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The Latin American Social Movement Repertoire

How It Has Changed, When, and Why

ABSTRACT

This article addresses the changing repertoire of resistance movements in Latin America, as the economic and political conditions adapted to regional changes: the shift from import substitution industrialisation to neoliberalism, populist based regimes via dictatorships to democratic rule, and growing awareness of global norms concerning social, economic and political rights. Increasing industrialisation and the rise in living costs meant agrarian protests dwindled and labour movements grew in number, though their focus shifted from work conditions to the increased cost of consumption. Similarly, students protested against the rising cost of schooling and inequities in access to education, rather than Marxist-Leninist inspired movements for radical societal change. Women shifted their focus from human to gender rights. Further, indigenous and race-based movements gained traction, which had been ignored by class-based and modernisation theories.

Keywords: *social movements, Latin America, industrialisation, neoliberalism, resistance*

Introduction

This article details how and why the repertoire of social movements changed in Latin America since the mid-twentieth century. It shifted as peoples in the region experienced new economic deprivations, inequities, and injustices, and new conceptions of rights, in the context of globally embedded structural, normative, and ideological changes. Yet, the formation of movements, and their effectiveness, hinged on Latin Americans with shared identities and experiences opting to seek collective improvements to their lives, but also on the strategies movement leaders pursued, and responses by those with power and authority. Some movements were country specific, owing to distinctive conditions, but many transpired in a multitude of countries in the region, and even elsewhere in the developing world, that shared experiences. After describing macroeconomic and political conditions and how they evolved, the article addresses the shifting landscape of Latin

American social movements in the countryside and then in cities, and among women, race/indigenous groups, and students.

Social Movement Context

Restructuring of production, consumption, and capital accumulation on a world scale after the Second World War affected all developing countries. Yet, conditions distinctive to Latin America influenced the speed, scale, and nature of changes there. Foreign debt crises in the 1980s brought import substitution, which had been the Latin American development model of choice since the 1940s, to a precipitous halt. The crises discredited the model and weakened the negotiating position of governments in the region *vis-à-vis* foreign banks.

Neoliberalism arose on the ashes of import substitution. Premised on the prioritisation of unfettered market activity, neoliberalism has been associated with privatisation of state-owned enterprises, state withdrawal of food, fuel, and other subsidies, promotion of exports, and reduction of barriers to trade and foreign investment. Above all it has benefited businesses best positioned to compete in a globalised free trade economy: mainly big businesses based in the developed world that could access markets in poorer countries as a result of the liberalisation of trade. Latin American governments, nonetheless, embraced neoliberalism, to generate hard currency to service their foreign debts and to cover costs of imports, and to make their economies more attractive to investors. But what was good for foreign banks and investors, and, in certain respects, for governments in Latin America, was not simultaneously good for many in the lower, working, and even middle classes in the region.

Somewhat independently, but in tandem, democratisation took Latin America by storm. The region joined a global democratising trend. With the collapse of the Soviet bloc and then the Soviet Union, the Cold War ended. Washington, in response, withdrew its support of Latin American military it had backed for decades to quell alleged Communist influences. The military, with their capacities thereby weakened, were pressured to turn over governance to civilians. The political transitions both brought to power less repressive governments, and opened up formal channels of interest and grievance articulation. The new governments reestablished rights military governments had curtailed, including citizen rights to vote and worker rights to strike.

New global cultural norms, values, and practices, in turn, came to resonate with certain peoples in the region. In particular, new transnational conceptions of human, gender, indigenous, and race-based rights appealed to the disadvantaged. Yet, Latin Americans filtered the new conceptions of rights, as well as the political and economic transformations, through their own lenses, which built on local beliefs, customs, and mores, their status in institutional hierarchies, and their social ties and involvements.

Whatever people's yearnings, their proclivity to form social movements to bring about coveted changes unobtainable through institutional channels was contingent, in no small

part, on state structures, policies, priorities, and capacities.¹ Political opportunity structure theory, in particular, alerts us to ways politics and polities shape the formation and accomplishments of social movements (for example party competition and civil society “spaces” to organise, free of repression).²

When faced with structural or normative constraints, the politically and economically weak at times accomplish more through covertly coordinated informal resistance than through visibly coordinated collective protest.³ Overt challenges to authority may be met with violence and repression, such that the risks are great, while covert modes of resistance may quietly undermine what persons in authority can accomplish, to the point that they feel compelled to institute significant reforms. Albert Hirschman, in turn, alerts us to the possibility that the dissatisfied may opt for “exit” over “voice,” that is, they may perceive themselves to have more to gain by leaving situations they dislike than by remaining and trying to change conditions where they are.⁴

Ultimately, social movement formation, strategies, demands, and accomplishments hinge on features of the movements themselves. Resource mobilisation theory alerts us to the importance of leadership, group alliances, and other mobilisable resources.⁵

Below I detail shifts in the repertoire of social movements in Latin America in the last half century, against the backdrop of the changes at the macro political and economic level.⁶ Within the shared context, social movements and their accomplishments have

- 1 See Joe Foweraker: *Popular Mobilization in Mexico: The Teachers' Movement, 1977–1988*, Cambridge 1993.
- 2 Sidney Tarrow: *Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action, and Politics*, 2nd ed., Cambridge 1998.
- 3 James C. Scott: *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, New Haven 1985; James C. Scott: *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, New Haven 1990.
- 4 Albert Hirschman: *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States*, Cambridge 1970; Mala Htun: *Sex and the State in Latin America: Abortion, Divorce, and the Family under Latin American Dictatorships and Democracies*, Cambridge/New York 2003.
- 5 John D. McCarthy/Mayer N. Zald (eds.): *Social Movements in an Organizational Society. Collected Essays*, New Brunswick 1987; Betilde Muñoz-Pogossian: *Electoral Rules and the Transformation of Bolivian Politics: The Rise of Evo Morales*, New York 2008.
- 6 On Latin American social movements, see also Maria da Glória Gohn: *Teorias dos movimentos sociais*, 6th ed., São Paulo 2007; Margarita López Maya/Nicolás Iñigo Carrera/Pilar Calveiro: *Luchas contrahegemónicas y cambios políticos recientes de América Latina*, Buenos Aires 2008; Richard Stahler-Sholk/Harry Vanden/Glen David Kuecker (eds.): *Latin American Social Movements in the Twenty-First Century: Resistance, Power, and Democracy*, Lanham 2008.

varied somewhat among countries in the region, owing to different state policies on the one hand and to different leadership, alliances, and strategies on the other hand.

