

**HEIDI TINSMAN (2014) *BUYING INTO THE  
REGIME: GRAPES AND CONSUMPTION IN COLD  
WAR CHILE AND THE UNITED STATES.*  
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What would it mean to strive for a concept of the Americas that considers the United States and Latin America, Canada and the Caribbean, along with their histories, cultures, and political formations, to be similarly generative and influential, in a sort of *relation*? Even beginning to answer that question entails the elaboration of a more careful history of the components of the dialogue. (Tinsman and Shukla, 2007: 7)

Who buys into the regime? In her book about the Chilean grape-export industry during Augusto Pinochet's military dictatorship (1973-1990), feminist scholar Heidi Tinsman argues for the need to ask such a question from unusual perspectives. Her own answer features Chilean business entrepreneurs and Chilean fruit workers in the lead roles, a choice that confronts the reader with the far-reaching consequences of contextualising thoroughly and fearlessly theorising the paradoxes of 'buying into' in particular spaces at particular times. As a historian, Tinsman's achievement goes beyond saying something 'new' about the Chilean military regime through the synergistic integration of methods and disciplines of both the 'hard' and 'soft' kinds (from 'strongly materialist' political economy and comparative history to open-ended ethnography and textual analysis of consumer cultures). While Tinsman's work is a fine example of interdisciplinary craft, her achievement resides in the nuances of her interpretation, the subtle observations that allow her effectively to shake up and displace common places about 'Latin America' that continue to operate inside and outside academia. Above all, Tinsman does not simply reiterate familiar knowledge about Pinochet's atrocities in Chile or U.S. complicity with them (in the style, for instance, of Naomi Klein's *The Shock Doctrine*). Rather, she exposes the dichotomous assumptions and the hierarchies at

work in *all* familiar knowledge about U.S.-Latin American relations. As such, *Buying Into the Regime* is a remarkable piece of radical history, the kind of critical scholarship that is committed to exposing how power is constituted, abused and contested in the very act of writing history. The book is not just about Chile, and is most usefully read in the context of a larger, collaborative attempt to develop a new theoretical paradigm for thinking 'the Americas' as an integrated 'area'.

'The Americas' as a transnational and trans-regional 'area' emerged from a critical re-articulation of Cold War 'area studies', which was formally described for the first time in *The Radical History Review*, in an issue titled *Our Americas: Political and Cultural Imaginings* (2004). Both this issue and the book into which it evolved (2007) were co-edited by Tinsman and her colleague Sandhya Shukla. There they explain that 'the Americas' paradigm requires, above all, to go beyond the side-by-side examination of discrete nation-states ('comparative history') towards an *interdisciplinary* exploration of experiences and imaginaries of 'interaction' throughout the American continent. While this project entails nothing less than a deconstruction of mainstream 'area studies', like good deconstructionists Tinsman and Shukla take care to prevent any sort of oppositional narrative that attempts to radically break with the past. Instead, they critically dwell on the strengths and weaknesses of two broad and internally heterogeneous traditions ('U.S. American studies' and 'Latin American studies') in order to bring them into a mutually transformative dialogue. Neither of those traditions, they insist, 'was ever a mere tool of empire' (Shukla and Tinsman, 2007: 7-8). They both bred their own deconstructions by generating important critiques of domination on both sides of the U.S.-Latin American border. Yet while U.S. American studies focused for the most part on power struggles within the American nation, Latin American studies became fixated on the external domination of North America over particular Latin American nations. It is only recently that both instances of 'area studies' began to self-reflect around their respective blindnesses, repetitions and failures: either too much or too little global awareness, too much or too little political economy, too much or too little 'Theory' or everyday 'lived experience'. For Tinsman and Shukla it seems clear that the typical assumptions and methodological preferences in each field led, for the most part, to the sedimentation of a well-known hierarchy that positions North America as the active subject and Latin American nations as passive, victimized objects. 'The Americas' paradigm seeks to disrupt this way of imagining U.S.-Latin American relations

through the development of ‘new epistemologies’ based on shared problematics rather than geography, as well as on cultural and political resonances between past and present rather than linear chronologies. What is perhaps most inspiring about this theoretical project is its explicit political orientation: ‘the Americas’ seeks to produce a ‘more historical sensibility’ that interrogates ‘how arguments about the past are mobilized to underwrite theories about more contemporary moments’ (18). As Tinsman claims, Chile providing grapes to the United States might not look today as specifically iconic of contemporary globalization, yet the story of Chilean grapes does instruct about global issues in powerful ways, in ways that are relevant indeed for all current mobilisations, in Latin America and beyond, against the many threats of neoliberal capitalism.

