MY NEIGHBOR THE GRINGO: Commercialized Intimacies and Newcomer Hospitality in a Rio de Janeiro Favela

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Márcia stood in the middle of the main road leading up the hillside *favela*, or self-built neighborhood, that she has called home for nearly her whole life. A photographer snapped a picture of her that would appear on the front page of Rio de Janeiro's most widely read newspaper the following day, along with a brief interview of the schoolteacher turned activist. Her arms outstretched like the city's iconic Christ the Redeemer statue, Márcia's pose could be read as either an all-embracing welcome or as barring the path against invaders (see Figure 1). Standing in the street with the lights of the favela glimmering in the night, and with a wry smile across her face, was she playing host or guardian? Márcia's community, known as Morro do Vidigal (Vidigal Hill), a settlement of around 10,000 inhabitants that overlooks the Atlantic Ocean and high-end beachfront districts of Leblon and Ipanema, had been experiencing a growing influx of outsiders from the early 2000s. This change had felt like a reversal of sorts. Middle- and upper-class foreigners as well as Cariocas, as Rio inhabitants

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Figure 1. Márcia poses for a newspaper profile piece as an anti-gentrification activist in Vidigal. Photo by Domingos Peixoto (Agency O Globo).

are called, had long considered Vidigal a no-go zone associated with poverty and criminality. However, in the space of a few years, Vidigal had undergone a dramatic change of use and image. It had begun to attract not only visitors but also capital in the form of outsider interest in building new or refurbishing existing properties.[1]

By 2015, eighteen hostels had been established, and numerous other properties started to advertise rooms on platforms such as Airbnb. In an area near the top of the hill known as Alto Vidigal, a cluster of bars, two art schools,[2] a culinary academy, a boutique hotel, and an architect-designed condominium were newly built. A series of large mural interventions by star graffiti artists had also transformed the physical landscape and the imagery of the neighborhood.

In this essay, by examining how hospitality outposts developed in Vidigal, we outline how anxieties over belonging to place become manifest. One threat is what anthropologist Angela Torresan (2020) describes as the reciprocity embedded in Vidigal residents' struggles to improve their own conditions—*melhorar a condição de vida*—that lies in tension with a local moral economy, the tacit expectation that one person's gain will bring wider community benefits. *Gentrificação*, a word adopted directly from the English *gentrification*, had started to take on currency in Rio de Janeiro in the economic boom of the late 2000s and early 2010s. This unprecedented real estate speculation, it was thought, could bring new opportunities for people to improve their lives. Certain residents

with financial means and locational advantages invested in building new floors or rooms to rent, or in converting residential spaces into hostels or bars. But conversely, such efforts to "cash in" on the perceived bonanza might undo the sense of neighborliness that frames social arrangements as between more or less equals or people from similar backgrounds; in short, a communitarian idea of favela sociability would be undermined. By 2015, as Brazil's economy entered a downturn and as construction projects stalled, skeptical residents emphasized the markedly racial character of displacement via real estate speculation, popularizing the term *remoção branca*, or "removal by whites."[3]

It is by focusing on host-guest relations that we explore the contours of anxiety, expectation, hype, and skepticism in what was broadly felt like an inflection point in the history of the neighborhood and city more broadly. With many newcomers setting up hostels and bed-and-breakfast accommodations as a way to promote and capitalize on a cultural imaginary of the favela, claims to assume the role of host turn on diverse practices of conjuring community, and more saliently, a notion of *convivência*, which in Brazil refers broadly to the conditions under which living together or coexistence is made possible and sustained. To put it another way, we trace how the paradox of newcomers becoming hosts reflects how anti-gentrification struggles are not commensurate with calls for a return to a restoration of *convivência*. The emergence of foreign-owned and -run hospitality reveals a confluence of global favela imaginaries and real estate interests, as well as their attendant contradictions. With gentrification seemingly unrestrained at the time of our research, *convivência* is invoked not as a nostalgic desire to reclaim a mythic sense of community but as an aspiration to rework urban change on one's own terms. These discursive and affective attachments constitute a structure of feeling that, in Vidigal and other favelas, has to do not only with qualities of the urban fabric but is also ethnicized or racialized as distinctly "favela."

This essay examines the material process of building new spaces to accommodate an economic orientation toward receiving outsiders; the symbolic process of reimagining the favela's place in the world, consolidating its historical and cultural value; and the affective process of transforming the favela as space of danger, violence, and poverty to one of communal togetherness, cultural vibrancy, and chic lifestyles. The racial politics of the gentrifying favela shift amid the production of new entrepreneurial spaces of leisure and hospitality. As these fault lines emerge, and as the idea of the favela's symbolic place in the urban imaginary shifts, we show how struggles to mobilize collective memory and

collective action derive from the ambiguity of defining who and what constitutes being a resident. We explore scholarly debates over gentrification and hospitality to inform how the notion of *convivência* became a keyword in conversations over property speculation, rising rent and utility prices, and the arrival of middle- and upper-class visitors to Vidigal. In the sections that follow, this article thus responds to an overdetermined story of both gentrification and resistance to displacement. Vidigal was not only made into the emblem of *favela chic* by the rapid emergence of accommodations and leisure industry locales but was also experienced as a kind of sign of a spatial reordering of the city, an inversion of the urban order of things rife with opportunities and contradictions. This article then tracks how these processes led to a consciousness-building campaign to consolidate public memory. In the conclusion, we discuss how the end of this period of investment and hype was experienced as both reverting to a familiar status quo of state and capital neglect as well as renewed questions of place-belonging and identity.