The Rise and Decline of Agrarian Protests

Agrarian protests were common in Latin America historically, when most of the population lived off the land, impoverished. They also were central to the main twentieth century revolutions in the region: in Mexico (1910), Bolivia (1952), and Cuba (1959). The rural struggles centred mainly on demands of peasants for land they felt entitled to. However, even in the context of revolutions, the peasantry did not mobilise for radical social transformations. Yet, their rebellions eroded dominant-class control in the countryside, and when they allied with defiant urban groups (and, in Bolivia, with workers in the main tin mines) inspired by radical ideologies, they contributed to the remaking of state and societal-wide class relations.

Guerilla movements spread throughout the region, between the 1960s and 1980s, in countries in the region that had experienced no revolution.⁷ The movements contested some of the greatest inequities in land distribution in the world, but in some countries they protected vested interests in the production, processing, and trafficking of drugs. Home to the largest guerilla movements during these years were (1) Central American countries (except Costa Rica, a country of small farmers; (2) countries with poor, indigenous populations, such as Peru and Chiapas, in southern Mexico; and (3) Colombia, then the epicentre of cocaine trafficking in the region. Confronted by better armed and trained military (that benefited from United States assistance), the movements were quelled, all the while that the social and economic inequities which fueled the movements remained. Yet, with the transitions to democracy, some of the movements transformed themselves into political parties. This was especially true in El Salvador.

Rural protests and land seizures have peppered the Latin American landscape in more recent times, but they have been confined, in the main, to localised uprisings.⁸ Brazil is an exception. There, the Landless Workers Movement (*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra*, MST), founded in 1984, near the end of 21 years of military rule, developed into the largest, most sustained late 20th century social movement in the region. Concerned with addressing and redressing agrarian inequalities and injustices,⁹ it organised

7 Timothy P. Wickham-Crowley: *Guerrillas and Revolution in Latin America*, Princeton 1992.

8 On occasion, agrarian elites have also engaged in protest movements against the rare government measures that they perceive defying their economic interests. In Argentina in 2008, 2009, and 2012, for example, they protested against proposed tax increases on their output and exports.

9 See João Pedro Stedile/Bernardo Mançano Fernandez: *Brava gente: A Trajectória do MST e a luta pela terra no Brasil*, São Paulo 1999; John L. Hammond: *Law and Disorder: The*

collective invasions of public lands and unfarmed and fraudulently claimed privately owned lands. Since the early 2000s it also invaded and despoiled agri-businesses that produced genetically modified crops and caused environmental degradation. Emphasising community building within, and solidarity among, the encampments land-invaders set up, the MST proceeded to set up schools, health clinics, and agricultural extensive services for the families involved. In terms of strategy, the movement relied not only on land-takeovers, but also on large marches and road blockades, and, beginning in the mid-1990s, even on working *within* the state. Members deliberately and strategically secured public sector jobs through which they promoted MST interests, including through accessing state funds.

The MST must be understood in political context, namely Brazil's (re)democratisation. The country's changed "political opportunity structure" reduced the risks of rebellion. And so too is the MST best understood in economic context, namely the transition to neoliberalism, which exacerbated rural inequalities, as agribusinesses expanded their holdings and marginalised small farmers. Yet, it was savvy, committed leadership that capitalised on the changed milieu to build up a movement which helped improve the well-being of landless rural Brazilians.

Given how abysmally low rural wages are and how many agriculturalists are landless in Latin America, the infrequency of protest is striking. Instead, disgruntled rural peoples in the region have been mainly voting with their feet, opting for "exit" over "voice". In so doing they have turned to individual/family, over collective, efforts to improve their lot through rural-to-urban migration. Large-scale migration began during the import substitution era, when governments favored industry over agriculture, and urban over rural peoples. In the process, Latin America became the most urbanised region in the Third World, nearly as urban as the rich countries.

Beginning in the mid-1980s Latin Americans who voted with their feet increasingly turned to emigration over rural-to-urban migration. Cities ceased to be seen as solutions to rural (and new urban) plight. The shift came with the transitions to neoliberalism.

Brazilian Landless Farmworkers' Movement, in: *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 18:4 (1999), pp. 469–489; John L. Hammond: *Land Occupations, Violence, and the Politics of Agrarian Reform in Brazil*, in: *Latin American Perspectives* 36:4 (2009), pp. 156–177; John L. Hammond/Federico Rossi: *Landless Workers Movement (MST) Brazil*, in: David Snow et al. (eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*, London 2013, pp. 680–683; Gabriel Ondetti: *Land, Protest, and Politics: The Landless Movement and the Struggle for Agrarian Reform in Brazil*, University Park 2008; Zander Navarro: *The Brazilian Landless Movement (MST)*, in: *Critical Times. REDES* 15:1 (2010), pp. 196–223; Wendy Wolford: *This Land is Ours Now: Social Mobilizations and the Meaning of Land in Brazil*, Durham 2010; Miguel Carter: *Between Orishas and Revolution: The Expression of Racial Inequalities in Post-Soviet Cuba*, in: Paul Gootenberg/Luis Reygadas (eds.), *Indelible Inequalities in Latin America*, Durham 2010, pp. 139–168.

Urban living costs spiraled as the neoliberal governments cut back food, fuel, and other subsidies. At the same time, employment opportunities contracted. New, profit-oriented private owners of former state-owned enterprises reduced enterprise payrolls, and many of the inefficient but labour-absorbing local businesses could not compete with foreign imports once Latin American governments lifted tariffs. Also, debt-ridden governments cut back employment to reduce their expenditures.

