

The Spatial Organization of Inequality¹

Marco Garrido
University of Chicago

When is inequality felt as social difference? Charles Tilly argued that it is not simply the extent of inequality that matters but how it is organized. I build on this account by incorporating a view of spatial boundaries as organizing social interactions and directing perceptions of groupness; that is, as helping define the actors and contexts at stake. I argue that the spatial organization of inequality affects how we perceive and experience it. *Where parties are unequal and in competition over resources, their segregation may promote categorical inequality, while their integration may inhibit it.* I trace these obverse trajectories in the cases of Manila and Singapore. In Manila, social inequality increased despite economic inequality decreasing, whereas in Singapore, social inequality decreased despite economic inequality increasing. I show that spatial organization in the form of segregation and integration, respectively, played a significant role in the sharpening and muting of social boundaries.

When is inequality felt? When does it become palpable as a difference in social worth? Charles Tilly (1998) provided an elegant and powerful answer by emphasizing two social processes: organization and categorization. He argued that it is not simply the extent of inequality that matters—the economic

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distance between X_A and X_B —but how it is organized. When unequal relations incorporate status distinctions, such as male/female, black/white, and citizen/foreigner, the parties come to be seen as categorically unequal, that is, as belonging to different groups unequally deserving of honor, esteem, and respect—no longer X_A and X_B , we might say, but A and B (fig. 1). Status categories come to be applied in the course of unequal interaction between solidary sets of actors. They provide a way for one group to explain and justify its exploitation and/or exclusion of another group. Categorically unequal relations are reproduced in other situations and settings. People adapt to them by inventing rituals and other practices meant to guide and supplement interaction. The social boundary dividing the two groups is thus institutionalized, and their inequality becomes not only palpable but durable. It also appears natural, as if following from intrinsic differences in group capabilities when, in fact, these differences developed as a consequence of categorial organization.

How does the *spatial* organization of inequality make a difference? Massey (2007) is one of the only scholars to consider segregation in light of Tilly's work on categorical inequality. Segregation, he argued, represents the overlap of social and spatial boundaries. Spatial boundaries play a supporting role. They underscore social boundaries, making disvalued groups easier to locate and, hence, easier to discriminate against. Practices such as redlining and racial steering, for example, are based on the identifiability of neighborhoods in terms of race. The political and economic isolation of poor, black areas is enabled and made more effective by their segregation. Administrative boundaries are drawn around areas of concentrated poverty, confining the poor to municipalities where property values are lower, schools and services inferior, and taxes generally higher. Segregation also makes these areas targets for disinvestment and cutbacks. In short, the consolidation of social and spatial

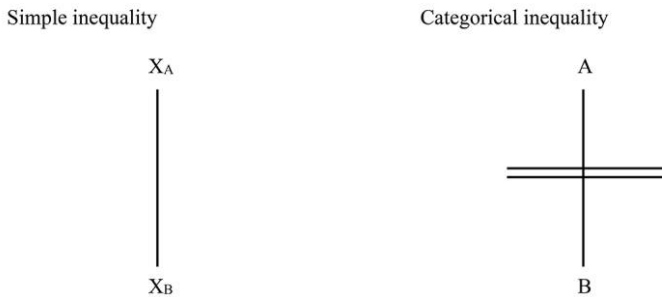


FIG. 1.—Categorical inequality

boundaries makes a disvalued group more salient and thus easier to exploit, exclude, and avoid.

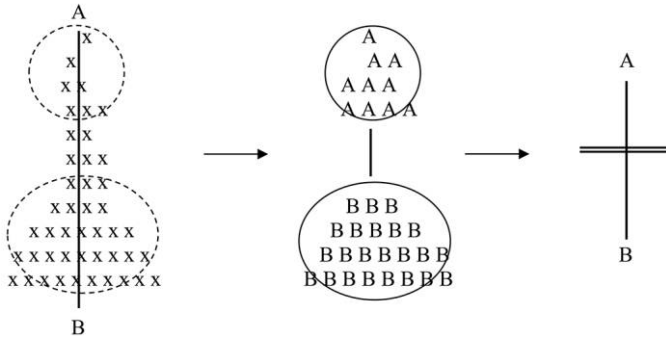
I would suggest that spatial boundaries play a more active role. They do more than reinforce a preexisting group difference but help constitute that very difference through a process of spatialization, whereby the different parties come to be identified with distinct places in the case of segregation and with the same place in the case of integration. There is a long-standing and substantial warrant for this claim. Gordon Allport (1954, p. 129) argued that the salience of certain physical characteristics—their “visibility and identifiability”—aided social categorization. “Visible differences imply real differences,” he wrote, and thus attitudes such as prejudice tend to “condense” around visible cues. Skin color is one such cue, a very powerful one, anchoring the category of race. More recently, Gieryn (2002*a*) underscored the “agentic capacity” of physical things—their power, in other words, to shape social things. He illustrates the claim in Gieryn (2002*b*), showing the built form to structure social interaction and concretize symbolic distinctions.²

Sociologists have learned to treat space, in particular, as more than simply where things happen (location) but as fundamentally implicated in making them happen (mechanism). A long time ago, Simmel ([1908] 1997) argued that spatial boundaries play a role in organizing social interaction. In doing so, they direct and not simply reinforce social categorization. In this vein, Amos Hawley (1944) argued that segregation has the effect of making groups conspicuous. Segregated neighborhoods stand out, and the people inside them appear homogenous. We tend to relate to these people differently, not as individuals but as a group. If these people were not segregated, Hawley posits, if they were dispersed across the population at large, then we would not see them in the same way. Segregation, that is, imparts “a categorical character” to social relations (p. 672). It lends group difference “an aspect of concreteness” that serves to conduct prejudice and stereotyping (p. 669).

I will argue that the spatial organization of inequality in the form of segregation or integration affects how we perceive and experience it. *Where parties are unequal and in competition over resources, their segregation may promote categorical inequality, while their integration may inhibit it* (fig. 2). How does this happen? (1) Interaction comes to be organized spatially in the form of segregation or integration. This may be the result of state intervention or market forces. (2) Spatial boundaries guide social interaction. They lead us to distinguish between relations within and relations across the boundary. Relations within the boundary tend toward the elaboration of a common identity (they produce a “sociological centripetality,” Simmel wrote), while

² In psychology, scholars have largely accepted a view of cognition as situated or operating in interaction with the nonhuman environment (Wilson 2002; Smith and Semin 2007; Robbins and Aydede 2009).

The spatial organization of inequality in the form of *segregation* promotes categorical inequality...



...and in the form of *integration* inhibits it.

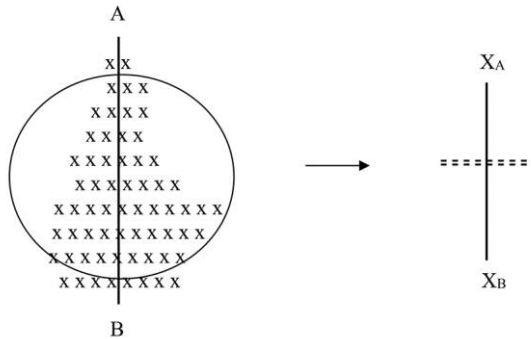


FIG. 2.—The spatial organization of inequality.

relations across the boundary tend toward the elaboration of social difference. (3) Unequal interactions are *spatialized*. In the case of segregation, the parties are identified with, and identify with, different places. Exploitation is understood in spatial terms, social closure is spatial closure, and the parties make claims on the basis of their respective territories. In the case of integration, the parties are identified with, and identify with, the same place. Exploitation is not framed in spatial terms. The parties make claims on the basis of their

common belonging and thus engage in spatial accommodation and negotiation over shared spaces. (4) Spatialization directs social categorization. Groups form around segregated places, and the inequality of its members is seen as a categorical inequality between the residents of place A and place B. Integration, in contrast, provides the parties with a common basis of group identity and facilitates processes of “decategorization” (Gaertner and Dovidio 2000). To the extent these processes prove effective and place becomes symbolic of the group, their inequality will not be seen in categorical terms.

I will deploy this account to explain why, in Metro Manila, social inequality increased despite economic inequality decreasing, while, in Singapore, social inequality decreased despite economic inequality increasing. I will make the case that spatial organization in the form of segregation and integration, respectively, played a significant role in the sharpening and muting of social boundaries.

In Manila, we see the segregation of urban space into slums and enclaves containing, on the one hand, much of the urban poor and lower middle class and, on the other, the upper and middle class. Spatial boundaries organized social interaction within and across these places. Slums and enclaves came to form distinct communities, and their residents were seen as belonging to different and unequal groups—squatters and villagers (“villages” being the local term for residential enclaves). Notably, spatialized class identities became salient as poverty rates declined precipitously and income inequality decreased.

In Singapore, we see the opposite trajectory. The spatial boundaries dividing people into class groups yielded to boundaries holding them within a common space. Slums and squatter settlements were erased, and their residents resettled in public housing. Eventually, the middle class were also accommodated and the different class groups were physically integrated. Public housing became the predominant form of housing in the country. Once again, spatial boundaries organize social interaction, but here we see public housing residents elaborate a collective identity based on their common belonging in the same place. Consequently, within public housing, the stigma attached to poor people dissolved and a relatively egalitarian social order emerged. This happened, notably, as income inequality increased sharply.

