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# WHY NOT “GHETTOS”? THE GOVERNANCE OF MIGRATION IN THE SPLINTERING CITY

Willy Brandt Series of Working Papers  
in International Migration and Ethnic Relations  
2/06



MALMÖ UNIVERSITY

**Willy Brandt Series of Working Papers  
in International Migration and Ethnic Relations  
2/06**

**Published**

2006

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**Published by**

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205 06 Malmö  
Sweden

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## **WHY NOT “GHETTOS”? THE GOVERNANCE OF MIGRATION IN THE SPLINTERING CITY**

Neighbourhoods are led to construct themselves in a homogeneous way, in a sort of community in the sense of aggregated groups, not necessary only in terms of ethnicity but in terms of socio-economic characteristics. This reflects migration, socio-economic difference and the dynamic of the city development. These neighbourhoods have a potential of self-regulation and stabilisation of the city that is often underestimated. Thus, I think that the mixture of a city is the result of mobility, but cannot be the starting point, in particular in modern, flexibilised societies in which weak identities search for stabilizing communities.

Keywords: aggregated neighbourhoods, migration and identity, urban life

The city attracts difference: different ways of life, different trajectories and different socio-economic positions.<sup>1</sup> Its anonymity promises liberty and attracts people in search of new opportunities. The city simultaneously combines the promise of indifference toward diversity (as outlined by Simmel 2001 [1900]) and of a possible social ascension, thereby creating a particular attraction for people on the move. Thus, in the city, we find the elite of the “creative class” (Florida 2004) and society’s poor in search of a better future. In this sense, the city, par excellence, attracts migrants.

Traditionally, the inclusion process of migrants has been analysed by urban sociology in two major ways. The first analysis, made by social hygienists, adopted a cultural explanation. It underlined the perversity of self-exclusionary mechanisms among people who did not adopt a bourgeois way of life in the city (for instance Mearns 1970 [1883]) and promoted a negative vision of bad neighbourhoods, segregated spaces and ghettos. In short, they became stigmatised areas.

Not really liberated from the social hygienist’s prejudices, Simmel added an alternative explanation. For Simmel (2001 [1900]), people

living in segregated areas of the city were simply unable to leave their peasant background behind and would rather choose to reproduce living conditions similar to those of their former peasant world in their urban neighbourhoods. Lacking human, economic and social resources, yet still needing communitarian relationships or some kind of mechanic solidarity, they were unable to seize the perspectives and potential of freedom offered by the city.

With Park (Park 1928), the segregation analysis introduced a structural element that explained segregated spaces in terms of the territorial constitution of a city rather than the choices of the migrants themselves. The city organises itself in order to put migrants and poor people in its less attractive areas. There is a dynamic of exclusion related to socio-economic positions in which the rich take up the best places of the city and confine the poor to the segregated spaces. Anti-segregation policies, then, became the political way of fighting against a systematic exclusion; a choice of policy that is still the principal measure of segregation in many of today's cities.<sup>2</sup>

These analyses of the Chicago School of Urban Sociology reached a turning point with the rediscovery of communities in the cities as self-regulated spaces of solidarity. Whyte's *Street Corner Society* (Whyte 1943) reflected this new point of view. It interpreted the city's culturally homogeneous spaces occupied by people of a lower socio-economic status not only as risk areas, but also as areas producing reciprocity and potentially stabilizing the city.<sup>3</sup> In segregated spaces, in fact, social cohesion (and control) is much higher and can affect people's capacity to survive, ontologically speaking, from both material and psychological points of view.<sup>4</sup> From the material point of view, the more communities are homogeneous, the easier the exchange of services in a non-monetary economy becomes. Psychologically speaking, identity is not systematically challenged and the recognition process of one's identity is facilitated within homogeneous communities.

These facts lead me to think, along with Dear (Dear and Flusty 2001), that homogeneous spaces that have a high concentration of people and a low socio-economic status are not problematic as such. In contrast to the Chicago School, I think that they *can* be organised as elements which stabilise urban dynamics that are submitted to ever-changing populations, criminality and violence. These spaces also allow the intervening bodies in the social and health sectors to focus on their users.