By the time conditions in the region partially recovered from the crises that the ISI-neoliberal transitions and civil wars unleashed, Latin Americans in many countries in the region had established transnational personal networks that led more and more of them to see their future in wealthier countries, not in their homelands. Central American, along with Caribbean, countries, rank among the countries in the world with the highest rates of emigration. “Exit” in the form of emigration became the way whereby both rural and urban Latin Americans increasingly sought to improve their lot. Increased emigration notwithstanding, as countries in the region became ever more urban, protest movements shifted there, when city-dwellers experienced conditions they considered unjust.¹⁰

The Rise and Decline of Work-Based Movements

Labour movements have been smaller and weaker in Latin America than in the dominant countries in the world economy historically, especially than in Europe. Overall, workers in Latin America have been less militant owing to the different context in which their lives are embedded. With most of the Latin American labour force employed in the informal economy, including the vast army of migrants from the countryside, industrial workers constitute a “labour aristocracy”. They enjoy labour rights, including rights to a minimum wage, to unemployment benefits, to pensions, and to healthcare (except in the export processing zones), which workers in the informal sector do not. During the import substitution era the labour movement won concessions by disrupting production with strikes. In that tariffs at the time limited foreign competition, business could pass on labour costs to consumers, by raising prices for their products.

Nonetheless, labour mobilised during import substitution in the context of corporatist alliances with government and business, in which they had the least power. The alliances contained their militancy, and accordingly their economic demands. The clout they enjoyed, however limited, deteriorated when the military in many countries staged *coups d'états*, and governed between the 1960s and 1980s. The military rescinded labour's rights to organise and strike, while they promoted interests of capital. The risks of rebellion kept most labour quiescent, even as their earning power declined. Under the circumstances, workers rarely staged strikes.

With the restoration of democracy labour took advantage of its renewed rights to organise and strike. This led to an immediate surge in strike activity, even against the backdrop of wage increases. However, strike activity never returned to levels of the pre-military period, and the surge proved short-lived, after which strike activity tapered off anew, this time for economic, not political reasons, but for economic reasons embedded in neoliberal transformations. In the early 1990s, for example, more Latin American countries experienced decreases than increases on the three standard indicators of workplace disruption: number of strikes, number of workers involved, and workdays not worked.¹¹ The new governments, committed to the new, neoliberal economic model, removed trade and investment barriers that perniciously eroded workers' ability to exercise their formally restored rights. As businesses became free to (re-)locate anywhere in the world where they chose (and export goods to foreign market), to maximise their profits, labour lost bargaining power, to the point that they came to have more to lose than to gain from strikes.¹² The greater labour costs in a country, the more likely business would move elsewhere. In essence, the new democratically elected governments tacitly became accomplices in the *de facto* retraction of rights workers regained *de jure*, as they aided and abetted business over labour interests, in the new globalised economy. The strike activity that persisted was shaped by political party and union dynamics, more than by economic conditions of employment.¹³

Argentina, one of Latin America's most industrial countries, experienced the broadest-based labour strife between the mid-1990s and the first years of the new millennium. Upon losing their jobs en masse when the Carlos Menem government instituted draconian neoliberal privatisations of formerly state-owned enterprises, workers formed a movement of the unemployed and even took over factories. As the country experienced a major economic crisis (in 2001), labour took on a political mission. In alliance with other angry Argentinians, they brought down the government.¹⁴ A protest movement that began with demands for economic justice, for the right to employment and a live-

- 11 Susan Eckstein: Epilogue: Where Have All the Movements Gone? Latin American Social Movements at the New Millennium, in: Susan Eckstein (ed.), *Power and Popular Protest: Latin American Social Movements*, Berkeley 2001, pp. 351–406, p. 369.
- 12 Only during the first years of the democratic transitions, and, paradoxically, against a backdrop of wage improvements, did strike activity pick up. On Brazil, see Eduardo Noronha/Vera Gebrim Garuti/Jorge Elias Jr.: *Explicações para um ciclo excepcional de greves: o caso brasileiro*. Paper delivered at the 21st International Congress of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA), Chicago, 24–26 September 1998.
- 13 Maria Victoria Murillo: *Labor Unions, Partisan Coalitions, and Market-Oriented Reforms in Latin America*, Cambridge 2001.
- 14 Jose Daniel Benclowicz: *Repensando los orígenes del movimiento piquetero: miseria y experiencias de lucha antes de las contrarreformas de la década de 1990 en el norte argentino*, in: *Latin American Research Review* 46:2 (2011), pp. 79–103.

lihood, packed on demands for political justice, demanding the ouster of a government no longer perceived as legitimate.

In most countries, remaining work-based movements centre in the public sector, and they increasingly involve the lower middle classes, for example, teachers,¹⁵ poorly paid and threatened by employment cutbacks as governments streamline their expenditures (in some cases even withholding pay checks to public sector workers). But the strike activity results also from the public sector's inherently political nature. Since governments need to be responsive to worker demands to maintain their legitimacy, public sector employees retain some leveraging power. And it results from governments being somewhat shielded from the world economy in its provisioning of services. It can thereby pass on stepped up labour costs either to consumers in the form of higher prices for public services, or to taxpayers (although they risk angering consumers and they face civil societies resistant to paying taxes).

Aggrieved public-sector workers expanded their repertoires of resistance in the context of re-democratisation in the region, which included democratisation of media access. In late 1990s Mexico, public-sector nurses, for example, upset with medical-supply shortages tied to neoliberal fiscal belt-tightening, publicly drew blood from their arms with syringes that they then squirted at the doors of hospital administrators. Also, in Mexico's state capital of Tabasco, public-employee street-sweepers collectively pressed for compensation for the private services which politicians exacted of them, and for reinstatement of jobs lost to neoliberal austerity policies. They staged a hunger strike, marched *en masse* to Mexico City, and stampeded into Congress where they peeled off their clothes to press their claims.¹⁶ In these instances angry public sector employees made use of new media access to draw public attention to their causes.

Even the left-leaning governments elected to power in the region around the turn of the century did not always implement policies satisfactory to workers. For example, the state-based oil-worker "labour aristocracy" in Venezuela joined the business class in protests designed to bring the Hugo Chávez government to heel. Oil-workers stopped production and took to the streets to destabilise the economy. However, Chávez craftily leveraged powers of the state to maintain the upper hand.

15 Joe Foweraker: *Popular Mobilization in Mexico: The Teachers' Movement, 1977–1988*, Cambridge 1993; Maria Lorena Cook: *Organizing Dissent: Unions, the State, and the Democratic Teachers' Movement in Mexico*, University Park 1996.

