth and students progressively became a powerful force in political change in the region. Pundir discussed the fact that as a princely state, formal assemblies could not be public. Since most political activism took place out of Dehradun, not being allowed within Tehri state itself, the formalization of youth politics took on a new meaning. The article continued to emphasize new “freedoms” in stating that, “in the history

of the state, we could not until now arrange any convention for the youth and students due to the hurdles of the feudal rule, but now there is opportunity for it to begin.”⁴⁷ Calling for a “new foundation,” they could “now take complete active part in the political life of the state.” He elaborated that the “student community” would “have to lift society out of the deep hole of decline and carry it to the heights of success.” Furthermore, emphasizing regional affinity, he stressed that students who are studying within the region have different problems than those studying “outside” (in the plains areas). The “responsibility” for the future, he asserted, lied in the hands of “educated society.”⁴⁸ In a final section of the invocation, the construction of youth solidarity was articulated in relation to democratic futures:

We know that whatever decisions the leaders of our people will take for the future course will be for the welfare of the public. Even then, in order to provide strong support and to take a proper role in future activities, it is necessary that during these summer holidays, a convention of all the youth and the students of the state should be arranged at a proper place, at a convenient place, so that we can consider the exchange of ideas, think over our problems and future programs properly and give our support to the leadership of the masses.

In May 1948, *Yugwani* reported on details of a conference at Tehri, stating that “for the first time in the history of Tehri on [the] 12th, 13th, and 14th [of] May, a youth convention is being celebrated with much fanfare.” The program involved a two-day convention and included music, drama, a large exhibition, sports, debate, essaywriting, and a swimming competition. Various workers and leaders oversaw these conventions, where youth “energy” could be directed toward national and regional causes. On 3 June 1948 *Yugwani* reported on another youth conference held in Tehri by Bansilal Pundir, emphasizing the common idiom of youth as the “backbone” of society:

The youth have been the backbone [*rīṛh*] of any society. As long as the backbone is strong [*mazbūt*], the nation will become strong. If Tehri Garhwal and Garhwal are to be taken to high places, then the youth of these regions will have to come forward. The weight of the nation has been on the strong shoulders of the youth. Oh, the youth and the students of Tehri Garhwal and Garhwal, the country is invoking you! Come forward! Come forward as the true service providers of the people [*jantā ke sacce sevak*] and take responsibility to remove and clear any dirt remaining from the previous period.

The theme of progress re-emerged and *Yugwani* invoked their role again:⁴⁹

Youth, you are the guards of your own country. Until you take the responsibility of safeguarding your own people, the work of public welfare will not be realized. So will you not be prepared to do true public service? ... You will surely come forward. We are welcoming you... I hope that for the new establishment and development of Tehri and Garhwal, our youth community will work as a symbol of progress.

The invocation concludes as follows:

Youth are the accumulation of power.⁵⁰ Youth should surely dedicate this possessed power of theirs to uplift the common people. It is the youth who can fight and oppose the evil forces that are coming up within the country.

This phrase is telling, as the power of the youth—as they have been told—not only created an aura of potentiality, but also reverberated into contemporary politics. They are addressed as “being able to create a new world.”⁵¹ These passages uncover some of the political language of leaders as they mobilized affective and regional symbols. The notions of service, struggle, decline, and erasing the dark past, all enter the political vocabulary of a new generation. Youth involvement, which once involved “mediations” and studies on politics as a science, soon came to be something as always already political, with students “sharing a duty” to shape the future. Emerging leaders, hoping for a working democracy and new kinds of open public debate, also perhaps sought entry into new forms of political power as Tehri State became democratic and formally merged with the United Provinces in 1949.