In the following section, I incorporate a view of space as “productive” into an organizational account of inequality. Next, I clarify the article’s contribution to American urban sociology and discuss my comparative approach and data. I then turn to the cases, tracing the same process, the spatialization of inequality/equality, as it plays out in obverse ways. The comparison is lopsided: I deal summarily with the Manila case since it is already well established but dwell on the Singapore case, which readers are more likely to find surprising. Finally, I consider how the argument might apply to other cases, the United States in particular.

INTERGROUP CONFLICT, SPATIAL BOUNDARIES,
AND THE ORGANIZATION OF INEQUALITY

My argument draws upon three streams of research in different fields: the literature on intergroup relations in social psychology, the literature on spatial boundaries in urban sociology, and organizational accounts of inequality in sociology. We begin with the pioneering work of Muzafer Sherif and Gordon Allport on the importance of group belonging in shaping perceptions of social difference. In his famous Robber's Cave experiment (1954), Sherif brought a number of 12-year-old boys to Robber's Cave State Park, Oklahoma, separated them into two groups, and made them compete with one another. They soon developed antagonistic relations grounded in distinct group identities (as the Eagles and the Rattlers). Forcing the two groups to work together toward superordinate goals (e.g., fixing the camp's water pump, pushing the food truck out of a rut) mitigated group tensions. The experiment showed that competitive relations can spur group formation and lead to prejudice and discrimination.

Allport (1954) made a similar argument at around the same time but emphasized the benefits of cooperative relations (although see also Sherif 1958). He found that sustained intergroup cooperation can lead to learning across groups, accommodating behavior, affective bonds, and the development of a less provincial and more tolerant outlook. It can even weaken social boundaries to the point of their being redrawn more inclusively. In other words, cooperation can induce cognitive processes of decategorization and recategorization, whereby the members of different groups come to regard themselves as belonging to a common, superordinate group (Gaertner and Dovidio 2000). Although contact theory is generally well supported empirically (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006, 2011), it tends to be reduced to the idea that positive intergroup contact is enough to erode stereotypes, reduce prejudice, and alleviate stigma. Allport (1954) was very clear, however, that such effects are likely to obtain only under certain conditions, specifically, equal status contact and cooperation in pursuit of common goals. Segregation, in particular, works against these conditions by leading segregated parties to interact on unequal terms. "Where segregation is the custom," he wrote, "contacts are casual or else firmly frozen into superordinate-subordinate relationships." Such contact "does *not* dispel prejudice; it seems more likely to increase it" (p. 251, italics in original). In order to better understand why categorically unequal relations prove particularly durable under conditions of segregation, I argue that we need to account not only for the type of interaction at stake—competition or cooperation—but also for how that interaction is organized spatially. Here we turn to the scholarship on spatial boundaries in urban sociology.

Simmel argued that when a social boundary is spatialized or takes spatial form, it "hardens," acquiring "a clarity and security . . . a certain rigidity"

that it lacked previously (1997, p. 144). If it had not been “projected into a sensory formation,” it would have remained inchoate. Spatial distinctiveness affects how we perceive the space. We become conscious of it as a discrete entity. The people associated with it—being inside it or belonging to it—acquire social coherence (“a sociological centripetality”) and a greater consciousness of social unity. In other words, boundaries frame space such that all the elements within the boundary appear to belong together and to be distinct from all the elements outside the boundary.³

Urban ethnographers have long documented the organization of social life around boundaries dividing space into discrete territories associated with distinct social groups. In *Villa Victoria*, Small (2004) builds on efforts to theorize the process at stake, most notably, by Park (1925), who was himself building on Simmel, and by Suttles (1968). In chapter 5, he describes how the crowd of nearly 5,000 people attending the Puerto Rican Betances festival in Boston’s South End remain clustered around the Villa Victoria housing complex. There is no physical blockade or formal prohibition, and yet people collectively avoid spilling over onto the sidewalks of the South End proper. For their part, South Enders almost universally shun the massive festival. Such mutual avoidance “gave the impression of an invisible fence, drawn neatly around the Villa, that kept residents (and Latinos) in and non-residents out” (p. 98).

To explain the phenomenon, Small furnishes an account of how social differences take spatial form and harden in the process. First, he points to the spatial boundary separating Villa Victoria from the South End. The boundary is defined by racial and class differences—Villa Victoria is significantly browner and relatively poor—but also by physical ones. The neighborhoods look different in terms of their layout and architecture. This boundary guides social organization. Businesses cater to the people living on one side or the other. They define themselves by what they sell or serve, whom they hire, how they advertise (whether in Spanish or not), and how they decorate. Crime tends to cluster on the Villa Victoria side of the boundary. People interact only with neighbors on their side of the boundary. As a result of these practices, racial and class differences become linked to the different places. They become spatialized, in other words. We might say that Villa Victoria and the South End acquire distinct place identities and come to be seen in determinate ways (Molotch, Freudenburg, and Paulsen 2000). Meanwhile, the residents of each place come to seem socially homogenous and uniformly different from the residents of the other. Relations across the boundary take on a categorical character. The residents of one place come to relate to the residents of the other not as individuals but as members of a different group. For example, as Small illustrates, an act of discrimination committed by a

³ See also Miller and Brewer (1984) on the psychology of desegregation.

South End resident tends to be taken as emblematic of the attitude of South End residents in general. The incident serves to corroborate a view of the South End as an alien and hostile place.

We might say that segregated neighborhoods become symbolic of group difference. They are perceived to be a certain type of place and, thus, convey a certain character. Historically, in the case of poor black and brown neighborhoods in the United States—neighborhoods like Villa Victoria—this character tends to be stigmatizing, connoting crime, physical disorder, and cultural dysfunction. As Anderson argued (2012), the ghetto is not just a place but a symbolic object. The “iconic ghetto” helps define the group. Its stigma “rubs off” on the people seen as belonging to it. Their identity is not purely racial or socioeconomic but also, crucially, *spatial*. They are identified stereotypically by virtue of where they come from (see also Park 1925; Wacquant 2008). It goes without saying, finally, that spatial organization and group differentiation are dialectic processes unfolding over time. That is to say, it is not just that the spatial boundary organizes social interaction and the people on either side of it come to view each other in categorical terms; it is also the case that perceptions of categorical inequality guide spatial organization and thereby reinforce the solidity of the boundary. The spatial organization of social differences produces the social organization of space and conversely.

This process is compatible with an organizational account of inequality, as developed by Tilly (1998), Schwalbe et al. (2000), Hallett and Ventresca (2006), Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt (2019), and others. These scholars share a view of inequality as fundamentally relational, as created and maintained through interactive processes in concrete settings. These settings are typically organizations. Organizations represent sets of social relations clustered around some task or activity. They serve to produce and pool resources of various kinds, for example, money, services, access, knowledge. Controlling these resources is a source of power, and deploying this power within and across organizations generates inequality. Following Tilly’s lead, Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt (2019) identify three inequality-generating processes: *exploitation*, where powerful actors benefit at the expense of less powerful ones, thereby increasing their share of resources; *social closure*, where organizational insiders hoard resources and exclude outsiders from using them; and *claims making*, where actors claim resources on the basis of some “right,” for example, ownership, citizenship, education, gender, or race. Notions of right or deservingness tend to be grounded, as we can see, in categorical distinctions. These distinctions are developed in the course of unequal interaction. They justify exploitation and social closure and thereby serve to entrench inequality.

Now what about the *spatial* organization of inequality? Insofar as spatial boundaries organize social interaction, they help define organizational contexts. One of the main resources at stake is usually space itself in the form of

property. Unequal relations are spatialized. In the case of segregation, the unequal parties are identified with and identify with different places. Exploitation is understood in spatial terms, with the people in place A seen as exploiting the people in place B; social closure is spatial closure; and actors make claims on the basis of ownership or control of territory. As a result of these inequality-generating processes, categorical distinctions come to be defined spatially. In the case of integration, on the other hand, the parties are identified with and identify with the same place. Exploitation is not framed in spatial terms. The parties make claims on the basis of their common belonging and thus engage in spatial accommodation and negotiation over shared spaces. We might describe collective claims making and spatial accommodation as equality-generating processes. Integration provides the unequal parties with a common basis of group identity. To the extent it proves effective and place becomes symbolic of the group, it works to inhibit the formation of categorical inequality.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE LITERATURE, COMPARATIVE LOGIC, AND DATA

Urban sociology clearly has the conceptual resources to view spatial boundaries as socially productive. Nevertheless, it tends to emphasize a view of spatial boundaries as supplementary: with respect to segregation, as serving to reinforce social, particularly racial, inequality (Blau 1977; Massey and Denton 1993; Sampson 2012; Sharkey 2013), and with respect to integration, as likely to be overwhelmed by more powerful racial boundaries (Molotch 1969; Rich 2009; Britton 2011; Chaskin and Joseph 2015). Of course, this understanding was developed with reference to the US context, where race is a particularly powerful social category. By examining the relation between social and spatial boundaries in contexts where race is not as overpowering, we find that it is not sufficient simply to underscore the presence or absence of powerful social divisions. We have to account for their salience and durability.

In the article, I argue that spatial organization makes more of a difference than we are led to suppose looking only at US cases. The case of Manila shows that residential segregation does more than simply reinforce preexisting group inequality; it plays a role in constituting it socially. The case of Singapore shows that residential integration is not always ineffectual; it can be a means of fostering social equality provided that place becomes symbolic of the group. While we can think about these claims in light of the US scholarship, we are able to see them more clearly and better demonstrate them empirically with these non-US cases because they are free of the contextual “baggage” predisposing particular theorizations.