We had initially identified Vidigal in 2014 as a key site in which to study the dynamics of urban social inequality and tourist imaginaries. The fieldwork, conducted primarily by Alessandro Angelini and supported by Gareth Jones as principal investigator, involved conversations and interviews with local activists, residents, tour guides, builders, and managers of housing accommodations, as well as attending community debates. Our positionality as white male foreigners at times shaped unprompted conversations about the real estate boom in Vidigal, the purported sightings of Global North celebrities, and even invitations to view newly constructed housing with the assumption that we might be interested buyers. This research formed part of a team comparative ethnography project bringing together anthropologists from three European universities to work in four cities across the Americas—Kingston, Mexico City, New Orleans, and Rio de Janeiro. Elsewhere our team explored the embodied experiences of tourists, guides, and residents in sensing and assigning meanings to spaces of urban poverty (Jaffe et al. 2020). We aimed to investigate the commodification and aestheticization of violent, impoverished urban spaces and their residents as an emergent phenomenon affecting urban imaginaries, the built environment, local economies, and social relations. The project analyzed the shift from stigma to brand by tracing different dimensions of this transformation: long-term processes of place-making, the circulation of narratives and images, the role of brokers including tour guides and NGOs, and the transformation of urban value as a sensory, aesthetic, political, and economic remaking of spaces long associated

with poverty and violence (Dürr, Jaffe, and Jones 2020). Among the cities in our study, what our group had come to call inequality tourism has had a longer history and in certain favelas figured as a precursor to "downward raiding" real estate dynamics (Garmany and Burdick 2020). These socioeconomic processes led us to the blurred spaces of hospitality, a facet of the tourist encounter beyond the ephemerality of the tour that introduces questions of residential belonging and displacement.

BEYOND THE JUST-SO STORY OF GENTRIFICATION

Vidigal's social and territorial history does not conform to the pattern of segregation by which observers have defined Rio's urban landscape (McCann 2014; Ventura 1994). By 2015, residents estimated in conversations that one in every ten residents was a *gringo*, a Brazilian colloquialism for a tacitly white foreigner, usually from North America or Europe (Blanchette 2005). A survey organized by local activists that year put the number of resident gringos—excluding sojourner backpackers, attendees on courses or education programs, and visitors—at significantly less, around 2 percent. The gap between the perception of international outsiders moving into the community and attempts to quantify their presence could be attributed to their outsized salience in everyday life. A demographic study based on a household sample bears out these local perceptions of the shifting race and class composition of new residents: "While the migrants who moved to this place in the period 2012–2016 are 75% white and 23% black or brown, the migrants heading to Vidigal in the period 2016–2018 are 55% white and 45% black or brown, a profile closer to the residents who had been living since before the pacification (48% white and 51% black or brown)" (Bonamichi 2022, 396). Favela residents generally identify gringos not only by their physical characteristics but also by their accents, clothing, consumption habits, as well as their manner of walking the many steep stairways of Vidigal (Freire-Medeiros 2009). In other words, gringo-ness came to be defined in Rio's favelas as an assemblage of embodied habitus. It was not unusual to overhear English, French, Italian, Spanish, or German on the main streets, when buying food or drinks at a bar, or when attending events.

This heightened presence, real or imagined, of gringos marked a more complicated geography of the historical divide between favela and *asfalto*, or formal city. It became a cause for both celebration and anxiety, particularly on the part of long-term residents who saw neighbors selling their homes for what were rumored to be hitherto unimaginable sums, new businesses opening up to meet

the needs of tourists and new residents, and "strangers" occupying seats on the *kombi* transport vans winding up the hill. This visualization of peoples' identities with their race or ethnicity, even if their presence was short-term, is resonant with more materialist concerns and longer-term presence linked to gentrification, a process that in Vidigal and other urban areas became referred to as the aforementioned *remoção branca* or as "whitening" (Garmany and Richmond 2020; Mattos 2013).

The geographer David Harvey (2012, 20) anticipated the gentrification of Rio's favelas as an inevitable outcome stemming from land titling and the formalization of private property widely promoted by international development organizations and think tanks: "My bet is that, if present trends continue, within fifteen years all those hillsides now occupied by favelas will be covered by high-rise condominiums with fabulous views over Rio's bay, while the erstwhile favela-dwellers will have been filtered off to live in some remote periphery." This projection was shared and given nuance by life-long resident Dona Graça when she confessed in a documentary film about Vidigal, "I think residents need to value this place, but I think soon Vidigal will become a gringo neighborhood [*bairro de gringos*]. Nothing against them. It's great, that convivência, but not in an exaggerated way."[4] Her assessment of local changes, echoed by other residents we encountered in this research, evinced a certain ambivalence that complicated the tidy conflictual binarism of prevailing academic writing on gentrification. Whether offered as prediction or polemic, Harvey's speculation rests on the logic of rent-gap theory, or that is, how the dynamics of capitalist urban development seek to bridge the differential between actual and potential land rents under an increasingly globalized real estate competition (Smith 2002). While there has been a vigorous debate over the rent gap as a driver of gentrification, and indeed its very definition (Slater 2017; Ghertner 2015), Matthew Richmond and Jeff Garmany (2023), in a direct rebuttal to Harvey's claim, point to the "inertia" of local territorialized processes (cf. Santos 1979) to explain how a wholesale displacement of favela dwellers did not happen. The question of whether and where gentrification succeeds or fails obscures the zones of contact where in fact something otherwise may be afoot. Thus we are concerned in particular with how the dynamic between actual and potential value maps onto identities of resident and newcomer, which in turn are expressed in uneasy ways in claims to belonging and to hosting.

Claims of incipient gentrification in Vidigal extend back decades before the intensification of the mid-2010s. The first houses, in the form of wooden shacks,

appeared on the hillside in 1941. In Robert Gay's (1994, 70) historical account, "For much of its early history, the favela of Vidigal was both isolated and unorganized. In fact, it was only when it was threatened with removal that the community was spurred into any form of collective action." The owner of the territory, an industrial company, attempted to expel the nearly 200 families residing there twice, in 1958 and 1967. The latter standoff led to the founding of the favela's neighborhood association. In 1977, mayor Marcos Tamoyo attempted to remove Vidigal, as he did several other favelas in Rio, alleging that houses were in imminent danger of landslides. However, when residents discovered that the purportedly high-risk areas would be redeveloped into twelve luxury apartment buildings, they mobilized once more, with the help of the Pastoral das Favelas (a Catholic Church organization to promote the rights of favela residents), the Brazilian Institute of Architects, lawyers, and parliamentarians, to force the project's abandonment (McCann 2014; Lima 2010). And then again, in the early 2000s, Rolf Glaser, a German entrepreneur who had amassed a substantial fortune in currency trading, eyed Vidigal as a future tourist attraction. He proceeded to buy thirty-seven houses with the idea of constructing luxury hotels and restaurants to be staffed by residents of Vidigal, as well as a museum to showcase the favela as it once had been before its transformation. In 2012, Glaser entered into a legal battle over a property he had allegedly sold to an Austrian business partner who had refurbished it into a backpacker hostel.[5] Glaser denied selling the property, but the dispute was interceded by the local gang boss, who expelled and prohibited him from returning to Vidigal.