Conclusions

While the public sphere has traceable forms before the rise of print and news media (such as through markets, religious texts and oral traditions⁵²), this essay has argued that the category of youth as related to a regional modernity was crystallized with the introduction of print culture and nationalist mobilization in colonial Uttarakhand. The spread of higher education, the circulation of print media, and increased political news production and availability, situated within a strong regional identity, set the stage for youth as political agents of the age—as a group bestowed with “political potential.”⁵³ In vernacular newspapers, essays, and reproductions of speeches invoked themes of temporality, progress, and future making, often in rela-

tion to calls for youth discipline. Sen (1994) has called the spaces of the formation of childhood—such as schools, laws, and children’s literature in colonial India—the “juvenile periphery.” He elaborates, “These spaces... were apparently set apart from overtly ‘political’ zones of adult contention” (ibid.) As I have shown, the transition from such spaces into the stage of youth—as the ambiguous space between adulthood and childhood—grew to be a time for political action. In India, youth politics has been well analyzed in its contemporary avatar, showing the way in which young people in post-colonial India navigate fragmented life (cf. Jeffrey et al 2007; Jeffrey 2008, 2009; Lukose 2005, 2009; Kumar 2012).⁵⁴ As a precursor to their contemporary political lives, here I have examined more closely the language and historical formation of youth publics and the emergence of youth as a form of address in vernacular print culture in the colonial period.

As such, I argue that such studies also need to be regionally situated, as youth publics have unique histories and imaginaries. In the late nineteenth century, the roots of a “rural imaginary” in the Uttarakhand region formed as town politics began to slowly focus on issues regarding peasant protest, especially against *begār* (forced labor) and demands for forest rights. These rural and nascent environmental concerns informed anti-colonial protest in the hills, shaping the content of regional public sphere. This brings up interesting questions regarding the political construction of ‘youth’ in relation to education and a regional modernity. Educated youth were called upon to engage in nationalist politics in urban spheres and to spread awareness to rural areas, often drawing from Hindu notions of sacrifice and duty. Considering the cosmopolitan affiliations of political leaders, the idea of a larger global political imaginary grew to be an important theme for youth publics. Those with elite education and extra-regional connections were able to link local politics with wider national and global movements, as “multiple regional and vernacular practices of cultural activism...could be sutured, through the anti-colonial nationalist relay, to an over-arching sense of world-historical destiny” (Mazzarella 2010:10-11). This tells us much about the vision of how the future nation was imagined in this mountain region.

Finally, intergenerational contacts amongst the intelligentsia in the hills meant that patriotic politics and spheres of influence built during the national movement continued to shape the political activism of youth in the contemporary context. The contribution of regional youth to the movement for independence emerged as a prominent narrative in various later aspirational political demands during and after the movement for Uttarakhand statehood. To briefly

mention the next avatar of regional student politics, the following period of the 1950s proved to be one of high aspirations for educated Pahari youth, many whom continued to study in universities in Uttar Pradesh and joined administrative roles in nation-building endeavors. However, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, disillusionment and a new politics of development took hold in the region, one manifestation being the student role in the Chipko movement against deforestation and demands for a regional university. Post-statehood (2000), the promises of development and the historical memory of the regional contribution to the nation created a new kind of popular politics among youth and students. The affinity towards one's place in the mountains and forests and early expressions of "ecological nationalism" (Sivaramakrishnan and Cederlof 2006; Linkenbach 2006) informed the vocabulary of youth politics. While reflections on progress and development—situated in ideas of citizenship and reform—arose at the end of the 19th century, these themes in relation to discussions of time, futures, and the possibilities of progress and decline, continued to be resilient categories of youth publics post-independence.