The article’s contribution consists in this broader, more variable understanding of sociospatial inequality, and also in its comparative historical

approach to the topic. This approach presents spatial organization as the outcome of processes involving multiple actors and factors and unfolding over time. It highlights both the complexity and temporality of this outcome. We see that segregation and integration are not just the product of market forces or government policies but are realized through the practices of various agents, including community organizations and neighbors. These spatial forms are produced and have to be actively reproduced through policies and practices. Their durability is a function of social categories becoming spatialized and predisposing policies and practices oriented toward inequality (as in Manila) or equality (as in Singapore). As we will see, this process is inherently contingent.

The article's contribution rests on the comparison between Manila and Singapore. It is a lopsided comparison, however. I present the Manila case summarily because the story of its segregation and social division has been told before (Garrido 2019) and because its plot conforms to the theoretical expectations laid out by Simmel, Hawley, and others, that is, segregation promotes categorical inequality. In contrast, I treat the Singapore case in great detail because the story it tells, that integration inhibits categorical inequality, may be found to be surprising despite being consistent with a theory of spatialization. In other words, readers may require a more expansive account.

My comparison is aimed at elaborating theory, developing a proposition, and clarifying the scope of its applicability, with cases selected according to parameters of interest. I take my cue from Vaughan (1992) on theory elaboration. Vaughan employs the logic of theoretical analogy, using comparison to develop theory by showing how it plays out in similar or analogous ways across different settings. The approach I employ is a species of this but may be described more accurately as theoretical obversion. I use comparison to develop theory by showing it play out in different or obverse ways. (Formally, the obverse of the claim that all *S* are *P* is no *S* are non-*P*.) In terms of my empirical argument, Manila and Singapore make sense to compare because they are so different, indeed, almost perfectly opposite, with regard to the spatial organization of class inequality. This difference allows me to consider the proposition that spatial organization affects how we see inequality from both sides of the coin, as it were: segregation makes people more likely to see unequal parties as categorically unequal, while integration makes people less likely to see them in this way.

Case study methods are good for developing theory, for telling us whether something matters and how it matters, but they are less good at telling us *how much* something matters (George and Bennett 2005). Because this impinges on the scope of my argument, I would qualify it in two ways. First, with respect to the cases, while I can show that my explanation mattered, I cannot show that it is the only explanation (I do not believe it is anyway) or the most important one. I can make the case for its significance, however,

and articulate its relations to other, compatible explanations. Second, with respect to the theory, while I see the mechanism I describe as operating generally, its effects may vary from case to case contingent on a host of contextual factors. The most I can say is, “This is how the mechanism played out in Manila and Singapore. It may play out similarly in a different case.” The specific contribution of the article is a description of the mechanism to track (spatialization) and a demonstration of its explanatory power.

The case studies are drawn from library and archival research. My archival data consist of reports and census, survey, and spatial data collected from government agencies (in Singapore, the Housing and Development Board [HDB] and Department of Statistics) and the Singapore/Malaysia special collection of the Central Library at the National University of Singapore.

MANILA

Segregation

In Manila, squatting became a social problem only after World War II. Before then it was “an ephemeral and insignificant thing” (Arcinas 1955, p. 35). By the end of the war, however, provincial migrants were pouring into the city. They were pushed by the physical devastation of the countryside, increasing population pressure on farmland, and rural insurgency. They were pulled by new job opportunities in the civil service and the prospect of jobs in industrial production. The slum population multiplied 40 times between 1946 and 1970 (Karaos 1995). Squatting on this scale represented a new phenomenon, and a growing one. The slum population has grown from one million in 1968 to nearly five million in 2010. Currently, it comprises between 40% and 50% of the metropolitan population (table 1). Slums are a ubiquitous feature of the urban landscape and slum life a typically urban way of life.

From the 1950s through the 1970s, the middle class generally lived in mixed neighborhoods and open subdivisions along the metropolitan outskirts (Hollnsteiner 1969). This changed with democratization in the 1980s. Existing subdivisions put up gates and posted guards, and new subdivisions were gated and guarded as a matter of course. Gating was a response to the greater presence of slums in the city and the stronger legal protection afforded the urban poor (Karaos 1995). It was also a reaction to crime, or at least the perception of crime. The pace of enclavization greatly accelerated in the 1990s, driven largely by demand from a growing middle class and overseas Filipino workers. By the 2000s, enclavization had reached a point where observers could speak of a “private city” having seceded from the public one (Shatkin 2008). Enclaves had not just become more numerous but larger in scale. Corporate “cities” were being built, megaprojects bundling several facilities within the same complex, including office buildings,

TABLE 1
SLUM POPULATION IN METRO MANILA (Millions)

Year	Slum Population	Metro Population	Share of Metro Population, %
1946	.03	1.4	2
1956	.09	1.87	5
1960	.28	2.5	11
1970	1.2	3.9	31
1980	1.6	5.3	30
1990	2.8	7.4	38
2000	3.9	9.9	39
2010	4.6	11.6	40
2020	6.3	12.9	48

NOTE.—Slums include informal or illegal settlements and blighted areas. The slum population figures for 2010 and 2020 are projected by Ballesteros (2011) based on a figure of four million in 2006. The latest metro population figure is from 2018. Data are taken from Karaos (1995), National Housing Authority (2000), Ballesteros (2011), and Philippine Statistics Authority (various years).

condominiums, malls, sports clubs, schools, hospitals, and even consulates. Different kinds of enclaves grew more connected as real estate developers increasingly partnered with the government to build transportation infrastructure. They were motivated, Shatkin writes, less by the profitability of these projects than by the opportunity to connect their various residential and commercial properties. This strategy helped give shape to the private city as a network of corporate, commercial, and residential enclaves.

Slum building and enclavization represented parallel streams of urban development by private actors, the poor on the one hand and the middle and upper class on the other. As a result of these efforts, a housing divide came into focus. By 1988, Caoili (1999) was able to discern the outlines of a “dual society” in Manila. Its two components were spatially distinct yet functionally interdependent. The disparity between them in terms of density, sanitation, services, and, of course, housing was immense. By the end of the 20th century, Berner (1997) could argue that the spatial division between slums and enclaves had become the most important social division in Metro Manila. It subsumed other significant lines of differentiation, including provincial origin, ethnicity, and even class on the basis of work.

Relations within the Boundary: Slums and Enclaves as Distinct Communities

Slums contained social organization. Residents conceived a strong sense of belonging to their particular slum and a sense of community coincident with its territorial boundaries. They organized on the basis of territory and around largely parochial issues, such as community defense, slum improvement, and

social association (Jocano 1975). This sense of community underlies the capacity of slum residents as political actors. Community organization has long been a requirement for obtaining the patronage of local politicians. In the post-Marcos democratic period, community organization has become a route to greater political power in the form of institutional access and national-level patronage. The political agency of slum residents has become a function of their organizational “weight,” with community organizations the basic unit of larger agglomerations better able to pressure housing agencies and powerful political actors (Karaos 1998). Community organizations link with non-governmental organizations and conglomerate into federations. They form coalitions around specific issues or political candidates. Slum residents, in other words, have gained a measure of political empowerment through community organization. To a significant extent, their political identities are rooted in their identities as residents of this or that particular community.

A parallel form of social organization took place within the network of enclaves. The upper and middle class increasingly withdrew from the public city over the course of the 1990s and 2000s. They opted out of public schools and hospitals and shunned public spaces, including parks, walkways, and déclassé malls, and conducted their social lives within various kinds of enclaves (Connell 1999). In *The Patchwork City* (2019), I documented the social segregation of the upper and middle class in Metro Manila. As I showed, they live in gated subdivisions and condominiums, study in private schools, and work in office buildings in one of several central business districts around the metro. They shop in mid- to high-end malls, go out to clubs, cafes, and bars located inside commercial compounds, and attend Mass in the churches within these compounds. They move in private cars from one enclave to another and travel through toll roads too expensive for the general public to use.

Relations across the Boundary: Categorical Inequality

Squatter areas provided a physical object that focused class feelings and clarified them. The anthropologist Mary Hollnsteiner (1977, p. 310) noted that it was not the rundown quality of the housing that struck people but “the unkempt surroundings and densely packed, irregular physical layout that jolted the passerby into this now vivid awareness” of squatter areas as “a new kind of slum.” Slums were regarded as ugly, unsanitary, unsafe, and obstructions to urban development (Santiago 1977). They were not just a new kind of place; their residents—squatters—were a different kind of people, different from the city’s formal residents, different even from the rural poor. In Manila, the word “squatter” has come to refer to slum dwellers whether actually squatters or not (Murphy 1993). Technically, the term refers to illegal settlers and the term “slum” to the physical condition of settlements. The distinction matters to slum residents, but to the upper and middle classes, slums are

simply where squatters live. They do not differentiate between settlements that have been formalized and those that have not. They do not see usufruct or tenure status. They see a slum and treat its residents accordingly. In other words, the stigma attached to living in a slum is inherently territorial.

In my book (2019), I described relations between the residents of an enclave and slum across the street from one another. The enclave, Phil-Am Homes, closed its gate facing the San Roque settlement in an effort to discourage San Roque's residents from attending Mass inside the subdivision. Those who insisted on doing so now had to walk a kilometer out of their way to a farther gate, which remained open in order to allow the residents of West Triangle, a nearby subdivision, access to the church. Why exclude one group of residents but not another? I argued that it is because San Roque's residents are not socially equivalent to West Triangle's. They are seen as potential criminals because of where they live and thereby subject to exclusion.