A more recent analytical framework for gentrification, apropos Harvey, points to the securitization of real estate values through community policing. The Police Pacification Unit (Unidade de Polícia Pacificadora, or UPP) program aimed not so much at liberating favela dwellers from the threat of everyday violence as liberating property values in neighborhoods suppressed by the presence of violent actors entrenched in nearby favelas (Frischtak and Mandel 2012). This strategy was enhanced by significant public and private investment associated with the 2014 FIFA World Cup and 2016 Summer Olympic Games. Officials heralded these sporting mega-events within a discourse of urban integration and amplification of the so-called Marvelous City brand (Landesman 2016). The sudden enthusiastic application of urban planning regulations and environmental protection assessments also did work to displace communities from what were claimed to be flood or landslide-prone areas, thinning the high-density favela (Freeman and Burgos 2016) and signaling a preparedness for investment qua

gentrification (Rocha and Carvalho 2018). Property prices, in real terms and compared with incomes, grew by as much as 266 percent between 2008 and 2015, before crashing in 2016 in the wake of an economic recession (Cummings 2015). The UPP and partial redress of infrastructure deficits made daily life feel more secure, including an indicative sense of citizenship, while paradoxically stirring feelings of uncertainty in other ways, including anxiety of covering utility bills and compliance with building codes (Pilo' 2020), potential dispossession through gentrification, and the existential loss of neighborhood identity.

With the optimism associated with the hosting of successive mega-events and, more tangibly, the installation of a UPP outpost in the neighborhood, a tourist gaze took hold of Vidigal. Outsider curiosity became taken up as a real estate interest. At the peak of the speculative boom around 2015–2016, Vidigal was rife with stories and signs of celebrities being sighted in the favela (see Figure 2). The tabloid press showed photos of former soccer player–turned-model David Beckham, as well as U.S. cultural icons Kim Kardashian, Kanye West, Will Smith, Spike Lee, and Madonna walking through Vidigal, alleging that they were scouting properties to construct mansions or studios.[6] The presence of sports figures, actors, and artists enhanced the role of the favela as a contemporary symbol and space for creativity, vibrancy, and resilience, as well as addressed a stigmatizing crisis of representation (Angelini 2016; 2020).[7] And while this has been an empowering move, it has also provoked a sense of the favela

Figure 2. A cardboard cutout of television show host Sabrina Sato exclaiming "Sabrina was here!" at a resident's front door, next to building materials. Photo by Alessandro M.Angelini.

as mediatized space, as spectacle or spectacular, appropriating from poverty, Blackness, and violence to constitute a particular aesthetic, a supposed favela chic (Larkins 2015).

The way these stories of celebrity buying property filtered through lines of gossip in Vidigal and Rio more widely, despite their apocryphal basis, spoke to a desire and vested interest on the part of local boosters, ranging from tour companies, media organizations, the Rio municipality, and especially property owners to push a rise in prestige and economic value.[8] Yet the ways everyday rumor and gossip circulate through and even drive gentrification problematize the macro-lens view of urban transformation and the narrative of displacement. While such discourses point to how and where zones of interclass contact are produced from a material, symbolic, and affective standpoint, in extremis, gentrification becomes a just-so story that mutes the agency of local actors who are instead cast as victims or unwitting agents of the inexorable march of predatory capital. The story of the dissolution of community ties and loss of social cohesion amid this change further obscures long-standing tensions and conflicts within neighborhoods (Pérez 2002; Boyd 2005). The effects of market-led displacement through rising prices and rents became evident in Vidigal and elsewhere in Rio by the early 2000s, but the teleology of the gentrification narrative as a wholesale takeover through the logic of unfettered capital lacks attention to actors' ambivalent positions within fields of cross-cutting interests. While statements such as "Vidigal is being gentrified" were generally met with nods of recognition, the actors, processes, and relations substantiating these assessments rarely became specified. Who are the agents of change, and what does change under the sign of gentrification look like on the ground? In the following section, we explore these questions in the phenomenon of newcomer hospitality and the discourse of *convivência* as mediating racial and class differences.

NEWCOMER HOSPITALITY AND *CONVIVÊNCIA*: Shared Life, Racial Consciousness, and Place

In Vidigal, we became attuned to hospitality's role amid changing regimes of territoriality, place-belonging, and capital. As the literature on hospitality does not readily assume a stable host and a transient guest, in Vidigal some newcomers arrived with the aim of becoming hosts. Moreover, the question of belonging was tied up in entrepreneurial drive, as well as forms of class and racial friction. Put bluntly, the recently welcomed became the new welcomers. But how the right to host is negotiated demands that we revisit hospitality as

an anthropological analytic. The works of Julian Pitt-Rivers (2012) and Jacques Derrida (2000) have been touchstones in shaping a theory of hospitality. For Pitt-Rivers, hospitality encompasses a sociological code, universal yet scaled at the level of encounter between a (native) community and an (individual, culturally unmarked) stranger. For Derrida, the aporia of hospitality lies in that, as a right of the foreign other to be received as a friend, the host reinforces his/her own authority in his own home. As Tom Selwyn (2000) has observed, arrangements of kinship, friendship, and association are negotiated through a dialectics of hospitality and hostility, which determines how and on what terms strangers become insiders. Hospitality entails a mediation of norms and manners and conditions the contours of intimacy.

Matei Candea's (2012) ethnographic case proves particularly instructive here. He describes a Corsican form of hospitality, framed in ancestral culturalist terms, directly confronting French national law over the question of harboring a presumed criminal, and thus refutes Derrida's assertion of hospitality seamlessly shifting scales. In other words, it is not enough to claim that hospitality works the same in the family as it does in the street or the nation (Wessendorf 2014). Ambiguity, irony, and humor are interwoven into hospitality's fluid web of relations, particularly to commercialization, as Magnus Marsden's (2012) study of Afghan traders highlights. Arguing that hospitality has long been a matter of reconciling utility and morality, Marsden suggests that its power derives from a capacity to co-produce a sense of dynamic, even playful interrelationality.