16 New York Times: 21 January 1997, p. 10.

Urban “Popular” Sector Movements

Consumer Based Movements

Latin America also experienced social movements that focused on consumption, as distinct from production. The focus of these movements as well shifted with the transition from import substitution to neoliberalism, and a concomitant shift in the political bases and class biases of governments in the region. Under import substitution, movements focused mainly on “popular sector” collective claims to individual rights to housing. Under neoliberalism, in contrast, they focused on anger with government cutbacks in subsidies that drove up the cost of everyday living.

Collective Mobilisations for Improved Housing

Import substitution, and the urbanisation it unleashed, gave birth to novel movements for affordable housing throughout the region. They involved lower, working, and lower middle class city dwellers collectively mobilising for the right to claims to vacant publicly owned lands, on which they could construct their own housing. Once assured of land occupancy rights, they mobilised to pressure their respective governments to provide the areas they staked out with roads, public transportation, running water, electricity, and schools for their children. The so-called squatter movements represented a mode of consumer defiance against the high cost of property in the established housing market, as the available stock failed to expand apace with demand amidst the massive rural-to-urban migration at the time.

Typically, governments responded to squatter demands. In subsidising squatter housing costs, they indirectly subsidised industrialists’ costs of production/reproduction. Industrialists needed to pay workers a living wage that addressed needs for shelter, along with food. But the governments responded to squatter demands in a manner that both defused the grass-roots mobilisations and won them votes at election time.¹⁷

Squatter movements peaked in vibrancy under populist governments in the heyday of import substitution. The military who usurped power in many countries in the latter 1960s/1970s were less tolerant of these movements.¹⁸ The movements, as a consequence, disappeared from the Latin American social movement repertoire, never to revive after the restoration of democracy in the region in the 1980s. The new, neoliberal governments prioritised market solutions, including to housing. They favored commercial dealings

17 Susan Eckstein: *The Poverty of Revolution: The State and Urban Poor in Mexico*, Princeton 1977.

18 David Collier: *Squatters and Oligarchs: Authoritarian Rule and Policy Change in Peru*, Baltimore 1976.

over land invasions to address pent-up demand for affordable housing,¹⁹ as well as privatisation of urban service provisioning. Venezuela, under Hugo Chávez, was one of the only countries in the region where squatter movements continued on any scale around the turn of the century. One of the populist leaders in the neoliberal era, he cultivated support among urban poor, partly by politicising access to housing.

A non-squatter based housing movement emerged in Mexico amidst the transition from import substitution to neoliberalism – in the context of a major earthquake in the capital that left tens of thousands of city dwellers homeless. Mexico at the time had been ruled fairly autocratically, behind a populist veneer. Yet, amidst the earthquake crisis, new urban social movements gained a footing. With the support of politicised middle class university students, the earthquake victims mobilised to pressure the government to rebuild their homes and neighbourhoods. The residents involved in the movement challenged the thinking of urbanists at the time, who perceived inner-city residents to be apathetic, incapable of organising, and weighed down by a “culture of despair”.²⁰ Yet, in providing some displaced persons with new housing, while coopting movement leaders, the government weakened the mobilisations before pressured to build housing for all earthquake victims.

In Brazil in the 1990s a different sort of poor people’s housing movement arose, the Roofless Peoples Movement, inspired by, and building on, the previously noted Landless Workers Movement. Participants, in all major cities in the country, but most notably in Sao Paulo, seized unoccupied urban buildings and vacant plots, where they erected tent villages. Involving thousands of poor and homeless city dwellers, Movement organisers worked with clusters of families, first to build solidarity among them, and then to oversee land invasions, sometimes in coordination with the increasingly influential Workers Party, the left-wing labour confederation, and the progressive wing of the Catholic Church. However, the Movement helped far fewer city dwellers gain access to housing than did squatter movements in their heyday.

19 Alain Durand-Lesserve: *Law and Urban Change in Developing Countries: Trends and Issues*, in: Edesio Fernandes/Ann Varley (eds.), *Illegal Cities: Law and Urban Change in Developing Countries*, London 1998, pp. 299–257, p. 236.

20 Susan Eckstein: *Urbanization Revisited: Inner-City Slum of Hope and Squatter Settlement of Despair*, in: *World Development* 18:2 (1990), pp. 165–181.

Protests Against the Rising Cost of Subsistence

The neoliberal-induced restructuring that sharply reduced food, petrol, and service subsidies unleashed a wave of unprecedented protests by low-to-middle class city dwellers across the region.²¹ At least half of Latin American countries experienced consumer revolts, just in the 1980s, as the increased cost of subsistence affected many people in the region collectively, simultaneously, and suddenly. Other regions of the developing world, less urban and with populations less dependent on the market for food and services, and where “IMF reforms” were less draconian, also experienced similar protests, but typically not as many.

These protests marked a shift among Latin Americans in their focus of economic grievances from the point of production to that of consumption. Even organised labour, recognising the new constraints on work-based strikes, came to recognise that they were more likely to be effective in contesting state-initiated consumer price hikes than conditions at work. For this reason, organised labour often was instrumental in the consumer based protests.

The consumer protests that the neoliberal transitions ignited built on defiance by middle class women in Chile in the early 1970s, during the import substitution era. However, the Chilean protests in the 1970s had a political and not merely economic mission. They were designed to discredit the socialist government of Salvador Allende in the early 1970s. As scarcities drove up food prices, regime opponents took to the streets on set occasions, banging their pots and pans. Their symbol of resistance remained part of the country’s protest repertoire long after they helped pave the way to a military *coup d’état*, and, years later, after the government redemocratised.

In contrast, the consumer defiance sparked by the neoliberal transitions was framed as “IMF protests”, because the International Monetary Fund (IMF) pressured governments in the region to end their consumer subsidies introduced under import substitution. Some of the movements, in addition, addressed non-material grievances, such as anger with government corruption and a quest for respect and dignity. This was true, for example, in Argentina, where neoliberal policies were discredited amidst political, along with economic crises.²²

21 See John Walton: Debt, Protest, and the State in Latin America, in: Susan Eckstein (ed.), Power and Popular Protest: Latin American Social Movements, Berkeley/Los Angeles 2001, pp. 299–328; Javier Auyero: Contentious Lives: Two Argentine Women, Two Protests, and the Quest for Recognition, Durham 2003; Javier Auyero: Routine Politics and Violence in Argentina: The Gray Zone of State Power, Cambridge 2007.