### **From Segregated Neighbourhoods to Aggregated Neighbourhoods?**

Why not "ghettos"? With this, admittedly, provocative question, I intend to reconsider the internal dynamic of aggregation in neighbourhoods in

modern societies. I assume that in societies run by individualistic values, pluralist ways of living and flexible organisation, “ghettos”<sup>5</sup> in democratic and open societies might have a different role than in the past: a role which would be less focused on an external exclusion or segregation and more on an internal re-appropriation of sense from the inhabitants of these places.

In other words, while Simmel does not see the functionality of segregated spaces, and the Chicago School wants to dismantle them, we are of the opinion that their existence is still relevant and that combating them creates more problems than solutions. In order to support this hypothesis, I am going to examine the transformation of the *external* cause of the creation of aggregated neighbourhoods and their *internal* organisation.

From an *external* contextual point of view, significant societal changes lead me to this consideration. The pluralisation of society and the flexibilised economy both threaten the societal and identity cohesion; the responsibility for which depends on individuals. This phenomenon of individualisation and flexibilisation thus complicates the integration of the whole society. As many authors have shown, we witness a growing number of people who are badly integrated, both economically and socially (see for example Castel 1995; Paugam 1991).

In this context, we assume that aggregation in urban spaces has a function. From the point of view of the *internal* organisation, three main arguments support this idea. In underlining that migration to the city cannot be stopped, I will develop the idea of aggregated neighbourhoods as an opportunity (*a*); continue by underlining that, in these spaces, identities are protected from modern society’s continuous challenge of value systems (*b*); and finally, I point out that these spaces have a strong capacity to act and to solve concrete problems through their self-organisation (*c*). With these three arguments, I discuss the fact that this self-regulating capacity is dependent on the other inhabitants and their political representatives recognising these neighbourhoods as a positive part of the city. Such recognition could open the doors for effective public policy interventions (*d*).

*Point a)* Although aggregated neighbourhoods are still imposed by the contextual situation and created by economic, legal, social or racial inequalities, we nowadays assume that these kinds of areas have a material and symbolic utility for the people living there. Firstly, aggregated neighbourhoods represent the entry point for many migrants in the city. They find people they know and communities that can help and sustain the first steps of economic and social integration into city life. In particular, undocumented migrants depend on such neighbourhoods, as they gain a feeling of security (Achermann and Chimienti 2005). Even in smaller

cities without segregated spaces, people having the same roots and socio-economic backgrounds can be found in common spaces like the railway stations, restaurants or clubs.<sup>6</sup> At first glance such a concentration could be seen as being problematic. But in fact, if a dynamic view is taken, these places not only lessen the impact of migration through communitarian accommodations, but are also places from which steps outside of that neighbourhood can be tested. In other words, migrants not only find a warm and loyal surrounding, but also an island, referring to Hirschman (1970), from which “exit” and “voice” strategies are possible. While exit might mean a return to the home country and a failed migration project, it would also mean being accompanied by the community of belonging. A “voice” strategy could mean that, after having stabilised the position in the neighbourhood, one enters a mobility perspective that can be either spatial or social. Aggregated neighbourhoods can be the starting point and the end point of a migrant’s history. They give migrants a chance to feel their way into a better life.

In a similar order of ideas, other authors have shown that in certain cases homogeneous, socially disqualified neighbourhoods can help to support external stigmatisation: their inhabitants avoid being confronted by external stigmatisation, which has the effect of protecting their self-esteem. Paugam, for instance (Paugam 2000), describes this situation in terms of “organised marginality”, i.e. a frame which allows

the symbolic reconstruction of a cultural framework that may be tolerated in a space controlled by the experience of exchanges, of daily activities and, sometimes, thanks to the resources of imagination. There is a form of positive identity through the experienced space of life, potentially containing a mixed history of conflicts, failures, celebrations and happiness. Nevertheless, it is not a matter of wishing to change status, but rather an individual adaptation to a condition that can be considered as the borders of social exclusion (Paugam 2000: 129ff).

*Point b*) Identities are under stress; particularly migrant identities. There is a twofold logic behind this stress. Firstly, inclusion in a flexibilised economic system of weak identities and strong personalities challenges those people in search of values and orientations (Sennett 1998). Migrants are well suited to a flexibilised economy in that the migration process has accustomed them to compromise their identity. In contrast to the Fordist economy, the new flexibilised economy no longer compensates the lack of social integration of migrants through workplace related community building activities.