The relation can assume a more self-conscious mode, as in, for example, Erika Andersson Cederholm and Johan Hultman's (2010) analysis of "lifestyle entrepreneurs" who attempt to construct an association between their lifestyle and those of their guests. The emphasis lies on breaking down the explicit commercial nature of the transaction, making the stay or experience a social one, in which engagement with the hosts, the surroundings, and other guests is encouraged, a process that promises emotional bonds, and deliberately or otherwise, a claimed intimacy that holds a commercial value (Smith 1977). In Vidigal, these kinds of improvised self-fashioning were evident among the intermediary class of actors, some of whom we will meet later in this essay, trying to open up the favela to tourism and lodging accommodations.

Hospitality, as a mode to bridge otherness, functions in this context to flatten class inequality as cultural difference. *Convivência* emerged within the discourse through which favela residents expressed anxieties about this confluence of economic power and social encounter, a threat to a particular notion of

harmony, an affective condition of being in place. But *convivência* also cropped up as an aspired-to yet not idealized state of affairs for so-called lifestyle entrepreneurs to cultivate among longtime residents. As such, *convivência* proved ambiguous and polyvalent rather than an ordered set of conditions; it had no checklist and could not be engineered. As a social relation, it was experienced as moored to people and place and already assumed difference as a precondition for the hospitality relation.

Convivência shares meanings with its Anglophone cognate, conviviality, but they are not isomorphic. As noted by Amanda Wise and Greg Noble (2016), conviviality as a concept has enjoyed a moment of notoriety and "become one of the latest groovy things," a kind of ethical keyword for intercultural agonism and living with difference. The sociologist Paul Gilroy (2004) identified conviviality as a response to the reification of identity, particularly in postcolonial Britain. And in anthropology, Andrew Brandel (2016) has made a case for conviviality as an alternative paradigm for the discipline to hold the erasure of difference in abeyance and to embrace the unresolvable. This claim proved especially pertinent to exploring the possibilities of "shared life" under globalization, cosmopolitanism, and multiculturalism, as well as to concerns with misanthropy and hate crime (Hinchliffe and Whatmore 2006; Wessendorf 2014).

In Brazil, *convivência*, similarly, constitutes an attractive concept for its versatility as an analytic tool and optimism of the intellect that the term seems to carry. Civil society organizations have adopted the term as an ideal or to-be-worked-toward state of living. Nevertheless, as Alexandre Emboaba Da Costa (2016) has pointed out, *convivência* needs to be seen against national ideologies that celebrate hybridity and racial democracy as forms of shared belonging and that have failed to overturn histories of racism. Adopting Sara Ahmed's (2010) idea of "happy objects," he points out that *convivência* can both mask discrimination and racism, alluding to a sense of being together, as well as serve to project a politics of identity and resistance against larger-scale claims to equal citizenship. The term holds an emic quality in Brazil, where the intellectual work it does mirrors its salience in everyday life. In this context, references to *convivência* generally refer to and affirm how people can live with difference in mobile and multicultural worlds. The term can be deployed as resistance to intrusion and evokes a sense of living together, a tacit set of endogenous social arrangements, under unspecified threat.

"Are you against *convivência*?" the newspaper journalist asked Márcia in the profile piece. "In some way," Márcia responded. "I'm against appropriation.

To be out strolling with my son and be photographed. I'm not a monkey." Her pointed retort marked out the racial inequalities embedded within the *convivência* relation. Fleeting encounters with strangers wielding cameras only further perpetuated the social distance and hierarchy, in Márcia's reckoning. However, the strangers were not only in Vidigal for brief visits; some had come to stay, and this provoked a deeper concern for Márcia. "And I am against the rising real estate prices," she continued. "How does that make it for those who rent? . . . The favela is for favelados." Notably, throughout this discussion, Márcia expressed preference for the term *favela* over the more neutral alternative *comunidade*. *Favela* generally carries pejorative connotations, with associations to Blackness, poverty, and violence, but it is precisely that stigma that Márcia was invoking as a badge of shared history and identity. Márcia insisted on the specificity of *favela*: "Any group can be a community. It has no face. Favela means something. A kind of place. History. It is a pretty word. It's in songs. And community? What's that? It sounds like the euphemism of saying *moreno* instead of Black." Márcia further emphasized a racial identification that aligned the favela with Afro-Brazilian historicity. This claim was not only about Blackness and history but more centrally about Blackness *as* history. As John F. Collins (2015) argues in his study of racial consciousness in the Pelourinho neighborhood of Salvador, Brazil's putatively prime site of patrimonialized Black identity, the ways architecture, history, and bodily dispositions are reified as markers of Afro-Brazilianess bears the double edge of objectification. While these claims to difference condition the image of the favela as a consumable good (Linke 2014) and its heterotopic accommodation of difference (Lino e Silva 2022), Márcia sought to preserve the favela semantically as a preeminently Black geography of struggle, at once deeply material, deeply metaphorical, and deeply experiential (McKittrick 2006). And this conviction informed her political activism as an oral historian and anti-gentrification advocate.

A case in point, Márcia further explained the police had banned *baile funk* dance parties in Vidigal because, according to police, the music celebrates criminality and sex.[9] The soundscape of the favela does work to construct social and cultural differentiations as "an assertive identity politics" in which funk musicians are variously considered immoral or criminal subjects (Lippman 2021; Oosterbaan 2009). Nevertheless, *funk carioca* music frequently featured in the private parties of the rich and gringos. Márcia recounted:

> There are people buying properties and coming to exclusive parties in Vidigal. I once went to one of these parties because a friend from the "asphalt"

> insisted on going. I could stand it for barely one hour. The people there were insufferable. I didn't know anyone there, even though it was happening where I have lived almost all my life.

When asked why she thought visitors were coming to Vidigal, Márcia reflected,

> There is the thrill, I suppose, of being in the favela. But there is no mixing. The parties charge over 100 reais [$30 USD] at the door, so no one from here can afford to go. And it was funny that one time I went to the party because they had a big projection screen and everyone was looking at that, rather than the view. When the parties are happening, the traffic jams [*engarrafamentos*] up and down the hill become impossible.[10]

Márcia's experiences in Vidigal's new enclaves of leisure evoked the contradictions of a spatial recoding that appropriates illicit sociality for chic exclusivity. To these ends, residents have deployed what Jennifer Roth-Gordon (2017) calls "linguistic differentiation" that demarcates the social space of the favela through uses of slang, word play, and grammatical constructions, as distinct from other parts of the city and its "citizens." Iterations of local slang (*gíria*) mark out the subject position of being of the favela, and as she also notes, "for the elite and middle class, Brazilian Portuguese *gíria* has long symbolized disorder, where the unauthorized breaking of linguistic convention indexes the breaking of laws" (Roth-Gordon 2017, 85). In Márcia's assertion, the favela is an autonomous and racialized space negotiating cultural sanitization and appropriation, its history flattened by public security policy and market forces. Drawing heavily on her affective sense of belonging to the favela, and adopting Ahmed's term (cited in Da Costa 2016), Márcia suggested she had become an "unhappy object." She was in effect issuing a public warning about the community's endangered territorial distinction. In the next section we offer perspectives from other actors, differently situated in what they perceive as an exceptional moment of entrepreneurial opportunity and a reworking of social relations. We describe the coaching and disciplining of local everyday practices and sensibilities to cater to an anticipated outsider demand for the favela as a consumable experience.