Categorical inequality is produced and entrenched in the course of unequal relations. In Manila, these relations were spatialized. (1) Exploitation was framed in spatial terms; laborers and servants identified with slums and employers and masters with enclaves. If categories facilitate exploitation, as Tilly noted, then spatial categories do so all the more. They give the parties a more definite sense not just of relative status but of relative location. In this case, the two things were equated. This had the effect of "hardening," in the Simmelian sense, the inequality between places and the groups associated with them. (2) Social closure meant spatial closure, with enclave residents hoarding opportunities and excluding outsiders, particularly slum residents. For enclave residents, the spatial boundary became a source of identity, distinguishing insiders from outsiders, and a source of power, given their ability to impose the boundary on others. (3) The right to impose spatial boundaries was articulated in terms of ownership and private property. It is on these grounds that enclave residents lay claim to the resources contained within their boundary, including employment and market opportunities, services and amenities, organizations such as churches and schools, or, simply, use of the space as passageway.

Spatialization directed social categorization, and the spatial boundary came to represent a social one. Relations between slum and enclave residents came to be experienced as relations between different and unequal groups: squatters and homeowners or "villagers" (residential subdivisions are called villages in Manila). These categories structure social interaction and thereby reproduce and extend segregation.

Class Division despite Diminished Economic Distance

We might expect class division to track with growing poverty and inequality, but it does not. Poverty incidence in Manila declined precipitously between

1985 and 2018 from nearly 30% to 2% (table 2). Income inequality spiked in the late 1990s, around the time of the Asian Financial Crisis, but declined overall within the same period. In general, slum residents have become a lot less poor. They went from being homogenously poor in the 1950s to being socioeconomically mixed. In 1948, 81% of slum residents fell below the subsistence threshold (Juppenplatz 1970, p. 104). In 2010, the figure was merely 3% (Ballesteros 2011). Today, only about one-third of slum residents are low income and poor; the majority (69%) qualify as middle income (Albert, Santos, and Vizmanos 2018). To a great extent, slums are where the lower middle class live: schoolteachers, security guards, clerks, and other service workers (Bernier 1997). In other words, slum residents are not so distant economically from enclave residents—and yet they are uniformly stigmatized by virtue of being seen as squatters. Class division, therefore, cannot simply be a function of the *extent* of inequality. We need a sociological account to explain it. In my account, I have emphasized the role of spatialization.

SINGAPORE

Spatial Division (1950s–60s)

Singapore’s slum problem in the 1950s was worse than Manila’s. Rapid population growth and a lack of regulations on building and land use had precipitated a housing “famine” by the end of World War II (Fraser 1952). Even

TABLE 2
POVERTY INCIDENCE AND INCOME INEQUALITY IN METRO MANILA

Year	Poverty Incidence, %	Income Inequality (Gini ratio)
1985	27.1	.44
1988	25.1	.44
1991	16.6	.45
1994	10.4	.43
1997	8.5	.49
2000	11.5	.48
2003	7.8	.47
2006	4.7	.43
2009	3.6	.41
2012	3.9	.40
2015	3.9	.39
2018	2.3	.35
2021	3.5	.33

NOTE.—The poverty incidence equals the number of individuals with incomes below the poverty threshold. The poverty threshold is the minimum income required for an individual to afford basic necessities as determined by the Philippines Statistics Authority. This threshold amount is adjusted over time and varies by region. Data from Philippine Statistics Authority (various years).

by 1966, with a quarter of the population in public housing, 60% still lived in slums and squatter settlements in the form of shophouses and kampong or village houses made of wood and *attap* (palm leaf thatch; Buchanan 1972). The central city area was extremely crowded, containing 72% of the entire population in 1947 (Teh 1975). Shophouses were subdivided into floors, floors into cubicles, and cubicles into bare space—a bunk let out to one person, a sleeping bag on the pavement. A survey conducted in 1954 found that 84% of low-income families in the Central Area occupied one room or less (Goh 1956). Meanwhile, kampongs accumulated along the urban fringe. Absorbing the spillover from the Central Area, they had come to house most of the population in the 1950s and 1960s. Kampong dwellers were not squatters—the government had allowed them to occupy marginal land temporarily—but because their housing was irregular and their livelihoods informal, they were identified as such and stigmatized. Kampongs were represented as unsanitary, congested, and dangerous (Loh 2010). The 57 “squatter colonies” surrounding the Central Area were seen as “forming a ring of squalor and misery,” “death traps and breeding grounds for disease, crime, and fire hazards” (Teh 1975, p. 5). In contrast to the housing conditions in most of Singapore, a small upper class—predominantly European and Chinese merchants—lived luxuriously in bungalows, duplex houses, and private flats in the Central Area and suburbs (Fraser 1952). This type of housing contained just 14% of the population in 1954.

Spatial division reflected class division. According to Buchanan (1972), the residents of shophouse slums and kampongs comprised a “community of interest” distinguished by its alienation from elite society. This alienation was characterized by solidarity, informality, cynicism toward official institutions, and radical politics. Slums and kampongs bred an indigenous socialism that was deeply antagonistic toward Western and hence elite values and loosely affiliated with leftist political parties like the Barisan Socialis. “Singapore society,” Buchanan concluded, “is strongly proletarian and *consciously* proletarian. To deny this is to deny the reality of Singapore” (p. 219).

Resettlement and Integration (1960s–80s)

The HDB was formed in 1960 explicitly to provide housing for the poor. This goal served the political ends of the new People’s Action Party (PAP) government. The slums and kampongs to be eradicated were places where the political opposition mobilized supporters (Loh 2010). In its first five years, the HDB focused primarily on rehousing the slum population from the Central Area in high-rise, high-density blocks in planned estates. Its efforts were greatly enabled by the passage of the Land Acquisition Act in 1966, which allowed the state to acquire land compulsorily, quickly, and at submarket rates (Han 2005). State ownership of land grew from 49% in 1965 to 80% in 1992 as

a result. By 1965, the HDB had exceeded its target of building 50,000 units and increased the proportion of the population in public housing from 9% to 23% (Teh 1975). Emboldened, it planned its second five years on a larger scale. It built "new towns" comprising several neighborhoods and around five times the population of an estate (200,000 compared with 50,000).

The fact of public housing alone did little to ameliorate class division. In the view of some observers, it actually deepened it. Public housing in the 1960s was housing for the poor. To live in an HDB flat during this time carried with it a class stigma (Mak 1992, p. 33). Buchanan (1972, p. 240) argued that while public housing represented an improvement over the slum in terms of housing quality, the slum had "merely been transferred from one physical setting to another." He cited the "split personality" of HDB estates, with informal and illegal practices flourishing alongside and in spite of the prescribed order: itinerant hawkers, secret societies, pirate taxis, and various means of subsidiary earnings from petty stall keeping to poultry rearing. Gamer (1972, p. 138) warned that public housing would reinforce class segregation by removing the poor from the Central Area, away from rich neighbors, and concentrating them in blocks of homogenous poverty. "Millionaires do not frequent housing estates," he quipped. While such criticism is easy to dismiss in retrospect for having been proven wrong, it reflected the state of public housing at the time. It took a series of interventions in the service of social goals to achieve the physical integration of class groups.

The HDB took on social planning in the 1970s. It encouraged homeownership by allowing residents to purchase their flats using their social security fund; it kept families together by giving them priority in assigning flats; it checked the formation of ethnic enclaves by imposing quotas in the allotment and resale of flats; and, most pertinently, it incorporated the middle class into public housing. "The Board is actually building a way of life," Liu Thai Ker (1985, p. 518), the HDB's chief executive officer, declared. "It is providing the life stage, complete with lighting, the props and the backstage equipment, for people to perform their life dramas."

The HDB incorporated the middle class, first, by progressively raising the income ceiling for residence in public housing. Between 1964 and 1985, the ceiling for owning a three-room flat was quadrupled (Chong, Tham, and Shium 1985). Second, in response to the rising cost of private housing in the 1970s, the government founded the Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUDC) in order to cater specifically to the housing needs of the middle class. HUDC flats were larger than their HDB counterparts, and the estates were equipped with greater amenities and located in "exclusive" residential areas (Tan 1998). As a result of these efforts, the HDB managed to incorporate the middle class but as a segregated group. The middle class and poor were not just segregated by estate but by building block. Small flats for lower-income residents were typically grouped together in the same block, and

these blocks were grouped together in the same estate. Larger three-, four-, and five-room flats, on the other hand, were mixed together in the same blocks and estates “since their occupants are known to be socially and economically quite compatible with one another” (Liu 1975, p. 137).