22 Javier Auyero: Contentious Lives: Two Argentine Women, Two Protests, and the Quest for Recognition, Durham 2003; Javier Auyero: Routine Politics and Violence in Argentina: The Gray Zone of State Power, Cambridge 2007.

Data on consumer prices help explain why revolts against cost of living increases mushroomed under neoliberalism. Between 1990 and 1997, for example, only two countries in the region experienced less than a 200 per cent rise in food prices, and five countries experienced increases of over 500 per cent. And of the ten countries for which information on fuel and electricity prices is available, four experienced increases of over 200 per cent. Yet, indicative that the rise in living costs did not alone induce protests, strike activity, that is, worker efforts to press for higher wages to offset cost of living increases, varied independently of consumer price hikes. By way of illustration, in 1995, none of the countries that experienced more than a 500 per cent increase in food and oil prices experienced increased strike activity. And three of the four countries where the number of strikes rose had the lowest consumer price increases.²³

Furthermore, in the context of distinctive cultural traditions, class and organisational dynamics, macro-level political-economic conditions, state-society relations, and group alliances, consumer protests took different forms in different countries in the region.²⁴ Cutbacks in subsidies, for example, stirred riots in Jamaica, Argentina, and Venezuela, street demonstrations in Chile, and strikes and roadblocks in Andean nations. Protests also varied in how violent they turned, largely depending on how public authorities responded. The consumer protests in Venezuela turned especially violent in 1989,²⁵ and in delegitimizing the government they helped pave the way for the electoral victory of the populist, left-leaning Hugo Chávez in 1998.

Whatever their form and however violent, consumer protests tended to be short in duration. They dissipated as governments retracted or reduced price hikes. And as governments in the region implemented anti-poverty programs, they built up loyalty among beneficiaries that made consumer protests less likely. Brazil's *Bolsa Família* program was the most broad-based anti-poverty program in the region, but other governments in Mexico, Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia, as well as in other countries, implemented similar programs, on a smaller scale.

- 23 Susan Eckstein: Epilogue: Where Have All the Movements Gone? Latin American Social Movements at the New Millennium, in: Susan Eckstein (ed.), *Power and Popular Protest: Latin American Social Movements*, Berkeley 2001, pp. 351–406, p. 375.
- 24 John Walton: Debt, Protest, and the State in Latin America, in: Susan Eckstein (ed.), *Power and Popular Protest: Latin American Social Movements*, Berkeley/Los Angeles 2001, pp. 299–328; Susan Eckstein: Resistance to Neoliberal Democracy in Latin America, in: *Colombia Internacional (Universidad de los Andes)* 63 (2006), pp. 12–39.
- 25 Fernando Coronil/Julie Skurski: Dismembering and Remembering the Nation: Semantics of Political Violence in Venezuela, in: *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 33:2 (1991), pp. 288–337.

Anti-Crime Protests

Under neoliberalism the moral order of cities eroded such that disaffected city-dwellers, individually and in organised groups, turned also to theft, pilfering, looting, crime rings, coordinated corrupt dealings, gang activity, and kidnappings on an unprecedented scale.²⁶ In such instances city dwellers took the law into their own hands, contributing to the deterioration of law and order.²⁷ The rise in crime, in turn, fueled a culture of illegality that made criminal activity all the more likely.

Poverty and unemployment, along with drugs, police corruption, and the formation of leaner and meaner governments, are at the root of the rise in illegal activity. Law enforcement agents in numerous countries became part of the problem, not its solution, as they joined the ranks of the criminals and operated with impunity.

The surge in criminality gave rise, in turn, to new middle-class-led, but multi-class-based, anti-crime movements, which have involved some of the largest contemporary mobilisations in the region. Mexico, Brazil, Colombia, and Argentina are among the countries that have witnessed such movements. Demanding tougher anti-crime measures, participants in the movements have made use of culturally crafted symbols of resistance. While grounded in crime-caused personal insecurity, the movements have been shaped by the democratisation of media access in the new democracies. The movements make use of symbols of resistance to capture the popular imagination, such as cladding themselves in white. Democracy-linked electoral competition has also fueled some of the movements, as opposition candidates have highlighted crime concerns to discredit incumbents' effectiveness in maintaining law and order.²⁸ The movements have demanded an end to police corruption and violence as well as common crime.

26 Alejandro Portes/Bryan Roberts: Free Market City, in: *Studies in Comparative International Development* 40:1 (2005), pp. 43–82.

27 United States deportation of undocumented Latin Americans who had affiliated with gangs in the US, especially in Los Angeles, has contributed to a transnationalisation of US gangs, especially in El Salvador, from where they have fanned out to other countries in the region (Jose Miguel Cruz: *Beyond Social Remittances: Migration and Transnational Gangs in Central America*, in: Susan Eckstein/Adil Najam (eds.), *How Immigrants Impact Their Homelands*, Durham 2013, pp. 213–233).

28 See for example Susan Eckstein: *Resistance to Neoliberal Democracy in Latin America*, in: *Colombia Internacional (Universidad de los Andes)* 63 (2006), pp. 12–39, especially pp. 32–34.

Student Movements

Students have a long history of protest in Latin America. Initially inspired by Marxism-Leninism, since the Cold War's end and the neoliberal turn in the region they have come to focus on specific student demands for what they consider education justice, and sometimes also for a deepening of democracy, including in the administration of universities. Their critiques of democracy notwithstanding, the ending of military rule fueled the likelihood of these protests, in reducing risks of rebellion.

Mexican students have been among the most ambitious in their mobilisations and demands. In 1988, twenty years after a government massacre of hundreds of peacefully demonstrating students so discredited the regime that it laid bedrock for the country's democratisation, hundreds of thousands of students marched in protest against government efforts to impose new university fees (as well as entrance exams), at a time when a major peso devaluation and austerity measures drove living costs up dramatically. Capturing the imagination of the capital, the student protesters won.²⁹ The government retracted the fees. History repeated itself a decade later when students closed down the campus of the main university, the largest in Latin America. Beginning, again, as a protest against announced increases in university tuition charges, from an annual fee of a few cents to 140 US dollars, this time the strike organisers refused to back down when the government offered to make the tuition payment voluntary. Instead, students broadened their demands and critique. They framed their protest as part of a struggle against free market economic policies and for university democratisation, including for greater student involvement in university decision making.