NEW HOSTS AND THE "INVERSION" OF VIDIGAL

"All this has turned inside-out. This is the most sought-after place in the city right now," Ricardo, a building contractor, commented while gazing out

over the favela sprawled below us. We stood on the veranda of a bar near the site of his current project, an arts school. The building site stood out from the surrounding architecture by its outsized scale and expensive construction materials: the skeletal frame of steel I-beams jarred with the reinforced concrete and brick structures that composed the vast majority of the favela. Ricardo was smiling with optimism. "I've already had five projects in Vidigal in just the past year and a half." He pointed at his most recently completed venture, a private apartment rental complex, painted bright orange. When asked if his clients were investors from outside Vidigal, he cracked a smirk. "All from outside. It's incredible." Ricardo had never previously taken on projects inside a favela; beyond certain state-run institutions like crèches and health centers, favelas are built primarily by those who live in them. It is perhaps a defining characteristic of favelas, the manifestation of self-built rather than professionalized construction. But in Vidigal, that distinction now no longer held true.

Notably, Ricardo's language of inversion also played on a semantic slippage. In Portuguese, *inversão* generally means a change in the order of things, especially a turning inside-out, upside-down, or backward from a normal state of affairs. But it is also an economic term referring to potential real estate speculation strategies pursued amid conditions of market valorization. This image of inversion can also be found in the English-language expression *flipping a property*. Ricardo's bemused exuberance about the projects he was undertaking in Vidigal, whom he found himself working for, and the capital flowing into the neighborhood spoke to a scrambling of Rio's spatio-economic order that had long consigned favelas to systemic disinvestment and deprivation.

An exceptionalist discourse of the favela as distinct social space can be found in tourism branding, street art iconography, videogames, films, and journalistic accounts that regularly traffic in exoticist tropes where the "reality" of Brazilian society is frequently invoked, as the gritty yet noble "other side" of the glitzy veneer of the formal city, or as an untamed "jungle" to be explored by intrepid adventurers (Jaguaribe 2004). Márcia's sour experiences at private upscale parties testify to this trope in action. However, representations of hospitality diverge from this kind of othering. In descriptions of accommodation options in Vidigal and other such neighborhoods, the presence of the favela is just as likely to be obscured or euphemized, while the majestic views and access to beaches or the Atlantic Forest are instead played up. The home rentals website Airbnb became a popular tool for residents, including Márcia herself, to capitalize on high demand around the World Cup and the Olympics. At that time, Airbnb's

mapping tool did not distinguish favela territories from the rest of Rio's urban fabric.[11] In effect, a listing consists of a location and an owner's description with photos and rates: "ocean views at an affordable price" was a common marketing line. The cumulative effect of these listings is to render the favela, at least for short-term rentals in private homes, unexceptional vis-à-vis the formal city.

The bar where Ricardo spoke effusively about Vidigal's transformation was located inside a boutique hotel at the top of the hill, well known for hosting the kinds of loud and exclusive weekend parties about which Márcia and others had complained. This hotel, designed by a prominent architect with reclaimed, "sustainable" materials and minimalist aesthetics, had become a popular short-stay destination. In an interview, the manager, Renata, explained that the hotel aimed to cater to international visitors, but 40 percent of the guests were Carioca and another 30 percent hailed from other parts of Brazil. With room rates on par with Rio's grand beach hotels, nearly all guests were conspicuously upper class. This juxtaposition with the social and racial profile of favela residents was the source of simmering tensions. Renata had been hired in January 2015 to ameliorate relations with the surrounding community, based on her previous experience at a corporate hotel built near Indigenous peoples' territories in the northern state of Pará. She drew parallels from that experience, where she mediated local anxieties and business interests, to her current position in Vidigal. Organizing open-door activities for residents while maintaining the lucrative, albeit loud and all-night, weekend program of live music and themed events, Renata eventually found herself in a bind: the parties were subsidizing the cost of maintaining the hotel, whose occupancy rate was not high enough to financially sustain itself. DJs blasting electronic music clashed with the tastes and work schedules of nearby households. The situation posed the hotel and Renata as a "bad neighbor" whose interests were guided by profit rather than *convivência*.

Indeed, shortly after the conversation with Renata, graffiti appeared on a wall near the hotel, proclaiming, *Gentrificação não é convivência*. The anonymous message marked out the hotel as an emblem of community anxieties, not only to longtime residents but to newcomer foreigner owners who saw the hotel as a foil for their own ostensibly more noble pursuits within the favela. One such newcomer was Josh, a business student from the United States, who arrived in Vidigal and, with two Argentine partners, founded a bed-and-breakfast and NGO called Favela Feeling. "We seek a social impact, for social development, rather than a non-profit approach," he explained in the vernacular of social entrepreneurialism. They had acquired a five-story building from a community

organization to establish their business, and they claimed to give 45 percent of revenues back to the organization. Whereas travelers once stayed at the guesthouse as volunteers, they now checked in at the Favela Feeling hostel, with volunteer work as an option. Josh pointed to an outdoor space for a community garden and rooms where English classes would be held. During the World Cup and Olympics, Favela Feeling brokered homestays for tourists in local residents' houses. Josh had noticed that families were posting their homes on Airbnb, an official Olympic sponsor. The broad embrace of the platform contrasted with that in other major cities such as New York, Paris, and Barcelona, which had severely restricted the practice of short-term property rentals. But, Josh observed, "We have residents here in Vidigal advertising on Airbnb, and they're not getting a lot of visitors. They're taking a photo of the corner of the bed, or of the toilet that wasn't cleaned. Since we have the sales channel—where we get between 3,000 and 5,000 visitors to our site every month—that is just going to increase their profile." Josh here was underlining how he guided residents as hosts to meet tourist expectations of hospitality. Home improvements were to be recast as capital investments, but the core of the accommodation enterprise would remain centered on an entrepreneurial pedagogy. "Airbnb is just not involved in specifics. They're not going to visit families, asking what their dreams are, or figuring out who they are as people. We do that. It's a much more personal approach. We make sure that when people make a lot of money, they know how to use that money." In other words, Josh's model of "responsible tourism" was premised on a kind of intimate managerialism with his hosting clients.