*Buying into the Regime* seeks to simultaneously recognise and decentre the above mentioned hierarchies by means of a story about Chilean ‘agency’ within global capitalism, a story that starts several decades before the military coup. In Chapter 1, ‘The Long Miracle’, Tinsman demonstrates that ‘lessons about free trade predated 1973 and were never learned only from the Chicago boys’. What she means by this is that, against all appearances and habits of thinking, there is a sense in which democratic governments had already cleared the ground for Pinochet’s infamous contribution to Chilean economic and political history. In Chile as in other Latin American countries agriculture had been less an industrial activity than a subsistence affair through which oligarchic rule was exercised. By 1960 the idea was shared across the political spectrum that this ‘feudal’ system required modernizing state intervention. During Salvador Allende’s government (1970-1973) labour unions expanded massively, agricultural wages tripled and spontaneous estate seizures by workers were legalized as part of an agrarian reform with a socialist orientation. As is well-known, within the span of a few years the military regime crushed labour unions and with them the relative economic security and the political autonomy that workers had gained through socialist democracy. Yet the agrarian reform for which democratic governments are credited began as nothing less than a state-led effort to spur capitalism in the countryside. Both Allende and his predecessor Eduardo Frei contemplated popular inclusion in an otherwise rather conventional vision of economic ‘development’ (i.e., industrialization, export-oriented production and import-substitution policies). Long before Pinochet, North American state agencies and philanthropic organisations had supported this kind of modernization as part of

their mission to prevent communism in Latin America. Tinsman highlights the educational component of such a mission, including university-based research exchanges and technology-transfer schemes, strongly echoing (though not explicitly drawing on) earlier analyses of 'developmentalism' (Escobar, 1995) and its infiltration in 'the revolutionary imagination of the Americas' (Saldaña-Portillo, 2003). In this context, large fruit growers led the first efforts to expand commercial fruit production and agricultural professionalization. Crucially, they actively looked to the US both as a model for building their own industry and as a future market. These 'entrepreneurial oligarchs', as Tinsman aptly calls them, were seen by Allende as a 'progressive bourgeoisie', on the basis of which they were often protected from expropriation and were allowed to be personally involved in the implementation of an agrarian reform that, naturally, privileged large private estates over state farms. After the coup, the same select group of landowners retained a position to benefit from Pinochet's implementation of neoliberal doctrine. Exports continued to be controlled by the Chilean firms that had thrived during the democratic governments and, while this may seem to add nothing shockingly new to the classical view of U.S. imperialism as strategically relying on the self-interest of Latin American oligarchies, Tinsman consistently refuses to follow the 'hard facts' economicist tradition of directly or indirectly reducing Latin American capitalism to interest-driven impositions from Uncle Sam. To this end she injects economic history with a powerful dose of feminist analysis and cultural studies, taking time to analyse the political discourse of each regime (democracy and military dictatorship) and its material implications for the internal hierarchies of the Chilean nation. She foregrounds the military's rearticulation of gendered and racialised divisions of labour. While the agrarian reform had privileged men's over women's work, the military would paradoxically invert such a hierarchy by disempowering men and sending women into the workplace (above all to the fruit-export industry). As for racial hierarchies, the military gave a renewed visibility to indigenous Chileans qua rural essence of the nation undergoing a process of modernization led by oligarchic entrepreneurs with European roots. Tinsman traces a cultural transformation of these roots that would have a profound impact on Chilean culture at large: after decades of developmental cooperation with the United States, California came to replace Paris as the main leisure and business destination for well-off Chileans. Inspired by the American mythologies of individualism, adventure, profit and market control, more and more middle-class Chileans would enter the export-crops playing field even after the economic crisis of 1982.

Yet instead of assuming that these privileged, ideologically co-opted Chileans vertically imposed their values on the rest of the Chilean society, Tinsman sets out to investigate the paradoxical outcomes of Chilean workers' ambivalent participation in American-style consumer culture.