The HDB corrected its course in the 1980s and pursued class integration in earnest. The move was reflected in a speech given by Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew in 1981 (*Straits Times* 1981). Admitting, uncharacteristically, to “serious mistakes,” Lee pointed to the “vast gulf” between three-roomers in one estate and five-roomers in another, despite their proximity. He urged the residential integration of class groups in order to promote “empathy.” “An easy social mix blunts, mutes, and dissolves resentment and gives that feeling of oneness and unity crucial for social progress.” Integration, he argued, would allow the “higher classes” to provide leadership to the lower ones. It would also keep them from becoming “too demanding,” a tendency, he noted, that had become increasingly pronounced with their concentration in residential enclaves. From 1980 on, new HUDC housing was integrated within HDB estates. HUDC was eventually incorporated into the HDB in 1982, and the construction of new HUDC flats was discontinued after 1985. Instead, the HDB offered its own HUDC-type flats called executive flats and raised the income ceiling for eligibility to own them (Tan 1998). Within normal estates, the HDB pursued interspersion as a policy, deliberately mixing flat types “to achieve a good balance of [residents from] different socio-economic strata” (Liu 1985, p. 513). Finally, the HDB committed to the continuous redevelopment and upgrading of estates in order to redress a growing imbalance in quality between older and newer estates. The blocks in older estates were demolished and rebuilt to accommodate larger flats, the facilities of older estates were enhanced, and the rules on flat alterations were liberalized to allow for individual improvements (Teo and Kong 1997). Continuous upgrading helped stem the flow of younger people with higher incomes from older estates to newer ones. By the end of the decade, the middle class had not only been integrated into public housing, but public housing had come to be associated with the middle class. Discursively, the poor vanished, commonly presumed to have been transformed by waves of economic growth into part of the middle class.

Social Integration (1980s–2000s)

Improving fortunes, increasing inequality.—The country developed rapidly in the 1960s and 1970s. It transformed itself from an entrepot economy to a manufacturing hub, leading to an expansion of employment. Public housing had a significant impact on the country’s economic progress (Castells, Goh, and Kwok 1990). The provision of public housing subsidized wages, lowering production costs and allowing for a higher savings rate. The construction

of public housing on such a large scale represented a substantial source of employment. The whole enterprise effectively socialized a good part of the country's wealth (Tai and Chen 1982). The PAP government appropriated wealth from private actors in the form of land and redistributed it to the poorer segments of society in the form of housing. The improving fortunes of public housing residents manifested in higher levels of educational attainment, growing professionalization, and increasing flat ownership and flat size (see table 3). Between the 1970s and 2010s, the proportion of residents with a postsecondary degree leapt from 4% to over 40%; the proportion working in professional and managerial positions increased from 10% to 50%. Flat ownership became well-nigh universal from one-third in 1973. Moreover, by the 1990s, the majority of residents lived in flats that were four rooms or larger, compared with merely 3% 25 years before.

The country underwent a new round of economic restructuring starting in the late 1980s. It began to shift away from export-oriented industrialization toward a knowledge-based economy involving, centrally, skill- and technology-intensive industries, the provision of corporate services, and the recruitment of foreign workers (Dhamani 2008). As a direct result, income inequality—which had decreased overall between the 1960s and 1980s—increased sharply in the 1990s and 2000s (see fig. 3). Interoccupational income inequality nearly doubled between 1974 and 1998 (Rao, Banerjee, and Mukhopadhaya 2003). In the 1990s, wages at the bottom fell sharply to about a third of what they had been, unemployment quadrupled, and the number of lower-income households increased (Singapore 2000).

In public housing, economic disparities among and within estates widened. By 2008, the median household income in “young” estates was, on average, 1.6 times greater than in “mature” estates, double in certain cases (HDB 2010). The residents of the largest flats (executive and five room) made six times more than the residents of the smaller ones (one and two room). Inequality made itself felt through the consumption of status goods, notably, cars (several times more expensive in Singapore than elsewhere) and maids.

TABLE 3
PUBLIC HOUSING RESIDENTS, SELECTED INDICATORS

	1973	1998	2018
Occupational distribution, %:			
Professionals, managers, executives, and technicians	11	40	52
Clerical, sales, and service workers	57	26	23
Production and transport operators, cleaners, and laborers . . .	32	29	22
Percentage with a postsecondary degree	4	20	47
Percentage of flats owned.	33	95	96
Percentage with a flat size four rooms or larger	3	67	76

NOTE.—Data taken from Yeh (1975); HDB (2000, 2018).

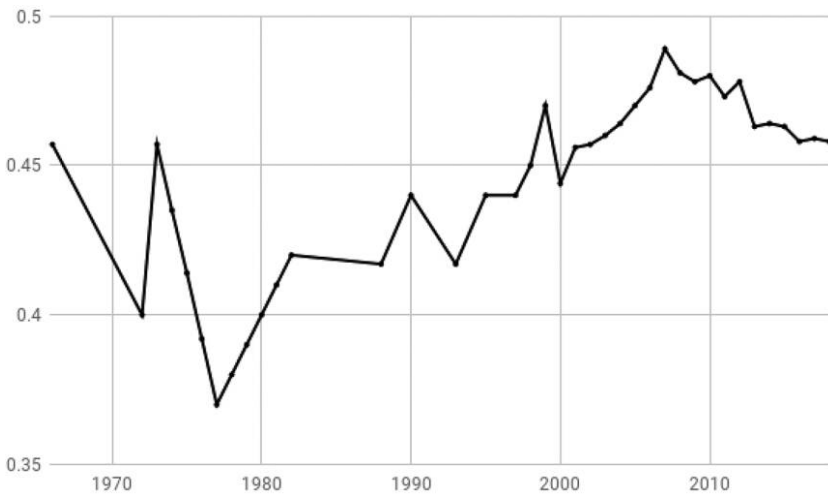


FIG. 3.—Income inequality (Gini index), 1966–2018 (Ng 2010; Singapore 2018; World Income Inequality Database 2019).

Sixty percent of residents in Punggol, a young town, owned cars compared to about 20% of residents in older estates like Kallang, Queenstown, and Toa Payoh. In 1998, a third of executive flat residents had maids compared to only 3% of one-, two-, and three-roomers combined (HDB 2000).

The government claims not to keep poverty statistics but deems 10% of all households sufficiently poor to qualify for financial assistance (Ng 2013). The *relative* poverty rate—the proportion of people earning less than half the median income—has been around 20% since the 2000s (Singapore 2018). These households are concentrated in public housing, where, even after excluding households with no earned income, the relative poverty rate is closer to 40% (HDB 2010). Poverty is sufficiently evident, in any case, that virtually all Singaporeans—98%, according to one survey (Ng and Ng 2013)—consider it to be a problem.

Rising inequality may have found expression in sharper socioeconomic distinctions (Chua and Tan 1999), but it was not experienced categorically—for a time at least. The poor were no longer stigmatized in the way they had been as squatters and slum dwellers. They were seen as having the same moral values as everyone else (Ng and Ng 2013). Further, cross-class ties appeared to be extensive: 85% of the respondents in one survey (Tan 2004) indicated having friends from lower income groups. Since the 1990s, the literature on social class in Singapore has pointed to a substantial degree of homogeneity in attitudes and aspirations across class (Quah et al. 1991; Mak and Leong 1993; Tan 2004). This is not to say that social class in Singapore is insignificant. Tan (2004) shows that it is a better predictor of certain attitudes than

ethnicity. It is to claim, rather, that from around the late 1980s through the 2000s and perhaps beyond—a period when economic inequality was on the rise—class groupings lacked the solidarity that once betokened social division. How did this happen? I will argue that with the integration of public housing, the basis of these groupings faded and a form of social integration took hold.

Relations within the boundary: public housing residents.—The poor and middle class were now encompassed by the same spatial boundary. Class relations were spatialized, but, unlike in Manila, the unequal parties came to be identified with, and to identify with, the same type of place. Spatialization in this regard transformed the character of their interaction. Now both parties could lay claim to the same space. There was still exploitation, but it no longer aligned with the spatial boundary. As residents of the same type of place, the parties engaged in spatial accommodation and negotiation over shared spaces. Indeed, we might speak of claims making on the basis of common belonging and spatial accommodation as *equality-generating processes*. Spatial integration thus had the effect of inhibiting categorical inequality. Within public housing, we see the emergence of a relatively egalitarian order based on common belonging.

Ethnographic accounts of everyday life in HDB estates give us a sense of what social integration looks like in practice. On the one hand, they show social relations in public housing to be fraught with unease, tension, and misunderstanding. Residents regularly come into conflict over the use of common space. On the other hand, in one scenario after another, we see residents manage conflict on an egalitarian basis.

Lai (1995, p. 54) shows that rivals for use of the badminton court adjudicate their claims with reference to a set of well-established norms: first-come first-served, sharing grounds for simultaneous play, playing together, limiting the duration of games, and, for those waiting to play, being patient. At one level, these norms are wholly pragmatic. They represent an adaptation to the exigencies of communal living. Residents learn to accommodate each other not out of neighborly feeling but simply because they have to. Take the example of drying clothes (Wong, Ooi, and Ponniah 1985, p. 480). It is common practice to dry freshly laundered clothes on a rod outside the kitchen window. Residents on the higher floors quickly learn to wring out their clothes before hanging them, lest their clothes end up wetting the clothes of their neighbors below, inviting complaint. Residents on the lower floors, meanwhile, learn to put their clothes out after the clothes of their upstairs neighbors have already dried, later in the morning, for instance.

At a deeper level, however, norms of accommodation reflect the sense that all residents, regardless of socioeconomic status (or ethnicity), have an equal right to public housing and its facilities. This egalitarian orientation is reinforced by formal regulations, but it is not solely a function of the rules and at

times may extend beyond their purview. It is not uncommon, Lai (2012, p. 128) notes, to see a Malay wedding and Chinese funeral being held simultaneously in the void deck (an open area on the ground level used for social gatherings). The wedding is booked months in advance, but the funeral has to occur immediately after the person has died. On the one hand, the rule is clear: first-come, first-served. In practice, however, there is some flexibility, perhaps precisely because the rule is so well established. The two parties may negotiate—the funeral party may prevail upon the wedding party to relocate or reschedule—or come to some form of accommodation, such as using different ends of the void deck. Practices of accommodation and negotiation reflect a normative, not merely regulatory, order.