Migrants thus look upon communities as identity stabilizing places (Fibbi and Cattacin 2002).

Secondly, the pluralisation process that has been accelerating since the 1960s has weakened the acculturation pressure on the migrants. As members of differentiated societies migrants can, like others, choose options of belonging. In this market of identities, people do not only have a weaker individual identity, but in order to exist and survive are also obliged to strengthen this residual identity (Amselle 2000). If normality means living in a social space that does not require any affiliation, or if the “liminality” of existence is the norm (Bauman 2000), stabilising identities thus represent a strategy of survival (Szakolczai 1994). Aggregated neighbourhoods become places in which fragile identities, threatened by daily experiences of discrimination or stigmatisation, can be stabilised through meeting people like themselves.

*Point c)* As Etzioni argued (for instance in Etzioni 1993), urban spaces can be the starting point for communitarian initiatives of self-help. The question is whether neighbourhoods with a large migrant community have developed such a capacity. Our hypothesis is that the more freedom to act these areas have, the more they are able to solve their own problems. The large cities in North America are an example of this liberty and acceptance to act, while in European cities, segregated spaces are generally politically contested as legitimated places in cities (Donzelot et al. 2001). The question is why these differences continue to exist between the New and the Old World. Probably because the programmatic choice of Europe to fight poverty with a large welfare state affects the toleration of highly disadvantaged situations (Cattacin 2006). Only since the 1980s and changes in economic and societal models limiting welfare state development (Cattacin and Lucas 1999) has Europe started to realise that poverty is an inevitable part of societal reality. In contrast, immigration countries like the USA have adopted a logic of development of social solidarity that is not state but community centred and does not charge the society for individual failures.<sup>7</sup>

Today we can discern a weakening of the two models. The European model is weakened as the welfare state’s financial crisis and related difficulties in pursuing redistribution policies become apparent. If there is any common ground at all in European social policies at the city level, then it is the lack of an alternative model to anti-segregation policy. The problem particularly resides in the fact that, without resources and without ideas, cities are working on a short-term logic of trouble-shooting that has no real perspective. Riots and anomy are therefore logical consequences (Donzelot 2006).

The communitarian model of immigrant societies has also reached its limit with the end of generalised economic growth. In the current economic dynamic, poverty and spatial segregation are related in the sense that the resources mobilised in the communities are limited. Aggregated neighbourhoods of people with a low socio-economic status risk being subjected to a process of “hyper-ghettoization”, as Loïc Wacquant calls it (Wacquant 2006a; Wacquant 2006b), that highlights this loss of self-regenerating resources. Even though I think that Wacquant is dramatising the urban dynamics of the United States (and Europe), and underestimating the communities’ reactivity,<sup>8</sup> he nevertheless points to clear relationships between communitarian and material resources, and between social and economic capital (see also Bagnasco 1999). The two dimensions are needed at a minimal level if people and groups are to survive. Even if it is easier to both meet people and find a job in the cities, we are nevertheless confronted with a sprawling city space that creates neighbourhoods without identity and in danger of anomie.

*Point d)* If we argue that, in modern societies, cities need places in which people with a low socio-economic status can live and in which communitarianisation processes are possible because these places are starting points in migration, identity stabilising and resource producing processes, we are not stating that we need “ghettos” as such, but that such places have a clear function in our society which is probably underestimated. Combating such places means following a romantic view of a harmonious, mixed – and multicultural – society. It means that cities are seen without a dynamic of continuous reorganization and migration (Donzelot 2006: 77).

But the blending of society, for example through anti-segregation policies in cities, risks destroying the self-regenerating resources of our society produced in more homogeneous spaces. Accepting to live in a pluricultural society – rather than a multicultural one – in which differences are the norm, implies finding a way of working with these differences for what they really are, namely, resources. But if we want to use these resources, we have to recognise them rather than denigrate them (Cattacin and Baglioni 2005); in other words we have to give them a place where they can react and deal autonomously with threats and troubles (Donzelot and Estèbe 1994).