Then, after an opposition candidate for the first time in modern history won the presidency, in 2000, students critiqued the country's democracy. In the presidential election of 2006 the student movement spoke out against electoral fraud, but in receiving little media, their protests were quickly silenced. However, during the next presidential campaign cycle, in 2012, they spoke out against restrictions on freedom of expression, corruption, and media manipulation of public opinion, this time making use of social media. In May a movement known as *#YoSoy132* (I am the 132rd), after its Twitter hashtag, went viral in its criticism of media coverage of the campaign. Students blockaded the studios of the main Mexican television network, to protest its biased campaign coverage, and following the elections, some 30,000 students protested in cities across the country to discredit the election outcome.³⁰ While their effort to discredit the election failed,

29 Jorge Castañeda: *Utopia Unarmed: The Latin American Left after the Cold War*, New York 1993, p. 204.

30 Sofia Castello y Tickell/Jennifer Preston: Students Blockade Mexican Television Studio to Protest Political Coverage, in: *The Lede*, 27 July 2012, thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/07/27/mexicos-student-movement-protests-televisa; *YSoy 132: How A Mexican Student Movement*

their protests kept their commitment to university and nation-wide democratisation alive.

Students across the region mobilise not only on their own and for their own immediate concerns. They have allied with other groups, especially with labour, for societal change. For example, in Argentina in 1997 tens of thousands of students joined street vendors, and employed and unemployed public and private sector workers, in blocking roads and access to government buildings, to protest newly instituted draconian neo-liberal policies. And in the Dominican Republic students, together with unions, led protests across the country to protest government approved increases in prices of basic foods and services.

After the turn of the century, the student movement in Chile became the largest and most sustained in the region. Student demonstrations drew the most participants since the late 1980s pro-democracy movement that helped bring the Pinochet dictatorship to heel. They also inspired student movements elsewhere in the region (and world).³¹ As many as 200,000 students demonstrated in scores of marches in Santiago and other cities in the country in 2011 and 2012, in what was dubbed Chilean Winter. They demanded the right to a free and fair university education and an end to profit-making in the public education system, after a newly elected conservative government instituted one of the most privatised university education systems in the world. Students also barricaded themselves inside hundreds of high schools which the national government refused any more to fund fully. Supported by unions and teachers, the student-led movement, like that in Mexico in the context of the 2012 presidential election, relied on high technology social media to disseminate ideas, build up support, and coordinate activity. The students, with their long history of protest, adapted to modern times in a manner that strengthened their movement. At the same time, though, they built, symbolically, on earlier Chilean protest movements, especially on the *cacerolazos*, the protests with pots and pans used by opponents to Allende's socialist government in the early 1970s and subsequently by the anti-Pinochet military government a decade later.

By 2012 the Chilean student movement broadened its focus beyond education to include political and tax reform. Also, it inspired movements in at least 12 of the other 20 principal countries in the region. Together, student movements across the region coordinated a "Latin American March for Education".³² Aside from demonstrating sup-

Was Born (video), 1 July 2012, www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/6/30/yosoy132-mexiann-youth (accessed on 2 August 2012).

31 see for example William Moss Wilson: Just Don't Call Her Che, in: *New York Times Sunday Review*, 28 January 2012, p. 1, www.nytimes.com/2012/01/29/opinion/Sunday/student-protest-rile-chile (accessed 25 July 2012).

32 See Pamela Sepúlveda: Student Protest Spread Throughout Latin America, in: *Upside Down World*, <http://upside-downworld.org/main/news-briefs-archives-68/3328-student-protests->

port for their Chilean peers, the other student movements added demands for university educational reforms in their respective countries.

Race and Ethnic/Indigenous Based Social Movements

It was widely assumed in Latin America that in countries with indigenous and Black populations, the ethnic and racial minorities would abandon their distinctive identities and cultural practices as they assimilated culturally to the ways of the non-indigenous lighter skin dominant classes and intermarried with them. Building on such assumptions, modernisation theory claimed ethnicity would cease to have social significance as peoples in the region were exposed to modern ideas and culture and as they became proficient in Western languages and better-educated. Meanwhile, Marxism envisioned class, not race or ethnicity, to be the driving force in people's lives.

Unanticipated by theoretical paradigms, vibrant indigenous, and, to a lesser extent, race-based movements joined the Latin America social movement repertoire since the mid-1980s, in countries, and regions of countries, with substantial indigenous and Black populations. While forming new movements, their social bases rested on longstanding, meaningful subaltern identities. What, then, contributed to the surge of such movements? Most notably, neoliberal restructuring had the unintended effect of igniting new grievances that fueled these, along with previously described, movements. The economic reforms sparked indigenous movements when governments stripped communities of long-standing land claims, when governments, concerned with fiscal belt-tightening, retracted social programs, and when governments promulgated new laws to attract investment (especially in mining) that dislocated indigenous peoples. Concomitantly, democratisation inspired indigenous groups to claim rights that had gained global legitimacy, and politicians in the new democracies, in turn, to respond to their concerns, to secure their votes. Meanwhile, democratisation reduced the risks that governments would respond with repression to claims indigenous peoples made.

A growing international consensus concerning minority rights inspired the movements. This international element represents an instance in which evolving values stressing universality contributed, paradoxically, to movements premised on the right to be distinctive. In addition, access to the Internet and to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) informed indigenous peoples of material and human capital resources, as well as ideas, that they could tap into.

By the 1990s indigenous peoples also had produced some leaders with the social capital to operate in the national and international as well as indigenous arena. With the capacity to articulate and disseminate ideas about indigenous peoples bilingually, they helped prioritise indigenous culture in a manner that built bridges among indigenous

communities (which did not always speak the same Indian language), as well as between them and non-indigenous lower, working, and middle class people.

Below, I first discuss indigenous movements, especially the nationally most significant indigenous based movement in the region, in Bolivia. Then I discuss race-based movements.

Indigenous Movements

Ecuador, Bolivia, Guatemala, and southern Mexico have been home to the main indigenous based movements in Latin America – movements that are indigenous in their social base, and, at least in part, in their concerns.³³ Sparked by newly experienced and newly perceived economic injustices, the movements have included political and cultural agendas. They have demanded respect for indigenous group legal autonomy and for the right to rule within their communities according to their own customary laws and their own system of authority. They have also pressed for community-based concepts of citizenship premised on collective rights as Indians, along with citizenship based on individual rights. Consistent with their community claims, they have pressed for bilingualism and other cultural features grounded in respect for their ethnic heritage.