The story of the *kopitiam* illustrates, in miniature, the process of social re categorization following residential integration. The *kopitiam* or coffeehouse used to be associated with poor immigrant workers (Lai 2013). These cheap eateries often consisted of little more than carts or makeshift stalls. They were found on plantations and other work sites, in kampongs, and along busy streets. There were Hainanese, Malay, and Indian versions of the *kopitiam*, reflecting the ethnic segregation of Singapore in the early and mid-20th century. When the *kopitiam* was transported into public housing, however, it had to be reconstituted on a more inclusive basis. In order to flourish in the new integrated setting, it had to be able to cater to people from different ethnic groups and socioeconomic stations, for instance, by offering a variety of ethnic foods and being open and affordable to all. Intergroup relations were thus recast in terms of a basic equivalence. The *kopitiam* came to be regarded as a place belonging to everyone, with everyone inside it equally bound by the same norms of civility. It became a public institution, “a site where ‘heartlanders’ [ordinary Singaporeans] frequent irrespective of various age, ethnic, income, and work backgrounds. . . . All may enter the *kopitiam* and share space at the same or adjacent tables. It is normal to ask ‘can I sit here?’ and unthinkable to reply ‘no, you cannot’” (Lai 2013, p. 222). This state of class relations stands out in contrast not just to the situation of the poor before the integration of public housing but to the situation of the poor *outside* public housing.

Relations across the boundary: migrant workers.—Migrant workers are strangers in the Simmelian sense. The terms “migrant” and “foreign worker” refer to “unskilled” workers employed in domestic service, construction, manufacturing, and the service industry. At nearly a million people, they constitute more than a quarter of the workforce (Singapore 2019). Qualitative research on relations between Singaporeans and migrant workers points unequivocally to relations of categorical inequality. In one study (Vincent et al. 2008), college students described South Asian construction workers as dirty, smelly, lecherous, but “good for the economy.” Female informants reported feeling dismayed not just by the sight of them but more so by “the way they

look at us” (in a sexual way). Migrant workers face overt housing discrimination on the basis of stereotypes regarding their cleanliness and smell. It has become commonplace to see rental listings state, quite explicitly, “No Indians, no PRC [mainland Chinese]” (Cheung 2014).

On the one hand, the spaces where migrant workers congregate are stigmatized as “socially polluted landscapes” (Yeoh and Huang 1998, p. 593). On the other, migrant workers are not welcome in public spaces and in public housing especially. In a symposium on migrant workers at the National University of Singapore in 2014, one minister of parliament reported that his constituents frequently complain about foreign construction workers lounging in the void decks of HDB estates. Their presence within these estates is seen as transgressive in a way that the presence of similarly blue-collar Singaporean workers is not. In one estate, a group of residents successfully opposed turning an unused school building into a hostel for migrant workers (Ong and Yeoh 2013). The opposition to these workers being accommodated in or near public housing estates is so fierce, in fact, that the government has even considered housing them on offshore islands (Ramesh 2013). Clearly, class relations across the spatial boundary of public housing lack the same egalitarian orientation as class relations within it. Claims on ostensibly public spaces are not open to negotiation but rejected on the grounds that migrant workers, being outsiders, have no right to partake in any but the spaces allotted to them. Thus, instead of accommodation, we see discrimination, exclusion, and eviction.

How then did the poor in public housing acquire an equal right to place? That they did so was not inevitable. It is possible, and perhaps even likely, according to the literature on residential integration, for an unequalitarian order to have arisen. We might have seen common spaces subdivided by symbolic boundaries. Instead of one kopitiam for all, we might have seen a kopitiam for the poor and a Starbucks or other upscale café for the middle class. This is how it is in Metro Manila, after all, where the rich and poor live side by side but in social worlds separated by physical and symbolic boundaries. The poor are not foreigners in that case and yet are treated as outsiders, nevertheless. This is to say that the development of an egalitarian order does not automatically follow from residential proximity or integration. It is something that needs to be explained.

Social integration through spatialization.—The HDB keeps track of social integration mainly by using two measures: a sense of community and a sense of belonging to people and place. Residents score incredibly high on both measures. According to the most recent figures, 73% felt a sense of community and 99% a sense of belonging (HDB 2014). The HDB explains these results by arguing that public housing facilitates social interaction. Residents become familiar with each other by virtue of having to share facilities. Their everyday routines intersect in common spaces, particularly the corridor, lift

lobby, and void deck. Familiarity leads to acquaintance and maybe friendship, and social ties engender feelings of community. This argument has been laid out by Chua and Sim (1985), Chua (1997), and Wong et al. (1985). It explicitly informs the HDB's continuing efforts to improve the physical environment of public housing in order to strengthen social ties. To this end, the HDB routinely parses the effects of numerous design variables—block height, flat size, corridor type, type of access, and so on—on “neighborliness.”

To a significant extent, however, this argument is contradicted by the HDB's own data (2014). First, most facilities are used irregularly. On average, 60% of residents use the estate's commercial facilities regularly (once a week or more) but only 16% use its recreational facilities regularly and, not counting the covered walkways, only 19% its community facilities. Second, community participation is low. Only 11% of residents participate in community activities regularly (once a month or more). Third and most importantly, social ties are generally weak. Residents' interactions tend to be limited and incidental, confined largely to exchanging greetings and small talk. In fact, only 10% of residents reported having shared memories and common experiences with their neighbors. This is the case not just today; it has been the case historically. Forty years ago, Chang (1975, p. 297) remarked upon the “absence of active and extensive neighboring among residents” in public housing. Neighboring contacts, he observed, were “selective and of limited scope.” Wong et al. (1985) noted the same in the 1980s, as did Teo and Huang (1996) in the 1990s and every HDB report since (2000, 2010, 2014, 2018). These findings belie the official explanation. They suggest that the HDB may be overemphasizing shared facilities and strong social ties as the basis of solidarity or “groupness.”

We might furnish another explanation: spatialization. Public housing provided a common and compelling basis for collective identity. It accumulated symbolic power over time and ultimately became a symbol of the group. As such, it served to orient relations among residents in terms of equality. There are two parts to this story: one, residents forming common ties to public housing as a result of their social organization within it, and two, these ties becoming central and taking precedence over ties to other groups.

Residents formed various common ties to public housing. The most basic one is the fact of their being “inside” as opposed to outside it. To be inside a place is an existential condition, Relph (1976) argued. It means to belong to and identify with that place. Concretely, common belonging in public housing involves a substantial economic stake: flat ownership, which, by the late 1990s, had become nearly universal. Residents are invested more generally, however. They share a common fate. They face common problems, with littering, noise, dripping clothes and air conditioners, and people peeing in the elevator being the nuisances most likely encountered (HDB 2014). They have a common interest in the status of their particular estates, for instance, with respect to upgrading.

A second tie is residents' equal standing with respect to place authorities. At one level, this involves their relationship to the state. Common dependence on the state's provision of public housing and other collective goods puts residents in a similar position. It makes them clients of the state and ties them to the PAP in particular (Chua 2000). At another level, the HDB treats public housing residents equally. Flats are allocated on a first-come, first-served basis and residents are subject to the same rules and regulations. The Area Office, which is responsible for the everyday management of estates, is careful to present an image of impartiality. As Lai (1995, pp. 90–96) points out, its credibility depends on it. In adjudicating conflict between residents, especially residents from different ethnic groups, the Area Office is known to be particular about hearing both sides out and upholding the same rules for all.

A third tie is the shared setting. The standard layout and facilities of HDB estates provide a common backdrop to residents' everyday lives as well as a shared set of spatial coordinates. The void deck is commonly used as an arrival and departure point; children and mothers meet at the playground and housewives at the wet market on Saturday mornings; retirees linger in the kopitiam in the daytime and lounge in the hawker center at night, which turns into a kind of a pub after hours (Chang 2000). This network of places structures residents' routines. They see their lives as unfolding collectively over the same terrain and taking a common shape.

Finally, residents form affective ties to public housing, making it, in Tuan's (1979) lovely phrase, "a field of care." As a repository for memories, feelings, and ideas, place becomes a central element in the articulation of identity at both the individual and collective levels. In other words, residents develop a shared stake in public housing not just materially but emotionally.

Thus, common ties to public housing have the effect of linking residents to one another and potentially fostering a sense of solidarity. Common ties are not sufficient, however. These ties have to become strong enough to supersede ties to other kinds of groups. In Singapore, public housing had to emerge as a powerful symbol of the group in order for different class groups to become socially integrated. This happened, I would suggest, as the result of three factors. One, the *legibility* or physical prominence of public housing (Teo and Huang 1996). The "cookie-cutter appearance" of the older estates especially enhanced its function as a public symbol. Two, its *scope*. By the 1990s, public housing encompassed most of the country's population (table 4). It could be taken as "universal" or representing the full spectrum of Singapore's social diversity and, thus, stand symbolically for the nation itself. Three, the work of *time*, not just in increasing residents' attachment to public housing but also in decreasing their attachment to the kampong.