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Endnotes

1. *Tarun Kumaun* (Young Kumaun), July 1923, as republished in Vaishnav (1994).
2. The original Hindi reads as 'sadā āndolanōm meīñ śandār bhāg liyā haiñ.'
3. "Tiharī ke navyuvakoīm se apīl" *Yugwani*, Dehradun, 15 April 1948, (*Yugwani* archives, Dehradun).
4. (Orsini 1999). I explain this quote further below.
5. Excerpts from Sri Chandola's Presidential Speech-Garhwal Youth Conference, 1925, Dugadda. *Garhwali*, Dehradun, April 1925, as reprinted in Vaishnav (1994: 34-35).
6. In this essay, statements regarding politics in the postcolonial context are drawn from ethnographic and archival research conducted in Uttarakhand during 2005-2007 with the support of a Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad Fellowship. See Koskimaki (2011).
7. I do not claim to have covered the entire print archive from the region, as my research time was limited for this aspect of the project. Here, I aim to offer insights into the language of youth politics as it emerged in the region.
8. In fact, as "nationalists began clamoring for a larger say in state institutions," Freitag (1989: 220-221) argues, "Public arena activity, evolving to meet twentieth-century needs for political activism and a greater sense of community, began to resemble the public spheres of modern European nation-states."

9. Warner (2002: 75) reminds us that, “A public seems to be self-organized by discourse, but in fact requires preexisting forms and channels of circulation. It appears to be open to indefinite strangers, but in fact selects participants by criteria of shared social space (though not necessarily territorial space), habitus, topical concerns, intergeneric references, and circulating intelligible forms (including idiolects or speech genres).”

10. Like in the plains, the active press in the hills also often worked to defend Hindu themes, such as cow protection. For example, in the 1830s Kumaunis worked to abolish cow slaughter, and it was thereafter only permitted in the military cantonments (Pande 1993: 414).

11. *Almora Akhbar*, 27 April 1914, (Selections from Indian-owned newspapers published in the United Provinces 1913-1918).

12. In the late nineteenth and twentieth century local nationalist leaders began to draw from the characteristics of their region’s “marginality” in creating agendas for protest and in doing so demarcated the hill provinces as subject to unique circumstance. The nationalist and Congress leader Govind Ballabh Pant from Almora discussed Kumaun’s “local handicaps” in a booklet, *Shasan Sudharon ka Sukshma Vivarn*: “Besides, treatment of Kumaun as a scheduled district and all the civil cases here under the administrative officers of this place are the hurdles in the freedom of the people. Besides, *benap* [unmeasured land], *nayabad* [new cultivation], wild animals, license, *gharat* [water mills], *abpashi* [irrigation], *begar* [forced labor], arbitrary rule in Tarai Bhabar are the other difficulties” (Pande: 1993 [1933]: 411).

13. Conflicts over the use and management of forests were a “medium to infuse a spirit of dissent under the British” (Pant and Rawat 1985[1922]: 13), with the 1920s being a key period of unrest, when many locals burned forests in protest (cf. Guha 2000, Agrawal 2005). Patterns of peasant revolt should be linked to the regional circumstances in the hills, especially the “enduring changes in the structure of colonial administration” (Guha 2000: 99). Guha (2000: 132-133) rightly critiques a focus on peasant mobilization and nationalism as only “centering on a ‘hegemonic party,’” pointing instead to “everyday” forms of resistance, earlier revolts occurring “before ‘modern’ nationalism penetrated the countryside,” and other aspects of “peasant autonomy.”

14. Pathak (1991: 262) argues that no evidence of a “widespread movement” against begār exists for the nineteenth century, owing to Kumaun’s “geographical isolation” and the fact that “Company rule... was less cruel and oppressive than Gurkha rule.”

15. While Orsini (2002: 326, 330) has contended that issues regarding rural society were not largely discussed in the Hindi public sphere in North India before 1920—asserting that awareness rose due to Gandhi’s influence—in the hills, rural concerns were addressed in the public sphere much earlier, as many scholars have shown (Agrawal 2005; Guha 2000; Pathak 1991, 1997). The local press widely discussed Gandhi’s visit to Kumaun in 1929, publicizing his speeches and meetings in various hill towns. His visit has been referenced as “a crucial link between the nation’s struggle for swaraj and the ongoing people’s movement in the region” (P.C. Joshi 2001: 3300)

16. In 1920 Mukundi Lal wrote a political appeal in Garhwali stating that “assemblies” needed to be set up in “even the smallest villages and towns where political matters would be discussed” (Joshi 1999: 146), cited from *Garhwali*, 14 February 1920.