*Buying into the Regime* does not claim to deconstruct anything, but this is pretty much what Tinsman does when she turns her attention to the issue of consumption during the military regime. As part of the book's methodology, she addresses fruit workers (rather than middle-class Chileans or their American counterparts) as primary consumers, for it is they who have been frequently assumed to be excluded from or simply oppressed by consumer culture. The end of the agrarian reform after the military coup meant that Chileans began depending on supermarkets for food, as well as on privatized healthcare, education, housing and pensions. Against the evidence of increasing hardship for most Chileans, Pinochet claimed that the availability of a wide range of imported goods was proof of rising living standards. As it has happened under capitalist regimes the world over, cool 'modernity' was constantly displayed in TV ads featuring white, cosmopolitan lifestyles far beyond the reach of fruit workers. The message of authoritarian neoliberalism was clear: the time had arrived for individuals to participate in politically neutral, internationalized markets. One particular show, *Sábado Gigante*, enacted the dream of individual upward mobility. Many fruit workers indeed became proud owners of televisions, washing machines, clothes and cosmetics during the military regime. Their desires for these goods and the consequences of their entry into workers' lives are explored in what is perhaps the most poignant chapter of Tinsman's book, 'Fables of Abundance'. Using feminist ethnography, Tinsman develops an alternative to Chilean literature that has predominantly viewed consumption merely as consumerism, indeed as 'a handmaiden of political tyranny' (16). Her careful analysis of numerous oral testimonies reveals that workers' practices of consumption were the breeding ground for progressive cultural transformations and complex forms of subjectivity. Contrary to the military regime's accusation that democratic governments had only brought scarcity to Chileans, workers first had access to gas stoves and sewing machines during Allende's government. What changed after the military coup was the extent of households' reliance on women's cash wages and on

market transactions. For Tinsman, the popularity of *Sábado Gigante* among Chileans (and eventually among Latin Americans) is not a 'proof' of passive consent to tyranny, but rather a symptom of peoples' invisible struggle to re-define themselves, individually and collectively, under the nose of Pinochet. Beyond television content Tinsman addresses consumption as a social relationship, 'something people fight over, basic to everyday experiences of power'. Television viewing took place in the context of a redistribution of power inside the home that eventually reached the public sphere. By displacing the masculine ideals of the agrarian reform ('Land for the man who works it'), the regime created a situation in which waged women (most of whom worked for the fruit-industry) gained more bargaining power in decisions about how to spend family income. Generational conflicts emerged around quests for greater autonomy through consumption practices, with older generations on one side rebuking the military regime's claims about improved living standards and younger generations (of women, in particular) placing enormous value on having a job and buying things themselves. The latter's concerns subtly shifted from familial duties towards self-care and self-oriented pleasure and social life outside the family. Women's gifts to each other, for example, came to be intended for personal enjoyment rather than survival needs. Not surprisingly, this transformation positioned women and young people as validating the military's modernization project. Tinsman's argument, however, is that women's and young people's experience was not really consistent with the military regime's normative ideals. Pinochet's was a neoliberal version of European fascism in which women's patriotic duty was to spend money according to their roles as housewives and mothers. Yet 'the good woman worker' that emerges from oral testimonies looks like a rather complex subjectivity that deviated sharply from the regime's official visions of gender. It was still defined in family terms but it demanded respect on the basis of its status as a worker and not as a mother, fusing two distinct ideologies. On the one hand it accepted the military's equation of personal agency with market transactions; on the other it invoked the agrarian reform's emphasis on social justice and workers' entitlement to the fruits of their labour. Even if women's questioning of male authority in the home did not necessarily make them explicit opponents of military rule, the transformations in culture and subjectivity that happened as a consequence of them 'buying into the regime' eventually translated into a strong call for

the return of democracy. After the military spent years legitimating its rule through 'fables of abundance', its critics across the Chilean social spectrum concluded that neoliberal dictatorship had made Chile a grossly unequal society. The argument here strongly resonates with foundational work in British cultural studies, which also analysed the paradoxical nature and the political lessons of women's and young people's buying into a (Thatcher's) regime.