The erasure of the kampong and its fading from people's minds took some time to happen. In 1970, more people lived in kampongs and shophouses

TABLE 4
POPULATION BY TYPE OF HOUSING (%)

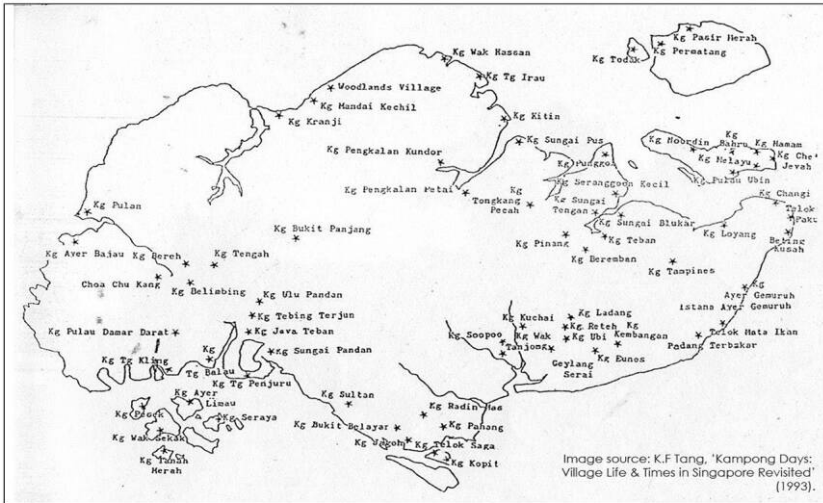
Year	Public Housing	Shophouses and Kampongs	Private Housing
1959	9
1966	25	62	11
1970	31	54	11
1980	67	20	12
1990	85	3	12
2000	88	.5	11
2010	82	.5	17
2022	78	. . .	22

NOTE.—The term “shop houses” includes shophouses, the floors of shophouses, rowhouses, and tenement buildings. The figures for 1959, 1966, and 1970 come from Teh (1975, pp. 5, 26), and the 1980–2022 figures come from Singapore (2022).

than in HDB flats. In 1980, although the tide had turned, the kampong remained an important spatial referent. A survey conducted by the HDB in 1984 found that comparisons with a previous kampong way of life reduced the sense of community residents felt for their estates (Wong et al. 1985). It led them to criticize the closed-door practices of their neighbors and bred a feeling of anomie. As one housewife remarked, “HDB got plenty of facilities, kampong got plenty of friends” (Wong et al. 1985, p. 467). By the 1990s, however, the housing landscape had been transformed so utterly that the state’s approach toward the kampong shifted from eradication to conservation. Once regarded as a blight, the remnants of the kampong were now being salvaged as a heritage site, a destination for school field trips, weekend retreats, and tourists. The National Archives (1993) released a coffee-table book aimed at preserving the memory of the kampong for a generation that had grown up with no experience of it. “Picture this,” the introduction began and proceeded to describe a bygone way of life. The maps had changed. Singapore’s residential landscape, once defined by the kampong, was now dominated by public housing estates (fig. 4).

Perhaps the clearest index of public housing’s symbolic power is that its status as Singapore’s “heartland” can be taken for granted. In 1999, Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong articulated the distinction between “heartlanders” and “cosmopolitans” in his National Day speech. Heartlanders are ordinary Singaporeans, locally rooted and distinctly Singaporean in their practices (e.g., speaking “Singlish”). According to Goh, they represent “the core of our society.” Cosmopolitans, on the other hand, represent an elite, global in outlook and highly mobile. The public housing estate is given as the natural site of heartland identity (Lai 2012). It figures as the setting and sometimes subject of the stories Singaporeans tell themselves about themselves.

A Kampongs in the early twentieth century



B HDB estates in the early twenty-first century

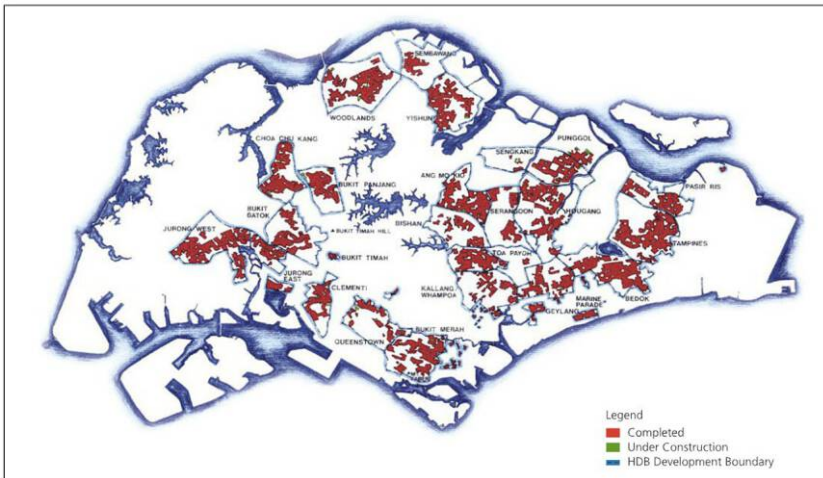


FIG. 4.—Singapore’s residential landscape (National Archives 1993; HDB 2009).

The poems of Alfian Sa’at (1998) have names like “Void Deck,” “Neighbors,” and “Good Morning (Images from an HDB Estate).” His book of short stories is called *Corridor* (Sa’at 1999). Over the course of a career that coincides with the HDB’s, Ong Kim Seng turned from the kampong to the HDB estate as the perennial subject of his art, as featured in the book *Heartlands* (Ong 2008). Chang (2000) describes HDB housing as vernacular architecture, building reflective of folk or ordinary people’s culture. Its symbolic power

lies precisely in its normal and normative quality. He recounts an incident where a Malay Singaporean university student decried the absence of void decks in some newly built estates. She claimed, Chang notes wryly, that “void decks are very important in Malay culture even though they had not existed until the second half of her parents’ lifetimes” (p. 113).

In sum, it took about 30 years, from 1960 to 1990, for public housing to become symbolic of the nation and for a kind of social integration to crystallize, social integration not in the sense of strong social ties but in the sense of strong symbolic ties, with residents linked to one another, horizontally, through the symbol of public housing.⁴

The Prospect of Social Disintegration (2000s on)

The foregoing account suggests that social integration is contingent. The symbolic power of HDB housing is not a *fait accompli*. It built up over time as the result of public housing having become predominant and universal, and it can be eroded over time as these qualities fade. Some observers would say that we are seeing this happen today as a result of centrifugal forces from above and below.

As Singaporeans became richer, they increasingly opted for private housing over public housing—sometimes paying a lot more money for less space—because of its prestige (Ho and Sim 1992). Private housing is prestigious in relation to public housing being normative. Its function as a status symbol is predicated on, indeed an index of, the symbolic power of HDB housing. We see this clearly in how private housing is marketed (Goh 2005, p. 151). Ads for condominiums play them up as private not public, exclusive versus commonplace, and peaceful in contrast to the constant social hubbub associated with HDB living.

Rising aspirations for private housing have prompted the state to schedule an increase in the proportion of private housing stock from 15% to 30% by 2030 (Wong and Yap 2004). In 1995, it moved to privatize the 19 HUDC estates. Fainstein and Fainstein (2014) have pointed with concern to the receding presence of HDB estates in the Central Area, the absence of any estate in

⁴ To be clear, this explanation does not rule out other sources of collective identity. We might also point to the role of National Service (compulsory military service for Singaporean men), schooling, and official discourse in promoting social integration. Cultural factors may also condition how inequality is experienced. A narrative of success, an ideology of meritocracy, and even a collective insecurity—a siege mentality—on account of its geographic situation as a tiny, majority ethnically Chinese state surrounded by large Malay neighbors may serve to mute internal forces of differentiation (Chua 1995). Of course, it only makes sense that a collective identity would be colored by multiple sources. While it is tricky to determine which sources are most important, the importance of residential integration is manifest in the articulation of national identity in terms of place: real Singaporeans are “heartlanders,” and public housing is the heartland.

certain areas, and the proliferation of exclusive residential subdivisions and condominiums in the 1990s and 2000s.

The shifting balance toward private housing raises the prospect that one day the population may outgrow public housing, not completely but enough to undermine the basis of its symbolic power. Hypothetically, it may once again become associated with the poor, as well as new immigrants and foreign workers in sublet units, and thus reacquire the stigma it once shed. If this scenario seems unlikely, it is only because of the government's proactive role in "managing aspirations" (Teo and Kong 1997). Starting in the 1990s, the state has sought to narrow the gap between public and private housing, first, by fashioning new estates in the style of private housing. It phased out executive flats in favor of executive condominiums. These were built and sold by private developers and modeled after private condominiums in their design and amenities but subsidized by the state and thus essentially a form of public housing (Tan 1998). Second, it took steps to integrate private housing within HDB estates, creating "hybrid" towns. Punggol 21, for instance, consists of 60% public housing, 30% private housing, and 10% executive condominiums (Han 2005).

These efforts notwithstanding, inequality between the residents of public and private housing is stark. On average, the residents of private housing make twice as much as the residents of the largest flats in public housing (five-room and executive flats) and nine times as much as the residents of the smallest ones (one and two room; Singapore 2018). Of greater concern, given the focus of the article, is the fact that this inequality maps onto the spatial division between public and private housing and that this division has become a basis for distinguishing the two sets of residents socially (Goh 2005). If public housing represents the heartland, private housing is the space of cosmopolitans. Residents are seen as not just wealthier but more worldly, less bound by the country's everyday affairs, and, perhaps, less culturally Singaporean—in how they speak, what they eat, and, of course, where they live.