17. See discussions below referencing Garhwali in 1925, for example.

18. Pant had received his education at Nainital’s Ramsay College and reportedly read Kumauni newspapers and began attending public meetings at a young age at Nainital’s Nanda Devi, a common place for patriotic speeches (Rau 1981: 33).

19. Looking at a similar context—the rise of a middle class in the plains of UP—Sanjay Joshi (2001: 40) also argues, “although almost all the editors of papers and the leaders of public associations were from among the college-educated section of the population, they spoke and wrote as the representatives of a much larger public.”

20. Badri Dutt Pande, to offer one example, founded a popular nationalist newspaper still in existence today, *Shakti*, on 15 October 1918, which notably coincided with Vijaya Dashmi, a day “when good prevailed over the evil” and “Ram vanquished Ravana.” The newspaper took a line from the Bhagavad Gita as its motto (Joshi 1999: 34-35).

21. In 1921, the Census of India for the United Provinces noted comparatively high literacy rates for the hill (West Himalaya) region. Of course, these figures are “not concerned with degrees of education” but rather the “product of primary schools” (Census of India 1921: 114). However, it is interesting to note that in the United Provinces, the districts of Almora, Nainital, Dehra Dun and Garhwal (referred to as Himalaya West) boasted a comparatively high literacy rate of over 100 (per 1000 persons) in 1921, along with Lucknow and Benares, which were two plains region districts with cities that were home to universities. “Himalaya West” had a higher literacy rate of 127 in 1921 than the neighboring plains region of South Himalaya West as 52 (Ibid: 116). Comparatively, the literacy

rate for Tehri Garhwal State in 1921 was listed as only “55 to 75” per 1000 persons (Census of India 1921: 117). Literacy rates in Nainital district increased by 26 between 1911 and 1921, due to the presence of “European schools” (Ibid: 117).

22. I also consider recent work that has detailed generational and social contexts of “youth” in my considerations (cf. Bucholtz 2002; Cole 2004; Jeffrey 2008, 2009; Lukose 2005, 2009).

23. See, for example, Dalmia 1997; Gupta 2001; Orsini 2002; Gould 2004.

24. As reported in Selections from Indian-owned newspapers published in the United Provinces 1913- 1918: “One Badri Dat Joshi contributes an article to the Almora Akhbar on 7 September 1914, in which he urges the Hindus to try their utmost to make Hindi the national language of India. He says that sound education can never be imparted except through the medium of the mother-tongue, and that Government, which is a sincere well-wisher of Indians and is anxious to help them, cannot do so unless they show themselves independent and deserve help. One reason, he says, why there should be a common national language of India is that it will make it an easier matter to understand people of different parts of the country.”

25. *Shakti*, 8 July 1919. As quoted in Joshi (1999).

26. *Purusharth*, “Samāj Sevā,” July 1919, as reprinted in Vaishnav (1994: 74-76).

27. *Shakti*, 25 May 1920, as quoted in (Joshi 1999: 151).

28. *Tarun Kumaun*, “Vidyārthi aur Rājñiti” July 1923, as reprinted in Vaishnav (1994: 34-36).

29. For example, to name only a few, regional political activists Mukundi Lal, Govind Ballabh Pant, and later HN Bahuguna (Congress Party leader and former Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh in 1973-1975) all studied in Allahabad.

30. After finishing a period in the military from 1907 to 1909, Chandola became involved with a group called the Garhwal Union, for “the progress of the country, social upliftment, and education to the people of Garhwal” (Vaishnav 1994). He was also jailed for publishing an influential critique of a well-known historical incident in the region, called the Rawain Firing Episode, during which villagers involved in a movement demanding forest rights were shot in 1930 (Joshi 1999: 238). The Rawain Firing Episode has been described as a precursor for the Chipko movement in the 1970s. See Linkenbach (2002).