> This one lady made 5,000 reais [$1,500 USD] in one month during the World Cup. We helped her a lot with thinking through improvements. But she went out and bought a 50-inch screen television. I said, "Really? Is this really what you need?" And she said, "No, no, it's for the tourists. They love television." They don't need that, trust me. So we still need some improvement.

For Josh, developing the hosting capacity of Vidigal was a cottage consultancy service he saw himself as providing, driven by a notion of moral impact on the community. We note here how Josh, who wielded social power as a gringo entrepreneur, spoke of "improvement" in two distinct yet intersecting senses: alongside the question of which material investments households ought to prioritize with their earnings as hosts, Josh was also concerned with disciplining

residents themselves around an ethos of hospitality, and making their practices of consumption in effect productive.

Josh and a young woman named Jessica attended a workshop series in 2015 over the legal formalization of favela tourism with the deputy secretary of the municipal tourism authority, Phillipe Campello. Jessica was a born-and-raised resident, or *cria*, of Vidigal who had converted one story of her house into a small hostel and was thus a fellow hostel owner. She lamented, "Residents are timid; they need to learn *convivência*." Campello suggested a model called Go Houses, in which optional add-on services are bundled into Airbnb stays. "It represents a way that hospitality can create networks of sales commissions. So, for example, if a boarder in an Airbnb home wants breakfast, or laundry service, or a tour of the community, these can all be contracted out." Nodding, Josh openly mused, "We must penetrate the mentality of residents." Their frustration with the residents' reluctance, or lack of imagination, to commodify domestic labor was articulated under the guise of a need to "learn *convivência*." This interaction belied the notion of *convivência* as an agentless brand of a local moral economy and underscored how it was a normalizing project of a favela tourism industry in the making.

DEBATE, SIGNAGE, RESISTANCE

When Pitt-Rivers (2012, 514) noted, "a host is host only on the territory over which on a particular occasion he claims authority," he was ascribing a particular spatial politics to hospitality. To be a host, in other words, one must exert dominion over a place. Whereas in the traditional society model that undergirds Pitt-Rivers's argument, territorial power is conferred by status, in capitalist Rio de Janeiro, this is expressed most evidently through private property. In Vidigal and other favelas, we observed a hardening of the boundary between private and public spaces. Informal spaces of sociability were giving way to commercialized, often physically demarcated, and fortified micro-enclaves.

Fala Vidigal (Speak Up, Vidigal) was a 2014 series of public debates to educate and "awaken" favela residents to the phenomenon of gentrification and other pressing social issues. Organized by the Vidigal Residents' Association, a local accommodations agency, and the favela advocacy and communications NGO Justice Action, the events took place on workday evenings in the open-air amphitheater at the entrance to Vidigal. The topic of the first debate was "Real Estate Speculation and Price Increases." A didactic presentation from the Justice Action director, an urban planner by training, explained *gentrificação* to the estimated

250 people in attendance from Vidigal and other favelas. Images from U.S. cities illustrated the changes gentrification portends and related forms of street protest. The presentation emphasized how Rio's favelas serve a structural need for affordable housing in direct contestation to their prevailing image as a social problem. The speaker then advocated for financial education, local economic development, and establishing a community land trust to keep the capitalist real estate market at bay. At a second event, longtime residents and new arrivals expressed the values of community under threat by rising utility rates and rental prices, militarized security under the UPP program, and neglect of public services and spaces. There, Márcia and her friend Vinícius, a trained actor with the local Nós do Morro collective and *capoeirista*, presented a film they co-produced with the visual anthropologist Angela Torresan, in which Dona Graça, cited earlier, appeared. Their project to rescue local oral histories sought to raise consciousness about identity loss and evictions due to skyrocketing rents in Vidigal. The effort to document residents' memories appeared to be a salvage-culture project to brace a sense of community against the threat of erasure.

The ensuing discussion compared the current struggle with the anti-removal movement in Vidigal in the 1970s, summarized above. The draconian anti-poor policies of the military dictatorship constituted a clear threat and prompted intense struggle that still shaped people's attachments; a renewed sense of community belonging was mobilized to confront a more ambiguous menace. Leandro, a Vidigal native of fifty-two years and a co-director of the Residents' Association, warned his neighbors against selling their homes to newcomers, even for figures they had never previously imagined. "You have to be aware that your house has a high human value. You have to think about whether it's really worth leaving here for R$200,000 [$50,000 USD]. You don't just change your address. You need to change your habits, the time it takes to do things . . . . All of this must be weighed." Leandro appealed to residents to incorporate the value of communitarian sociability and identity in considering offers to sell. While his plea called for a reasoning beyond cold economic logic by valorizing social relations inherent to Vidigal, it nonetheless remained couched in individual choice.

Márcia later explained in a private conversation, "We're not worried about relations between favela and *asfalto*. We are concerned with the occupation of the favela *by* the asfalto. I don't know anymore if someone is a resident or not, so it is hard to relate to people." Here she echoed the Pitt-Rivers imperative to resolve the ambiguous status of the stranger. In turn, this uncertainty disturbed a stable idea of *convivência*. Márcia extrapolated the end effect of such shifts: "You

know that famous book about Rio, *Cidade Partida* [Divided City]? Well, now what we have is the *favela partida*." Riffing off Zuenir Ventura's (1994) well-known work of reportage that came to define her city as spatially divided along class lines, Márcia was identifying an increasingly more granular geography of urban inequality. The divided favela is a seemingly confounding notion, for it belies the image of the favela as an excluded yet consolidated space on the urban periphery.