The process of recognition begins with suffering and the development of self-consciousness,<sup>9</sup> which in turn leads to a public positioning of those groups that are neither visible nor accepted. This “struggle” for recognition (Honneth 1994) allows people with specific characteristics to exist in dignity – but also demands that the rest of society accepts this dignity (as Taylor 1992 and Ricoeur 2004 highlighted). This can be done by indifference,

accepting the existence of different life worlds. But if these differences are related to a similar project, like the reproduction of an innovative urban society, then ways of relating these differences to this same project have to be found. This is a question of governance of the city.

### **Governance of Difference**

Before analysing the urban space as a place in which the density and differences of people are meant to bring out innovation and democratic conflict resolution, we need to understand how the city is regulated today. We assume that understanding the complexity of the city requires an understanding of its governance as a multifaceted dynamic in which the state authorities at the local level (the local state) play some kind of role, although probably no longer a predominant one (*e*). In particular, the governing authorities ought to be open to innovation and change. They should rather consider differences as resources (*f*). This will lead the city to a more urban development that is sensitive to difference. New instruments, adapted to the accelerated change of the city, are needed (*g*).

*Point e*) Nowadays researchers highlight the fact that local authorities are in a much better position than national authorities to deal with the plurality of society and to apply concrete and appropriate measures (see, for instance, Bauböck 2002). While the city is still the best level for the governance of differences and social challenges, I am assuming that the actors of governance are many and varied and that, in this framework, the local state is not the centre of governance anymore but only one – albeit important – producer of decisions among others.

Indeed, deindustrialization, migration and accelerated economic changes have challenged city authorities. Given the logic of the long-term urban development planning of the 1970s and the period of conservative stabilization of cities in the 1980s, for the last twenty years we have been confronted with the rediscovery of uneven growth and reactive policies demanding an acceptance of radical interventions and spaces of free restructuring (Campos Venuti 1990). The “splintering” of the city (Graham and Marvin 2001) is the new reality in which governance can be likened to a pattern of networked, relatively independent organised worlds. In such a network, the city has the function of guaranteeing basic infrastructures, with the main actors being investors and anarchically formed and continuously changing communities. Urban subcultures of alternative life-worlds, i.e. those of migrants, are generally organised through services and self-governing initiatives that are neither planned nor provided by the local state. For instance, the analysis of the world of undocumented migrants

in the city leads us to a picture of networks of self-help that are often acknowledged, or at least tolerated, by the local state. When the local state is in the ambivalent position of knowing that undocumented migrants need a service, such as health, that cannot easily be delivered officially, it accepts the existence of alternative health services. Without them, the local state would have to act in a contradictory way. By accepting them, it facilitates the provision of a basic right to healthcare.<sup>10</sup> Similar circumstances govern the world of drug abuse (Cattacin et al. 1996) or homelessness. Without parallel services – parallel worlds of urban existence – the problems would increase to the extent that cities would be in crisis.

These networks produce services – or in a sense, partial rights – for specific groups either through self-organization or advocacy and solidarity groups. Access to what amounts to basic services is guaranteed if one belongs to a specific group. This production of partial (and informal) rights outside the sphere of the state transforms the logic of citizenship. Citizenship then becomes a variety of rights, which are realised in a city and to which access is given by different laws *and* societal actors. We can call this multifaceted citizenship in the cities’ “societal citizenship”, as Isin seems to suggest:

Rather than merely focusing on citizenship as legal rights, there is now agreement that citizenship must also be defined as a social process through which individuals and social groups engage in claiming, expanding or losing rights. Being politically engaged means practising substantive citizenship, which in turn implies that members of a polity always struggle to shape its fate. This can be considered as the sociological definition of citizenship in that the emphasis is less on legal rules and more on norms, practices, meanings and identities (Isin 2000: 3).

This citizenship realised in the context of the city leads us to the idea of an “urban citizenship” that is not only based on rights given by the state and societal actors, but also by a multileveled affiliation of each person to local, national, inter- and supranational rights.<sup>11</sup> Even if the local state acts as the main reference for people living in the city, and in particular for people in a precarious situation, it still has to deal with multiple affiliations, legacies and constraints.

Consequently, the (almost impossible) mission of governing the city is doomed to failure if the ambition is to lead, rather than work in tandem with all kinds of civil society’s organisations to make decisions and provide services and affiliations.