31. *Garhwali*, December 1918 “Varttamān Śikṣā Praṇālī”, Nanadan Sah, Vidyarthi, 8th standard, Mission School, Pauri Garhwal, as reprinted in Vaishnav (1994: 60).

32. (No title), *Garhwali*, August 1925, as reprinted in Vaishnav (1994: 33-34).

33. Excerpts from Sri Chandola’s Presidential Speech-Garhwal Youth Conference, 1925, Dugadda. *Garhwali*, Dehradun, April 1925, as reprinted in Vaishnav (1994: 34-35).

34. *Garhwali*, 28 July 1928, Dehradun. (Regional Archives, Dehradun).

35. *Yugwani*, 15 April 1948, “Addressed to the Public,” Lieutenant Harshmani Bhatt ‘Prabhakar’, (*Yugwani* archives, Dehradun).

36. Sen (2007: 206) notes that the term “anarchy” in colonial India “indicated the breakdown of normative social and political hierarchies... [and] constituted an identifiable prose of counter-insurgency whereby rebellion could be stripped of reason and deliberation, and imputed to inferior nature (that of the immature native) and external impulse (that of the political provocateur). In the context of student disorder, the British usage of ‘anarchy’ implied that the colonial school, as a civic arrangement between the races and the generations, had collapsed: an imagined enclave of white/adult pedagogical authority over native/youth had been infiltrated by the ‘indiscipline’ of native society, with its rebel politics and bad parenting.”

37. Interview with Sunderlal Bahuguna by the author, Tehri, Uttarakhand, 2006.

38. See Rawat (2002: 147-149) for a more detailed narration of these events.

39. *Yugwani*, 1 March 1948, Kīrtinagar Kā Āndolan, Shri Dharbind Ghildiyal, (*Yugwani* archives, Dehradun.) In Hindi, the article stated, ‘Svatantratā kī devī ke liye, balidān kī āvshyaktā hotī hai.’

40. ABVP was founded in 1949.

41. See Koskimaki (2011).

42. Uttaranchal was the name given to Uttarakhand when it became a state in 2000, but due to popular demand, the name was changed to Uttarakhand in 2006.

43. Bhat, Neeraj 2nd year BA student, 2002-2005, Vartamān Banām Yuvā (The Present Versus the Youth), Āsthā (Faith), Kumaun University Saṅyuktānk (Yearbook), p. 29-30.

44. Dilwar Singh Negi, "Parvatīya Chātra Saṅgh," *Garhwali*, 1 September 1946, (Regional Archives, Dehradun).
45. Thakur Krishan Singh, *Yugwani*, 15 September 1947, "Rājā aur Prajā," (*Yugwani* archives, Dehradun).
46. Sri Bansilal Pundir, *Yugwani*, 15 April 1948, "Appeal to the Youth of Tehri," Prayag, (*Yugwani* archives, Dehradun).
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid.
49. *Yugwani*, 3 June 1948, Dehradun, (*Yugwani* archives, Dehradun)
50. "Yuvak śakti kī pūnj hotī haiñ," *Yugwani*, 3 June 1948, Dehradun, (*Yugwani* archives, Dehradun).
51. 'Yuvak cāheiñ to nai duniya kī racnā bhī kar sakte haiñ.'
52. See debates in (Bayly 1996) on the "Indian ecumene" and Subrahmanyam (1998).
53. Excerpts from Sri Chandola's Presidential Speech-Garhwal Youth Conference, 1925, Dugadda. *Garhwali*, Dehradun, April 1925, as reprinted in Vaishnav (1994: 34-35).
54. Kumar's (2012) work on student politics in Meerut does rightly demarcate a transition from student protest in the colonial era to party politics in post Independence North India (46).

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