John Burdick brings analytical clarity to this dynamic by calling for a focus on intra-class differentiation. In a recent ethnographic study of gentrification in a Rio housing project, he paints a picture of "the working class, more realistically, as differently positioned clusters of agents engaged with gentrifying forces in a variety of intricately patterned ways, each shaped by the capacities that each differentiated cluster brings to the encounter." (Burdick 2020, 449). This means seeing actors "sometimes, yes, as distressed absorbers of forces beyond their control, pushed involuntarily toward displacement, but sometimes as people endowed with sufficient resources to push back against displacement; and sometimes as savvy collaborators, taking advantage of the forces of gentrification to better realize their own life projects." (Burdick 2020, 449). While Burdick embraces a more textured range of behaviors than the blanket term *gentrification* may suggest, his framework is still attuned to residents fundamentally as economic actors. While Márcia and other long-term residents of Vidigal embodied these differently situated positions vis-à-vis market and state forces, they also struggled to cultivate a political subjectivity commensurate with the nuances and contradictions of their changing neighborhood milieu.

The provocation that Vidigal was becoming a divided favela raised a relevant question in conversation with Márcia at her home, where she rented a room to a university student. We asked, "You said that the favela is for *favelados*. But how can one qualify as favelado? What distinguishes a favela resident from an interloper?" Her reply proved insightful. "Look, the real residents of Vidigal never had a choice of living elsewhere in the city. These newcomers, at the end of the day, have the means and the freedom to leave. That is the difference." Márcia recast the picture of belonging as a question of a differential in economic mobility, displacing the common nativist claim of being *cria*.

Yet even her activism to confront this state of affairs underscored certain enduring complexities. "Vidigal is full. I want to put up a sign saying so," Márcia had proclaimed in the newspaper profile interview. She would later proceed to put up signs in the favela, but of a different kind: in a project they named Signing Memory (*Projeto Emplacando a Memória*), Márcia, Vinícius, and fellow organizers

installed plaques for streets, alleys, and plazas throughout Vidigal to commemorate local histories. These acts of marking territory defy official attempts of doing the same. In an urban infrastructure-upgrading program in the 1990s, the municipal government had mapped the favela and tried to name its streets after fruit. "There was already this issue of prejudice toward residents, and you want to name it Banana Street?" Márcia fumed. Nevertheless, the Signing Memory project is itself symbolic of the blurred distinctions literally being overwritten on Vidigal. The project was carried out in partnership with an Austrian graphic designer named Theo who produced a foldout paper map titled "Vidigal: 100 Secrets," which pinpointed not only important community landmarks but also shops, bars, hostels, and other businesses. Theo, himself a new arrival in Vidigal of several years, had reached out to Márcia in 2012 as a research partner to make histories of Vidigal part of its physical landscape. Acting in the name of his adopted community, Theo operated within the moral economy of a Vidigal seeking to bulwark itself from a perceived threat of losing identity. At the same time, the map rendered the favela as a space of consumption for outsiders, and the Signing Memory project conferred added value to the favela that could be reappropriated by future newcomers. This possibility underscored the difficulty of implementing a patrimonialization strategy, even one sensitive to histories of struggle and difference.

CONCLUSION

The emergence of hostels, homestays, and bed-and-breakfast accommodations, bars, restaurants, art and culinary schools, owned and managed by those who originate from outside the favela, and in some cases from outside Brazil, represents a new and unique phenomenon of newcomer hospitality. We have centered on actors operating in the contact zones of gentrification to highlight the inner contradictions and struggles of urban transformation and community identity. The concept of *convivência* emerges in this context to address the micro-level negotiations that make up a thriving community without losing sight of the class and racial inequalities embedded within a range of new encounters and social spaces. Márcia's insight about the *favela partida*—the splintered geography of chic leisure alongside precarity—is rooted in the everyday sense of living among travelers and partygoers who come to fulfill a consumerist desire to experience Vidigal as exotic spectacle, as well as other actors who perceive *convivência* as a normative project to introduce a range of entrepreneurial, artistic, and managerial outlooks and interests.

In tracking the uses of *convivência* in this social context, we struggled to find consistency in its deployments. *Convivência* in this moment of speculative economic activity and ambivalence about the arrival of newcomers variously emerged as a state of affairs to be restored, a (non-commodified) valuing of place, an aspirational sense of inclusivity, a set of values and practices to pedagogically transmit to others toward generating the preconditions for hospitality, an expression of a quintessentially Brazilian celebration of mixture and the ideology of racial democracy, and a relation of good neighborliness counterposed to profit-seeking interests. All of these signal the semantic capaciousness and inner contradictions of *convivência*. As such, we found not so much a concept that can seamlessly travel or translate into other anthropological analyses. Rather, we offer this account as a methodological lesson in how the social dynamics and countervailing forces in a complex field of relations can be perceived through the situated expressions of a salient term.

Rumor and memory practices also became discursive fields where residents expressed and contested anxieties presented by real estate speculation and shifts in the cultural imaginary. Not by coincidence, Márcia completed a master's degree in social memory in 2019, with a thesis on the politics of memory, and has continued working as an educator and activist. Some of the everyday encounters during field research proved portentous: in 2015, while exiting a *kombi* van at the top of the hill that had been stuffed with a group of young white backpackers, an old woman, her arms loaded with grocery bags, muttered exasperatedly, "Ah, these tourists! Sometimes I wish the traffickers would come back so they'd leave." Within less than a decade, the woman's wish seemed more like a prediction. With Brazil's economy contracting, inequality rising once more, and successive political crises embroiling all levels of government, Rio's security infrastructure collapsed. The UPP program was scaled back, officers went unpaid, and a series of new governors reinstated iron-fisted policing tactics. Consequently, in Vidigal and many other favelas, confrontations between traffickers and police rose, along with armed assaults and homicide. Some hospitality enterprises have shut their doors or limited business, and the traffic taking guests uphill to parties diminished. Josh, for his part, has remained in Vidigal. He and his partners rebranded their hostel as a co-living and co-working space, but it ceased operation in 2018. His Favela Feeling enterprise morphed into a "social incubator" and "innovation hub" offering English classes and entrepreneurship training for locals, and favela tours for visitors. Jessica, meanwhile, sold her house, which she had run as a hostel, and opened a spa in the southern state of Paraná. Listing her home sale

on social media elicited several posts tagging friends to facetiously nudge them: "Let's bring the gringos to Vidigal!!!!" and "Check out our new business. Should we open a hostel?" These turns toward uncertainty and ironic detachment may recast Vidigal's inversion from emblem of favela chic and entrepreneurialism to fleeting chimera. But the favela chic moment nonetheless revealed the work of *convivência* in shifting the conditions for outsiders to visit, for some of them to stay, and for longer-term residents to define themselves in relation to the new hosts.