*Point f)* Cities move from a hierarchical model of governance to a “heterarchical”<sup>12</sup> model with many centres of decision. This change can lead to a horizontal integration structure of actors in the city, to synergies between the producers of services and even to solidarity in the city, if the different actors are recognised as producers and if their resources can be combined.<sup>13</sup> But this combination can take different forms, as indicated by studies on alternative cultures or social and health services (Blanke et al. 1986; Cattacin et al. 1999, Battaglini et al. 2001a; Battaglini et al. 2001b). From tolerant attitudes to indifference and from exchange to contracting relations, the involved actors have to recognise the other’s relevant role in the creation of a workable urban society. But in relation to disadvantaged neighbourhoods, it is clear that only capability building policies lead to reactions in the sense that new (and autonomous) resources are created. As Donzelot developed in his significant work on the “animator state” (Donzelot and Estèbe 1994), in the French peripheries it was the shift from a paternalistic to a capability building policy that facilitated an improvement in the living conditions of these neighbourhoods. The urban development policies of these areas provided a kind of self-governance that meant giving power to the powerless. One might wonder whether this was the product of a planned strategy on the part of the animator state, or just an accidental side effect.

In any case, this policy was discontinued in the 1990s - as a result of financial cutbacks and not because the policy had failed. As a consequence, and as many authors have pointed out, living conditions once again degenerated.<sup>14</sup> In other words, the incorporation of the resources of the poorest people requires that they have some possibility of developing their own resources – an opportunity they generally take. That is an investment strategy, and well documented by Sen’s analyses on the building of “capabilities” (see, for instance, Sen 1992).

*Point g)* But what are the concrete instruments that permit a difference sensitive urban development and which pay particular attention to migrants and the building up of capabilities? Heterogeneity is the most common characteristic of urban societies and, as Graham and Marvin (2001: 405) argue, increasingly reflects the dynamics of a more general societal pluralisation. In the politics and urban planning arena, the last few years have witnessed an increasing awareness of the urgent need to include and grapple with the differences that shape the social contemporary urban environment. When one has to “manage our co-existence in shared spaces” – as Healey (Healey 1997: 3) defines planning – considering differences means *in primis* acknowledging that

population groups, differentiated by criteria of age, gender, class, dis/ability, ethnicity, sexual preference, culture and religion, have different claims on the city for a full life and, in particular, on the built environment (Sandercock 2000: 15).

Sandercock (1998) further argues that the following three factors led to a significant change in the agenda of urban planning: transnational migrations, post-colonialism and the rise of civil society. These phenomena strengthen the idea that the cities of today are “cities of difference” (Fincher and Jacobs 1998). This means that, unlike the modern planning paradigm, the new one should be based on the active involvement of groups representing such “differences”.

Following this logic, Holston (1995) suggests that, if the paradigm of modern planning was based on the state, the new one should be based on what he calls “insurgent citizenship”. In other words, the new built environment has to be the product of a participatory political process in which the dominant culture (and its institutionalised powers) is confronted and empowered with new identities, such as those of immigrants, homeless people or sexual minorities. In my view, three aspects are fundamental in order to manage the challenge raised by an urban citizenship<sup>15</sup>:

- *The promotion of urban diversity.* This first element concerns the existence, in urban policies, of strategies to attract groups of different people. I will call this factor “difference sensitive city-marketing”. The kinds of groups that are solicited to settle down in a certain territory illustrate the aims that underpin the environment to be built. In particular, if the city recognises its identity as being based on migration, established migrants will feel recognised and accepted. Participation in the construction of the city will be the consequence.

- *The integration of diversity in urban development.* This second element concerns the constructed space and the instruments used to develop the city. These instruments and their integration of difference sensitivity facilitate an understanding of how institutionalised such policy options are. In particular, in the sphere of housing difference sensitivity is crucial. In fact, housing policies establish whether or not certain groups should inhabit the city. Moreover, housing policies are fundamental as a contrast to the current trend pointed out by Häussermann in which housing is controlled by market mechanisms that “bring about a tougher segregation” (Häussermann 1995) and thus block the development of resources in these neighbourhoods.