The Bolivian *Movimiento al Socialismo* (MAS) is the indigenous based movement that has gained greatest national traction in Latin America.³⁴ MAS's formation and strength as a social-movement-based party rested on the charismatic and astute leadership of Evo Morales, a humble coca grower (*cocalero*) of indigenous origins who, as head of MAS, was elected president in 2005. Evo, as he is popularly called, had led a movement of *cocaleros*, a loose federation of coca-growers' unions, formed to defend their material interests when President Hugo Banzer in his second term (1997–2001) sought to eradicate export-oriented coca production under US pressure and with US assistance.

33 See Deborah Yashar: *Contesting Citizenship in Latin America: The Rise of Indigenous Movements and the Postliberal Challenge*, Cambridge/New York 2005.

34 Much of my discussion of the MAS, as well as of Brazil's MST, draws on a co-authored article I wrote with Timothy Wickham-Crowley (Timothy Wickham-Crowley/Susan Eckstein: *The Persisting Relevance of Political Economy and Political Sociology in Latin American Social Movement Studies*, forthcoming). Our analysis of the MAS builds on: Forrest Hylton/Sinclair Thomson: *Revolutionary Horizons: Past and Present in Bolivian Politics*, London 2007; Pilar Domingo: *Democracy and New Social Forces in Bolivia*, in: *Social Forces* 83:4 (2005), pp. 1727–1743; Betilde Muñoz-Pogossian: *Electoral Rules and the Transformation of Bolivian Politics: The Rise of Evo Morales*, New York 2008; Nancy Postero: *The Struggle to Create a Radical Democracy in Bolivia*, in: *Latin American Research Review* 45, special issue (2010), pp. 59–78; John Crabtree: *Patterns of Protest: Politics and Social Movements in Bolivia*, London 2005.

As fundamental as indigenous people have been to MAS' political success, MAS built on, but transcended, indigenous grievances and identities. The movement-based party reached out to *mestizo* lower, working, and lower-middle class peoples who together comprised the country's demographic majority. And to broaden its social base, MAS expanded its focus even in the countryside beyond the exclusive economic interests of coca-growers to include concern with the country's unequal distribution of land and rights of rural landless to property.

MAS built its strength by mobilising its broad social base to end neoliberalism and neoliberal governance. It pressed for the population's rights to public ownership of the country's natural resources and the revenues the resources generate, and for access to water as a basic human right. It therefore opposed government privatisation of the public water enterprise, and the price increases the new foreign owners charged. The coalition of protesters, which included large numbers of indigenous-origin peoples, disrupted governance such that the government re-nationalised ownership of the water company and reduced the cost of water, to restore public order. Once winning the presidency, the MAS quickly also re-nationalised the hydrocarbon industry, and redirected state revenues to improve the social and economic welfare of poor children, the elderly, and pregnant women, irrespective of ethnicity. In addition, to appeal specifically to its indigenous base it revised the country's constitution to allow new legal rights for indigenous peoples.

The indigenous and other social movements that allied with MAS never gave up their separate identities. Even under Morales the government was not spared protests. Thus, when his fiscally strapped government in 2010 announced a slashing of revenue-costly fuel subsidies, days of protests broke out in poor neighbourhoods of the capital, and peasant groups, miners, and unions threatened to march to demand Morales' resignation. When faced with a conflict between state fiscal exigencies and pressure from his political base that threatened his own claims to rule, the president sacrificed the former in favor of the latter. He rescinded the subsidy cutbacks.

Race-Based Movements

Similarly, movements rooted in Afro-racial identity that have pressed for ethno-national and race-based rights have joined the Latin American social movement repertoire in recent decades. This has been especially true in Brazil and Colombia, which have large Black populations.

The race-based movements, however, have had difficulty transcending class divisions. Middle class mulattoes and lower class black and mixed-race populations tend to have different concerns. But even movements within a single class, such as in Brazil's north-east, have thus far had limited appeal, in that the populace has not viewed race as the most salient feature in their lives.

The race-based movements benefited from racial tolerance of the new democracies. But the new governments also took pro-active measures to address and redress race-based

injustices, which defused the appeal (and potential appeal) of extra-institutional race-based movements. For example, in its 1991 Constitution Colombia granted Afro-Colombians quota rights to two legislative seats. And the Brazilian government, under Fernando Henrique Cardoso, formalised university access to persons of Afro-descent. For the first time in the country's history, a skin-color-based quota system was introduced that guaranteed Blacks seats in the public universities.

In Cuba, with the one remaining non-democratic government in the region, race-based discontent took cultural, covert political form. For thirty years the Castro-led government had controlled race discourse and policy, claiming that the revolution ended racial inequality. Yet, when Blacks were the hardest hit by the economic crisis that ensued when Soviet aid and trade ended, and racial inequalities increased, Blacks refused to accept the official story any longer. The state continued to make outright rebellion and protest difficult and risky, but Blacks developed cultural forms of resistance and criticism, such as through hip-hop. Rappers through their lyrics demanded attention to race and racial identity, and criticised enduring inequalities between Blacks and the lighter skinned in the country.³⁵ To date, the cultural movement has not challenged the government to correct race-based injustices, but it is serving to strengthen solidarity and a subculture of resistance among Blacks.

In sum, race, as well as ethnicity, became bases of collective identity and collective mobilisation for change in the 1990s. However, most typically the race-based movements were class specific, owing to the continued significance of class, objectively and subjectively. And for such reasons, the race-based movements tended not to focus primarily or exclusively on matters of race.

Gender-Based Movements

Women's concerns are shaped by their social standing within their families and the society at large, typically centering on their subordinate status. Analytically, their gender may serve as a social base of mobilisation, or as a set of concerns, possibly in combination with class, ethnic/racial, and other statuses and identities.³⁶

Under import substitution, women involved themselves in social movements not out of gender-specific concerns. For example, they were active in the previously described squatter settlement movements. Remaining in their neighbourhoods during the day

35 Odette Casamayor: *Between Orishas and Revolution: The Expression of Racial Inequalities in Post-Soviet Cuba*, in: Paul Gootenberg/Luis Reygadas (eds.), *Indelible Inequalities in Latin America*, Durham 2010, pp. 139–168.