The other threat to social integration is the increasing visibility of poverty. The ethnographer Teo You Yenn (2019) conducted research in two HDB rental flat neighborhoods between 2013 and 2016 and described an experience of deprivation and insecurity. The rental flats were "too small for separate bedrooms for parents and kids; [residents] worry about becoming homeless; they run out of cash at some point every month; they live in spaces so dense that trash and bed bugs are perennial problems; their main mode of entertainment is the TV; they are reminded daily that their neighborhoods are dangerous; they don't turn the lights on because they want to save money; they boil water their kids need for warm showers; their flats are filled with the castaways of the wealthy. These too are the everyday realities of life in Singapore," she insisted (pp. 69–70). Teo also argued that the welfare regime

constructed over the course of the 2010s was stigmatizing. It treated low-income households as exceptional, or different from normal citizens. It required proof of their need and made aid conditional on employment and heterosexual marriage. The complicated process of applying for aid made recipients feel untrustworthy, as if they were trying to cheat the system (p. 226). Teo's book, *This Is What Inequality Looks Like*, published in 2019, quickly became a bestseller and sparked a nationwide discussion about poverty in Singapore. Simply acknowledging that poverty was a problem represented something new. The dominant narrative of collective progress, Teo argued, had made people blind to the extent of inequality on the ground. It was necessary, therefore, to "disrupt the narrative" in order to develop a more inclusive vision of Singaporean society.

These developments do not necessarily spell the end of social integration. If anything, the story presented here has been about its durability. Social integration crystallized in the very period when economic inequality was on the rise: from the 1980s through the 2000s. The sense of groupness produced by spatial integration functioned as a kind of cognitive brace containing the centrifugal pull of growing wealth and poverty. This brace is not unbreakable, however, and has been showing cracks, particularly from the 2010s on. The rich and poor are coming into focus in a way that has not been witnessed since the 1960s. Social inequality may not strictly correlate with economic inequality, being subject, as we have seen, to a different set of processes, but, clearly, it is not entirely independent of it. Social integration had to be cultivated by the state. It had to be put into practice by people on the ground. It took a new generation, one that had grown up in public housing, to make it a felt reality. If the symbolic power of public housing continues to be eaten away by contradictions from above and below, feelings of social difference will harden and take hold. Social disintegration, too, will manifest spatially, with the residents of private housing and high-end public housing estates as one group and the occupants of rental and smaller flats in public housing as another.

DISCUSSION

I posited the idea that the spatial organization of inequality affects how we perceive it and developed this idea in obverse ways through a lopsided comparison of Manila and Singapore. In Manila, segregation promoted the formation of categorical inequality, while in Singapore integration inhibited it (see table 5 for a summary of the argument and evidence). One cannot easily extricate these effects from the cases in which they are embedded, however, and thus it is incumbent to consider them within their respective contexts, as well as to account for how the particularities of a case may have conditioned a particular result. Singapore may be considered exceptional given

TABLE 5
THEORY AND EVIDENCE

	Manila	Singapore
The Process of Spatialization		
1. Interaction comes to be organized spatially in the form of segregation or integration.	People are sorted into slums and enclaves mainly as the result of market forces.	The poor and then middle class are resettled in public housing through state action and intentionally integrated.
2. Spatial boundaries guide social interaction.	Slums and enclaves contain social organization. Relations between their residents are fraught.	These groups, once sharply distinguished, are forced to work together by virtue of their common residence in public housing.
3. Unequal or equal interactions are spatialized.	Exploitation is framed in spatial terms, e.g., laborers and servants are identified with slums, and employers and masters with enclaves. Social closure means spatial closure, e.g., enclave residents hoard resources and exclude outsiders.	Exploitation is despatialized.
	Parties make claims on the basis of their respective territories, e.g., enclave residents lay claim to the resources inside enclaves on the basis of ownership and private property.	Residents form common ties to public housing. They engage in practices of spatial accommodation and negotiation over shared spaces.
4. Spatialization directs social categorization.	Slum and enclave residents are seen as different and unequal groups—as “squatters” and “villagers.” . . . despite the fact that they have been moving closer together economically.	They claim resources on the basis of an equal right to place.
		A collective identity based on public housing takes shape over time.
		Public housing residents, “heartlanders,” distinguish themselves from the people outside public housing—the elite living in private housing and foreign workers
		. . . despite the fact that Singaporeans, public housing residents included, have been moving further apart economically.

the role of the state in directing urban development and the sheer scope of its public housing program. Manila may be considered exceptional given the outsized role of market forces in shaping the urban landscape and the intense form of segregation that results. In these respects, the two cases represent opposites, which is precisely what makes them useful for elaborating theory. The extent to which they are exceptional, however, makes generalizing theory based on them problematic. Certainly, we should not expect the theory to play out in exactly the same way in other cases. Just because the effects of a theory vary from case to case, however, does not mean that the theory is not useful. A good theory expands the ways we think about the world. It opens up new lines of investigation by providing us with ideas to track but also to test and revise in new contexts.

We might illustrate the potential utility of this theory with respect to one topic: integration. In Singapore, integration made it harder for unequal populations to form class groups. A common space provided them with a physical basis for imagining themselves as part of the same group. Common boundaries structured their interaction in ways that fostered the elaboration of a collective identity. It is hard to imagine integration having the same effect on racial groups in the United States. American urban scholars have shown race to be a more powerful symbol of the group than place, with racial boundaries regularly overwriting spatial ones (Molotch 1969; Rich 2009; Chaskin and Joseph 2015). For instance, Rich (2009) highlights the racialization of space within a demographically integrated neighborhood, leading to social segregation despite spatial integration. Just because the place effect of spatial integration is obscured or hard to detect, however, does not mean that it is absent. It may just be that we have not been looking for it. The virtue of the Singapore case is that we are able to see clearly how place belonging shaped conceptions of social membership, and thus we are better able to theorize the effect and develop a framework for seeing and organizing evidence of similar place effects in other cases. For example, take Laura Tach's account (2009) of social organization in a mixed-income housing development in Boston. Tach found that different levels of neighborhood participation had less to do with income differences, as she had supposed, than with differences in how long residents had lived in the neighborhood. Longer-term residents were more likely to view crime and drug problems as being incidental to the quality of the neighborhood, while newer residents were more likely to view these problems as an indictment of the neighborhood itself. The account suggests that, over time, place ties may come to outweigh other kinds of group ties in shaping neighborhood frames. It suggests, moreover, that social boundaries do not always overrule spatial ones. Spatial boundaries can also affect social ones. They can underscore and strengthen them or undermine and weaken them. Spatial boundaries possess social power insofar as they define places, and these places acquire symbolic power.

Generally, the research on racial integration in the United States shows residential integration to be less effective than integration in the workplace and other organizational settings (e.g., the military, unions, churches, and civic associations). Specifically, scholars have found social interaction within integrated neighborhoods to be limited, largely superficial, and incapable of changing prejudicial attitudes (Briggs 1997; Britton 2011; Chaskin and Joseph 2015). Scholars have thus concluded that residential integration does not guarantee social integration, hence the “integration exhaustion” reflected in the current scholarship (Hartman and Squires 2010). Instead, scholars have increasingly advocated for community development, that is, improving conditions in the places where people already live. Tellingly, Patillo (2019) distinguishes spatial integration from “the real stuff of equality”—for example, affordable housing, a living wage, good schools, and so on. This stuff is seen as taking precedence over, if not preceding, integration. The distinction suggests a view of residential integration as inert: less a means of achieving social integration than a consequence of already having achieved it.

If the US case speaks to why residential integration fails, the Singapore case can show us how it might work. This study affirms that spatial organization matters for conceptions of social membership. Specifically, spatial integration is not simply a means to particular ends—more interaction across social differences, less discrimination, a more equitable distribution of opportunities and resources—but may itself promote social equality and thus should be considered an end in itself. We learned that integration requires more than just proximity. In Manila, the rich and poor live close together but in distinct spaces divided by physical and symbolic boundaries. We saw that integration means being encompassed by the same *social* and not just spatial boundaries. In Singapore, the poor are housed alongside the non-poor in common spaces over which all have equal claim. Their social integration is the result of equality-generating processes taking hold over time and place becoming a symbol of the group. Residential integration matters insofar as it facilitates the processes involved in the formation of a collective identity.

We might derive another lesson as well, one with contradictory implications. If integration inhibits class division, it may also obscure the distinct needs of the poor as a group. In Singapore, there is a popular perception that the poor are “invisible” (Chan and Basu 2013). The problem, I would suggest, is not that the poor are out of sight but, in a way, out of mind: they are not seen as a group separate from the majority, largely middle-class HDB population. One important reason for their invisibility in this sense is their integration within a space identified as middle class. As such, they lack a social identity and thus a basis for making political claims. Ministers of parliament speak in their name. State agencies treat them as exceptionally unfortunate clients (Teo 2019). In Manila, in contrast, the poor are recognized as legitimate political claimants *because* of their territorial identity. It is as squatters and slum

dwellers that they have won legal rights and institutional representation. They possess political power as a distinct constituency, and politicians must venture into slums in order to court them. In sum, looking beyond the United States to the experiences of integration (and segregation) in Singapore and Manila opens up these concepts considerably, providing us with new insights into how integration (and segregation) work, including in the United States.

More broadly, this research represents a distinctly sociological approach to the study of inequality, a consideration not simply of its causes and consequences but of the conditions under which it makes itself felt as social difference. It is motivated by the sense that in order to understand inequality we have to do more than simply measure it. We need to study how people experience it. We need to take into account the shapes inequality takes in the world because they influence how people make sense of it. This area is ripe for sociological exploration, and, certainly, we are not lacking in material.

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