- *The participation of “groups of difference” in the processes dealing with urban planning.* This third element consists of the differences embodied in the city participating in the elaboration of urban planning and problem solving. Indeed, the hypothesis is that this is a principle that the new governance of the city should not derogate from.

When combined, these elements can mean a city governance that is conscious of the necessity to integrate differences as a key element of urban development.

### **Aggregated Neighbourhoods?**

In this text I have tried to develop the idea the neighbourhoods should be constructed homogeneously, as a sort of community in the sense of aggregated groups - not necessarily only in terms of ethnicity but also in terms of socio-economic characteristics. This reflects migration, socio-economic differences and the dynamic of the city's development. These neighbourhoods have the potential of self-regulation and stabilisation that are often underestimated. Thus, I think that the mixture of a city is the result of mobility, but cannot be the starting point, in particular in modern, flexibilised societies, in which weak identities search stabilising communities. If the history of “ghettos” indicates that they were segregated and closed until the last century, we have to see them and promote them as open spaces. The city has to be open and closed at the same time, as Donzelot (2005) argues.

In other words, the orientation of the modern city has to be conscious of the functionality of aggregated neighbourhoods. It has to give them the means with which to develop self-sustaining initiatives, but at the same time must avoid making the error of promoting “ghettos”. Finding the equilibrium between aggregation in neighbourhoods and openness for social and territorial mobility in the city is important; not through state centred planning, but through a difference sensitive governance that is committed to constructing the city in partnership with multiple actors.

## NOTES

- 1 This text was conceived through discussions with Milena Chimienti. Her comments were extremely helpful. Erik Verkooyen also contributed comments at the final stage.
- 2 For more on this debate between Simmel and Park, see in particular Häussermann 1995.
- 3 What is different from Simmel's thesis here is that society and state no longer think that equality is possible and seem to have accepted that inequalities cannot be solved, only limited.
- 4 This distinction between psychological and material ontological survival is introduced by Milena Chimienti (Chimienti 2006) as an addition to Giddens (Giddens 1991).
- 5 Historically, the word "ghetto" usually refers to a segregated and closed space based on cultural differences (religion or race, as the first Jewish ghettos created in Europe in the 16<sup>th</sup> century – by the way, the word stems from this reality in Venice at that time – or the Afro-American ghettos; see Nightingale 2003 on this issue). Here I go beyond this historical meaning and regard ghettos as homogeneous open spaces with a high concentration of people of similar, in general low socio-economic status, or what I have called aggregated neighbourhoods.
- 6 Typically, in smaller European cities, the homogenisation of neighbourhoods are rare, even with high numbers of migrants; but this does not mean that they are not organised in communities. In fact, instead of "ghettos" we find meeting places, shopping malls or buildings, which permit daily based contacts (see the studies in Hoffmann-Nowotny and Hondrich 1982).
- 7 See the normative debate between Barry and Kymlicka and Banting (Barry 1990; Barry 2001; Kymlicka and Banting 2006) about these two ways of creation of social solidarity, based on community recognition or redistribution (similar in Fraser and Honneth 2003).
- 8 See his critique on American authors writing about the communitarian resources of black people in bad neighbourhoods (Wacquant 2002).

- 9 As it has been reconstructed, for instance by Chimienti 2005 and Roca i Escoda 2004.
- 10 See the texts in Björngren Cuadra and Cattacin 2006.
- 11 Concerning these two faces of urban citizenship see Bauböck 2003 and Varsanyi 2006. Hence, Bauböck claims that urban citizenship is the first step in reading the city as a producer of a new cosmopolitan citizenship.
- 12 I borrow this word creation from Helmut Willke (Willke 1997).
- 13 See Evers on the logic of “synergetic welfare mixes” (Evers 1993).
- 14 For instance Donzelot 2006 or Wievorka 2005.
- 15 Thanks to Simone Baglioni with whom I developed these thoughts.

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In late 2006 Malmö University expects to publish a collection of papers based on three Willy Brandt workshops held at IMER, entitled *Migration and Health: Difference Sensitivity from an Organisational Perspective*, edited by Sandro Cattacin and Carin Björngren Cuadra.

Sandro Cattacin was Guest Professor in memory of Willy Brandt at IMER during the autumn semester of 2005.

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