36 See e.g. June Nash: *The War of the Peace: Indigenous Women's Struggle for Social Justice in Chiapas, Mexico*, in: Timothy Wickham/Susan Eckstein (eds.), *What Justice? Whose Justice? Fighting for Fairness in Latin America*, Berkeley 2003, pp. 182–202.

while their men worked elsewhere, they were strategically well positioned to defend their family claims to land, press for urban services, and fend off police, tax assessors, and other state agents.³⁷

When the military took over the reins of government in many countries in Latin America and ruled through repression, it was women who, courageously, first took the risk of protesting the regimes' human rights abuses. Working and middle class women together staged regular marches in defense of their rights to motherhood (and grandmotherhood) when their children "disappeared". They convened at set times and places, where they demonstrated with pictures of their loved ones the military killed or imprisoned for alleged opposition to the governments. The military unintentionally politicised the personal while depoliticising institutional politics, and in so doing ushered in seeds of their own destruction.

The women's movement in Argentina, in particular, became internationally renowned and an inspiration for similar multiclass women's movements in other countries in the region. In publicly discrediting the military regimes, their protests morphed into human rights, pro-democracy movements. Defiant women thereby played a crucial role in fueling the democratic transitions, a greater accomplishment than they initially intended when protesting against the "disappearance" of their loved ones. Then, as the new democracies became respectful of human rights, the women's movements dissipated. The conditions that had fueled most of their movements ceased to exist.³⁸

Building on groundwork that women's movements set in motion, gender came to be defined as sufficiently important to have Argentina, Guatemala, and many of the other new democracies in the region incorporate women's rights into their constitutions, establish women's agencies, and, subsequently, introduce gender quotas for party electoral lists.³⁹ Such concern with gender justice was without precedent in the region. In the new political milieu women in several countries even were elected president. Women, accordingly, shifted from participation in extra-institutional protest movements to participation in the formal political life of their countries.

As women's involvements in the human rights movements subsided, women of the lower, working, and lower middle classes became central to the previously described

37 Cf. Carlos Vélaz-Ibáñez: *Rituals of Marginality*, Berkeley 1983, pp. 119–122.

38 For an exception, see Jeffery Rubin/Emma Sokoloff-Rubin: *Sustaining Activism: A Brazilian Women's Movement and a Father-Daughter Collaboration*, Durham 2013. They document continued activism among rural women in Brazil, although through less collective extra-institutional protest over time.

39 Mala Htun: *Sex and the State in Latin America: Abortion, Divorce, and the Family under Latin American Dictatorships and Democracies*, Cambridge/New York 2003; Mona Lena Krook: *Quotas for Women in Politics: Gender and Candidate Selection Reform Worldwide*, Oxford 2009.

consumer protests that began in the mid-1980s, when governments in the region dramatically raised prices for basic foods and services with their neoliberal transitions. Wealthy women remained at the sidelines because they could easily absorb the price increases. Nonetheless, these movements, like the earlier human rights movements, were not driven by efforts to transform women's place either in the home or in the society-at-large. They were feminine, not feminist.

With the neoliberal transitions, economic opportunities opened up for educated women of the middle class that accentuated class differences and class-based concerns, dividing more than uniting women. Under the circumstances, women's movements became smaller in scale and less visible in the streets. Some new women's movements (often with NGO assistance) focused on domestic violence, and on health, psychological and legal services for women, as well as on reproductive rights – that is, on feminist concerns.⁴⁰ And in some countries gays pressed for their own set of rights.

In essence, by the 1990s women's political involvements became more institutionally based. Gender concerns were codified in law and incorporated into public discourse and practice. Earlier women's movements had laid the groundwork for bringing women into the public arena and for making government and society more accommodating to them. In the process, exclusively women's movements became less broad based, smaller, and more limited in their goals, but, on occasion, more focused on transforming gender relations in society and the home.

Conclusion

In sum, Latin Americans collectively protested and mobilised over the years to try to bring about change. They have done so in patterned ways across diverse countries in the region that shared similar macro economic and political conditions. At times, their movements drew on cross-border social networks and were inspired by movements in other countries.

The social movement repertoire was shown to have shifted somewhat over the years with changing conditions and opportunities, most notably with the transitions from import substitution industrialization to neoliberalism, and from populist governance to repressive military rule, and then to democracies with broader social bases than in the past. Movements new to the Latin America repertoire in recent decades include consumer protest and anti-crime movements. Yet, as new movements have taken form old ones have not entirely disappeared. Older movements that remain, albeit on a more reduced scale than in the past, include peasant protests for land rights in the countryside

40 Maruja Barrig: *Latin American Feminism: Gains, Losses and Hard Times*, in: Vijay Prashad/Teo Ballvé (eds.), *Dispatches from Latin America: On the Frontlines Against Neoliberalism*, Cambridge 2006, pp. 47–58.

and labour protests in the cities. But some movements have, for all intents and purposes, disappeared. The conditions that had fueled them ceased to exist, at times, owing to the work of social movements. The women's human rights movements that protested against the "disappeared" when countries in the region were under military rule are cases in point. In other instances, though, Latin Americans have shifted from pursuing collective to individual/family solutions to conditions they dislike. The most notable example involves the Latin Americans who in growing numbers have been "voting with their feet", prioritising "exit" over protest – through domestic rural-to-urban migration and, more recently, cross-border emigration. While rural labourers still organise and collectively press for change (the most impressive contemporary example being Brazil's Landless Workers Movement), they have become the exception rather than the rule in the region. In essence, Latin America is a "living museum" of social movements old and new, although the mix of movements has shifted over the years.

The Latin American social movement repertoire includes some movements that are unique to the region (and to developing countries in other regions of the world). However, others resemble movements in the rich countries, currently and historically. The housing movements involving land invasions that proliferated, especially under import substitution, were unique to the developing world. In contrast, the protests against consumer price hikes are reminiscent of the bread riots of yesteryear in European countries, and labour strikes for better wages, work benefits, and work conditions build on labour's long-established tradition of work-based protests since the industrial era in the rich countries. Nonetheless, in Latin America, as elsewhere, work protests have diminished, and not because worker satisfaction with their living conditions has increased. Rather, under neoliberalism capital is so mobile that workers throughout the world risk business relocating elsewhere if they are too demanding. Injustices and inequities remain amidst quiescence.

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