In the chapter titled 'The Fresh Sell', Tinsman turns to the relations between Chilean 'fables of abundance' and American fables of 'freshness'. Here, she positions American consumers less as free agents who chose to buy what was best for them than as the vulnerable targets of advertising campaigns that adapted representations of 'nature' to middle-class concerns about health and convenience. When the American counterculture's critiques of industrial capitalism had gone mainstream in the 1970s, persuasive messages about health and diet, working women and changing family dynamics began to be elaborated within American industry marketing. Women, in particular, were targeted with the slogan 'Grapes, the Natural Snack', which originated as one among several campaigns launched by The California Table Grape Commission. In an engaging analysis of the Grape Commission's marketing campaigns, Tinsman illustrates the aggressive manner in which American shoppers were persuaded to 'buy into the regime' (of transnational capitalism) through their purchases of fresh fruit. At first, Chileans merely capitalized on this formula in order to sell their product during the winter months in California. Yet they could not entirely rely on it because they faced challenges specific to Chile, such as the American prejudice about the 'inferiority' and even 'danger' of Latin American produce. Another problem was the reputation of Pinochet. Even though Chilean exporters were initially wary of having their product associated with a dictator, once the regime became involved towards the end of the 1970s, Chilean firms began to take a more central role in the promotion of Chilean grapes in America. Laudatory articles about Chile's fruit industry became common in U.S. and international publications, often drawing directly on promotional newsletters and catalogues circulated by the Chilean government. The notion that Chileans were trustworthy as business partners relied on the idea that Chileans were a special kind of Latin American because of their 'European roots'. The notion that Chilean grapes were trustworthy invoked the history of scientific

(that is, developmental) cooperation between Chile and California. In Tinsman's interpretation, such promotional materials symbolically whitened Chilean grapes by insisting that Chile's scientific expertise and national culture were similar enough to those of the United States. The most interesting aspect of such an operation relates to a double contrast: on the one hand with how grapes were being marketed in California and on the other hand with how Latin American fruit had been typically marketed in the United States. Californian grapes were showcased for the public usually on the vine or in picturesque baskets. By contrast, Chilean grapes were showcased in promotional materials in the context of packing plants, fumigation facilities and inspections by scientific quality managers. Latin American fruits, particularly bananas, had been advertised through images of dark-skinned women balancing fruit baskets on their heads or peasant girls with colourful skirts (on the political significance of these images, see Enloe, 1989). By contrast, Chilean grapes were advertised with images of women workers standing in assembly lines, wearing uniforms and hairnets while they packed grapes. In Tinsman's interpretation, the image of fruit workers (so often elided from ads of fresh fruit) was meant to speak back to U.S. presumptions of Chilean underdevelopment. Her interpretation, in turn, is meant to 'speak back' to area studies that have often been uninterested in or unimpressed by the entrepreneurial role of Latin American actors. Tinsman thus depicts Chilean grape growers and exporters as self-interested global entrepreneurs who exploited mainstream images of health and science in order to 'act upon' their North American partners and market (in this regard, her argument resonates with recent examinations of technoscientific narratives underpinning local and artisanal foods, see Heath and Meneley, 2007). No wonder that the grape-export industry, as a representative of Chilean modernity, was seen as positive by many Chileans across the political and socioeconomic spectrum, nothing less than as a developmental rupture with the 'backward' oligarchic system for which Latin America was famous.

'Boycott Grapes!' is the penultimate chapter of the book, and it tries to explain a not so strange disconnection between the California farmworker movement and the Chile solidarity movement organised by Chilean exiles in the U.S. during Pinochet's regime. Under the leadership of Cesar Chavez, the United Farmworkers