ABSTRACT

During the past two decades, foreigners have acquired housing stock in many of Rio de Janeiro's oldest and most iconic favelas, or self-built neighborhoods, and invested in capital improvements, with an eye toward turning private residences into lodging accommodations. These new arrivals, mainly from the Global North, have altered social milieus and property values. The proliferation of favela hostels has signaled a market-led displacement of residents and a reproduction of the urban periphery. The present essay asks what an anthropology of hospitality looks like amid these emergent spaces of commodified culture and transnational mobilities. This curious social arrangement wherein newcomers play the role of hosts inflects debates over favelas' economic trajectories and shifting status in the cultural imaginary. Newcomer hosts both aestheticize and monetize a presumed generosity, vitality, and promiscuity of working-class residents. Hospitality as cultural rule meets the favela as unruly culture. The essay explores ethnographically how the concept of convivência*, or living together, comes to describe an aspiration to rework urban change amid class and racial anxieties about place-belonging and identity. The emergence of foreigner-owned accommodations in Rio's favelas reveals a confluence of global slum imaginaries and global real estate interests, and how resident hosts and traveler guests experience the attendant contradictions in the everyday.* [*convivência*; favela; gentrification; hospitality; Rio de Janeiro]

RESUMO

Nas últimas duas décadas, estrangeiros têm adquirido imóveis em muitas das favelas mais antigas e emblemáticas do Rio de Janeiro, e investiram em melhorias de capital, visando transformar residências particulares em hospedagens. Esses recém-chegados, principalmente do Norte Global, têm alterado os meios sociais e os valores imobiliários. A proliferação de albergues em favelas tem sinalizado um deslocamento de moradores impulsionado pelo mercado e uma reprodução da periferia urbana. O presente artigo investiga como se configura uma antropologia da hospitalidade em meio a esses espaços emergentes de cultura mercantilizada e mobilidades transnacionais. Esse curioso arranjo social, em que os recém-chegados desempenham o papel de anfitriões, influencia os debates sobre as trajetórias econômicas das favelas e sua mudança de

status no imaginário cultural. Os anfitriões recém-chegados tanto estetizam quanto monetizam uma suposta generosidade, vitalidade e promiscuidade dos moradores da classe trabalhadora. A hospitalidade como regra cultural encontra a favela como cultura insubmisso. O artigo explora etnograficamente como o conceito de convivência, ou viver junto, descreve uma aspiração por compreender as transformações urbanas entre ansiedades de classe e raça sobre o pertencimento e a identidade. O surgimento de hospedagens de propriedade de estrangeiros nas periferia urbana do Rio revela uma confluência de imaginários globais da favela e interesses imobiliários globais, e como anfitriões residentes e hóspedes viajantes vivenciam as contradições inerentes no cotidiano. [convivência; favela; gentrificação; hospitalidade; Rio de Janeiro]

NOTES

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1. Part of this change can be attributed to the rolling out of a community-oriented policing program focused on favelas, the Unidade de Polícia Pacificadora (Police Pacification Unit, or UPP). On the UPP as a project of extending state presence and governmentality, see Haynes (2023).
2. One of these institutions, the Escola Vidigal, was founded by the Brazilian artist Vik Muniz, with financial partners including the firm Morgan Stanley, which contributed US$160,000 from employee donations with company matching funds. See https://www.morganstanley.com/articles/morgan-stanley-brazil-celebrates-vik-muniz-escola-vidigal
3. The earliest usage of *remoção branca* appears in a 1981 public administration report on Projeto Rio, a participatory planning project in Maré, a large favela in the city's North Zone (Poggiese 1981). Brazil's military dictatorship (1964–1985) ordered the demolition of numerous favelas and the relocation of residents to peripheral public housing (McCann 2014). The question of whether to urbanize or remove favelas represents a long-running current in Brazilian urban politics, one that has taken on distinctly new resonances in the latter moment of hosting international sports mega-events (Freeman and Burgos 2016).
4. Angela Torresan, "Fala Vidigal: Segundo Debate," YouTube, 2014, accessible at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6C0qqMNC8H8, last accessed March 17, 2025.
5. The *Globo* newspaper covered the dispute in particularly sensationalist fashion, reporting that Glaser had taken over the hostel, expelling staff and guests, while his Austrian business partner was abroad, comparing the episode to Hitler invading and annexing Austria in 1938. Glaser argued that the 2010 sale was fraudulent, but the partner was able to produce documents with details of the R$20,000 (US$5,000) deal to back up the claim (Rebello 2012).
6. Politicians also had a part in this phenomenon, including tours organized for then U.S. vice president Joe Biden to Santa Marta, and a visit to the City of God by U.S. President Barack Obama. It recasts the favela through the presence of outsiders, especially foreigners. These visits often included involvement with social enterprises or cultural installations, contributing to the re-imagination of poverty, exclusion, and insecurity.
7. An ambiguous example is the filming for the 2017 global hit "Vai Malandra," performed by Anitta, MC Zaac, and the U.S. rapper Maejor. With lyrics that combine

Portuguese and English, and shot in Vidigal, the video references tropes such as *laje* (rooftop slabs), *motobois* (motorcycle taxis), and particular clothing styles.

8. The counterpoint is the displacement of Vidigal-based artists, notably Alexandre Wilson, attributed to increased rents (Huggins 2016).
9. In Brazilian law, the glorification (*apologia*) of criminality constitutes a crime in itself and is sometimes invoked as a justification for the police repression of *bailes* (Sneed 2019).
10. There is one narrow, winding road to the top of Vidigal, and on weekends it gets especially congested with partygoers riding up in Kombi vans and on the back of motorcycle taxis. A debate in Vidigal at the time of this research was whether drivers should be allowed to charge up to ten times the usual fare—and thus give priority to deep-pocketed visitors, seizing economic opportunity—or recognize fair treatment for residents.
11. Andrés Luque-Ayala and Flávia Neves Maia (2019) examine Google's digital mapping of Rio favelas project, including Vidigal, to argue that digital mapping makes favelas available as spaces of consumption, especially for tourism, and therefore builds what they call a kind of "digital governmentality."

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