(UFW) launched a series of consumer boycotts which stressed that grapes were not 'natural' but rather were a heavily processed food, treated with pesticides that harmed both farmworkers and consumers. The movement articulated environmental alarm sparked by Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) with the period's concern about social justice. It succeeded throughout the 1960s in transforming local labour disputes into a national civil rights cause that mobilised thousands of volunteers: students, housewives, religious clergy and laity, civil rights veterans, and radical activists. At first, the UFW regularly emphasized the abject poverty of farmworkers, appealing directly to white middle-class sympathy and even pity. In 1968, Chavez (a devout Catholic) explained his decision to fast in terms of Christian penance. Fearing that consumer boycotts would indeed persuade mothers and housewives not to feed their families with 'toxic grapes', growers eventually capitulated to UFW demands, by recognizing the UFW as a bargaining unit and raising wages, enacting controls over and bans of pesticides, and guaranteeing public access to information. Chavez gradually made consumer boycotts a hard-line strategy of the UFW, accused those who disagreed with him of being communists or internal enemies and declared 'food safety' as the main mission of the UFW, which featured prominently in the 1984 'Wrath of Grapes' boycott. Strikingly, the UFW grape boycott and the Chile solidarity movement had no organisational overlap. The Chile solidarity movement, as it became known, emerged immediately after the overthrow of Salvador Allende in 1973. One of them, Casa Chile, was founded in 1981 by Chilean refugees in Berkeley, California and in 1985 it began organizing a campaign called 'Boycott Chile!' and asked consumers to stop purchasing Chilean imports, especially grapes and wine. Pamphlets and posters announced the boycott's central logic: 'Nothing for Pinochet, Nothing from Pinochet'. Although the UFW condemned Allende's overthrow and frequently expressed solidarity with the Latin American people, it rarely discussed how the Pinochet regime's economic model had made grapes available to American consumers year-round. When occasionally asked, UFW organizers argued that if anything, Chilean grapes were even more toxic than California grapes because they used more dangerous or higher levels of pesticides. This message was reinforced through an image of a fruit inspector at the Valparaíso port wearing a mask and special uniform, ironically the same image used by Chilean grape exporters to market fruit as

meeting the highest standards of quality and health. At any rate, and although the grape industry thoroughly connected California and Chile, activists in both campaigns saw their organizational fights as separate struggles. In Tinsman's interpretation, it was Cold War politics that shaped the disconnect between UFW and Chile solidarity boycotts by sharpening distinctions between U.S. struggles over democracy at home and third-world struggles for liberation abroad. The UFW understood its campaign as a national fight for Mexican American labour and civil rights within the United States. By contrast, Chile solidarity activists focused on imperialism and human rights violence as forces happening outside U.S. borders. Tinsman examines in depth several aspects of this unfortunate disconnection that, interestingly, also reflects her premise about the historic disconnection between U.S. American studies and Latin American Studies. She also strains a little bit in vindicating the cultural and ideological impact of boycotts. As she points out, neither the UFW nor Casa Chile succeeded in convincing large numbers of U.S. shoppers to stop buying grapes. The UFW saw a dramatic reduction in its membership as Chavez became more dogmatic about 'food safety' and Casa Chile remained a localised phenomenon. Yet Tinsman insists that boycotts against grapes mattered. In her view, they were primarily meant to get the message out and press toward a particular goal be it justice for farmworkers or democracy in Chile. UFW and Chile solidarity boycotts got Americans to think in new ways about food and what it meant to eat it, both for the environment and for workers. In turn, the immediate impact of the Chile Solidarity movement was low, but Tinsman insists that its activities played an important role in U.S.-based efforts to pressure for a return to democracy in Chile. At the pedagogical level, besides making clear the connection between the fate of Chilean democracy and international trade and business, they constructed forms of long-distance solidarity between U.S. citizens and Latin Americans. One cannot help thinking of Tinsman's book as a main instance of this, since the whole point of most chapters resides on taking political imagination seriously.

The last chapter of *Buying into the Regime* is entitled 'Not Buying It'. In it, Tinsman picks up on the transformation of workers' subjectivities described earlier in the chapter 'Fables of Abundance'. The goal here appears to be showing the extent to which such transformations mattered politically. In the 1980s, Chilean

prodemocracy activists worried that consumerism among agricultural workers had eroded the 'authenticity' of rural culture. Women's interest in televisions, clothes and cigarettes was seen as particularly dangerous and misguided, diverting precious income from real needs. Once again, fruit workers often disagreed on this point, since they enjoyed their televisions and fashionable items whenever they could afford them. Neither did they decry the fruit-export industry, often depicted by prodemocracy activists as an agent of capitalist destruction. What fruit workers did agree upon was the fact that they needed more money to buy enough of the things they needed. Crucially, they established a relationship between their ability to buy these things and personal dignity. Thus, the prodemocracy movement involved a debate among Chilean social classes (particularly between academics and fruit workers) about the kind of consumption that all Chileans had a right to engage in. From this debate Chilean women emerged empowered as the new image of social leadership of the Chilean nation, not just because of their role as waged workers but also because of the political education they gained as the military regime gradually waned. During the agrarian reform, women's cooking had 'merely' supplemented men's strikes and land occupations; under military rule, 'common pots' ceased to be a supplement to become the only form of collective action. Housing committees run by women, often organised in grape packing plants, focused on obtaining basic services (such as potable water and electricity) for self-built squatter settlements where agricultural workers came to live. Gradually, such actions escalated into lightning strikes and into more explicit articulations of concrete labour demands that were in fact attended to by the regime. Tinsman explains how such activities constituted spaces where women developed critiques of social injustice. Usually sponsored by the Catholic Church, they also drew fruit workers into national activist networks, particularly those led by feminist academics, who tied investigation of women's mass employment to grassroots organising. Sociologists, historians and anthropologists ran workshops for workers on labour rights, housing-application procedures, domestic violence and sex education. Feminists had a strong influence within the labour movement and the church, linking national politics to household politics. The most interesting story narrated by Tinsman in this regard relates to the Santa María Fruit Worker's Union, which emerged at the very end of military rule with the help of the academic managers of the NGO Casa del Temporero. This NGO became a place of encounter for mostly temporary workers, its first and most popular initiative being a day-care centre, followed by workshops on community leadership

especially intended for women. What is interesting about this union is not only the fact that it involved temporary workers who would not affiliate with a political party, but also the discourse it generated which positioned fruit workers near the centre of Chilean prodemocracy activism. In 1989 there was a U.S. ban on Chilean grape imports, following an anonymous call claiming that the grapes were poisoned with cyanide. U.S. importers thought the ban was a hoax and complained about economic losses. Chilean exporters thought the ban was hypocritical protectionism. In Santiago, students and politicians associated with the prodemocracy movement called on North American citizens to oppose the ban because it would hurt prodemocracy efforts, threatening a sector of labour dominated by women. Fruit workers marched on the streets alongside their bosses, defending Chilean fruit as wholesome. Just before the incident, Pinochet lost a national plebiscite that would have allowed him to stay in power another eight years. Whereas international bans on Chilean fruit seemed to unite Chileans, the latter were more divided about Pinochet (43% of voters wanted him to stay). Plenty of Chileans saw the regime as having created political stability and economic growth, yet most fruit-exporting areas voted him out in higher proportions, since by that point a consensus had been reached that the military regime was responsible for economic inequality, the main concern of the workers.

Tinsman argues that the history of Chilean fruit workers 'is suggestive of challenges facing activists for a more democratic world' (258). The main challenge she presents us with is political and can be described in terms of complex subjectivities. A decade after the grape ban, a few Chileans found themselves among the protesters in Seattle; a few more were inside the WTO talks as representatives of Chile's restored democracy yet firmly supporting the export-led, free-market model elaborated during the dictatorship. Meanwhile, in Chile many workers saw anti-globalization protests as problematic, since their livelihood already depended on large-scale commercial agriculture. Independent small-scale farming or cooperatives did not seem like a realistic solution for most. At the same time, their enthusiastic willingness to support Michelle Bachelet, a female president with a feminist social democratic agenda, was also the product of women's transformed subjectivities during the dictatorship. Whereas Tinsman shows passion in her call to appreciate the gains in political subjectivity after the military regime, several questions persist, for Chileans and for the rest of the world: can inequality be effectively addressed without a radical

critique of capitalism? Can a radical critique of capitalism take complex subjectivities seriously enough, without in some sense buying into the regime? These and other questions are not new but neither have they lost their urgency as we face the conjuncture called 'global crisis'. While *Buying into the Regime* provides a stimulating, self-reflective approach to them, it should also be said that such an approach might need to be supplemented, by readers more interested in contemporary theoretical developments, with post-humanist perspectives currently attempting to reformulate political questions. For instance, would a focus on grapes themselves, either as sociotechnical processes or as actors distinct from their human growers, traders and eaters, allow us to address the current global crisis in ways more radical than social democracy and formal gender equality? The question may seem well beyond area studies and well beyond the Americas paradigm; hopefully it points towards new bridges yet to be constructed between the Theory-friendly world of Anglo cultural studies and the 'merely human' world of Latin Americanism as it appears in *Buying into the Regime*.

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