Contesting inner-city space: Global trends, local exclusion/s and an alternative Christian spatial praxis

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Abstract

This article explores global patterns in the spatial formation of inner cities. It indicates how such patterns often perpetuate multiple local exclusions contributing to de-humanising and de-humanised inner-city spaces. It then explores an alternative Christian spatial praxis considering ways in which communities of faith can engage issues of inner-city space, land and housing to facilitate possible prophetic alternatives to the dominant trends.

Key words   Inner-city; Inner-city space; Social exclusion; Social inclusion; Space; Urban gentrification; Urban ministry; Urban mission; Urban regeneration

Some of the critiques against postmodern reflection are that it grants critical intellectuals the "indulgence" of retreat from active participation (Merrifield and Swyngedouw 1996:5) or, as the African-American scholar Belle Hooks (1990:27:30) suggests, there is within a postmodern approach sometimes the tendency of separating "a generalised 'politics of difference' from the more materially specified, contextualised and lived 'politics of racism'".

Renee Boomkens (1998:426) is critical of the postmodern distinction of major and minor narratives and advocates what he calls the use of "tall" stories; stories with "the power to reconstruct and to give voice to certain specific and local experiences so convincingly as to raise them to a more universal status and significance".

Perhaps, in response to the grand narrative of global markets and the reality of exclusion and marginalisation in local contexts we need to discover and introduce tall stories emerging from very specific and local experiences and we have to tell and re-tell these in order to create a new imagination (Brueggemann 1978) of a city and a world where all will be equally welcome at the table of humanity.

Therefore, I would like to locate my reflections very specifically in the context of the inner city of Pretoria with its promise and struggle. And I want to acknowledge that my reflections are shaped by the many "little stories" (Boyle 1998: 8) of those looking from the margins into what the inner city has to offer but, like Lazarus, too often have to be content with the crumbs.

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On a daily basis, the inner-city presents a contest for space between rich and poor, black and white, foreigners and locals. Global trends are manifesting in local inner city neighbourhoods and spaces. Forces that cause exclusion globally also cause social, economic or cultural exclusion locally. And it is in this context of contest, power, and exclusion that the Church has the challenge to flesh out a gospel that is appropriate, liberating, and constructive; a gospel that will take note of the historic, political, socio-economic, and spatial dynamics that are at work in making and re-making our cities.

From our own analysis and engagement as an ecumenical inner-city community, I would like to offer some suggestions and some critical moments for a Christian spatial praxis that is rooted in an economics of community and a politics of justice.

1. Notes on current Christian praxis in the field of urban social development and urban social activism

◆ Too many Christian practitioners in the field of development are still locally engaged without interpreting their locality in the global context, without participating in global dialogue, and without having the tools to do a reading of global dynamics. Such an ignorant position is detrimental at a local level because we can no longer understand the local without the global.

◆ Too many approaches are still exclusively busy with relief or community development without a clear programme of activism that addresses systemic issues and affects policy. In our inner cities, informal traders might be supported with skills and entrepreneurial training, but without gaining access to markets and with oppressive or inadequate policies that do not support and encourage the informal economy, such training will come to naught.

◆ But having said that, I have another concern and that is the narrow focus of some Christian social activists. There are those who go beyond relief or community development projects and focus on deconstruction but do not have the ability to imagine and/or offer clear alternatives accompanied even by viable models. So they hardly become constructive. Sometimes, our activism happens in a vacuum. We are good at offering criticism and analysis but we ourselves are not so strong in developing alternatives, and therefore our ability to transform is sterile.

◆ A few years ago, the Johannesburg City Council introduced their Egoli-2010 programme and outlined their programme to privatise public assets. A group of Christian social activists gathered to debate this document and although I shared most of their concerns, they clearly

lacked imaginative alternatives. The programme has since continued with little, if any, impact from this group. Many, if not all, of those who debated the programme a few years ago, have moved on and away from activism. This presents the problem of activism that comes from a kind of "correct ideological position" but lacks a deep and long-term rootedness in solidarity with those on whose behalf they purport to speak.

◆ An even bigger problem is that some Christian (and other)activists have a dismissive approach about local actions of development and organisation. They feel that now all our energy should be spent on the overthrow of globalisation and that other actions should be suspended in the interim. But in the interim, the hungry and the bruised are laying by the wayside and do not appreciate our withdrawal. Too often they are not part of the debate, or of the strategising of how to deal with the debate. They only feel the exclusion in their hungry stomachs.

◆ Maybe a preoccupation with debating alternatives to the global economy without such debate being rooted in concrete actions of engagement and solidarity with those being most affected lacks some integrity. We should beware of ivory-tower critique that does not constantly root itself back into local contexts of struggle. Perhaps, deep local engagement *as well as* participation in emerging global social movements are required that will continuously create spaces in which local expressions and global conversations can cross-fertilise each other.

This article is a revision of a paper read at a meeting of the South African Missiological Society (SAMS). It is therefore placed within the context of God's missional concern for the world. I speak here within a context of Christian discipleship, first, of inner-city space and of alternative structures to those that hurt and exclude people and second that, we cannot do without real and concrete engagement.

Out of their engagements and inter-actions, the prophets analysed their situations and out of the analyses, they constructed alternative images of a preferred reality.

2. Contesting inner-city space

In 1973, David Harvey in his groundbreaking work *Social justice and the city*, indicated the relationship between spatiality, power and justice. I intend to consider the topic of sustainable economies (or urban development) that is inclusive, sustainable and transformational from the perspective of how global trends manifest themselves in the local arena and how local urban spaces are filled, emptied, or contested.

Inner-city space is permanently contested. There is a battle between local authorities, private developers, slum landlords, civic organisations,

resident groups, landless groups, informal traders, drug pushers, and drug users all wanting to appropriate inner-city space for their own purposes.

Sociologist Manuel Castells (2000:9) speaks about this dynamic in Amsterdam. There, corporations and businesses try to preserve the beauty and heritage of noble old neighbourhoods, whilst countercultures occupy the same spaces illegally to make a point about the use value of these spaces, and local residents just want to get on with their lives. And, says Castells, beyond these spatial battles between social movements and the elite, a so-called new marginality of drug culture, homeless people, and new ghettos that are "tarnishing the shine of civilized prosperity". This new marginality is effectively sidelined from any official debate about space yet participates in the battle for space through their quiet and sometimes less than quiet subversive presence.

According to Castells (2000:9), the problem of many of these counterculture movements is that they deliberately cut themselves off from society thereby being "hopeless of being able to transform the society they refuse.". Almost as hopeless are the attempts of some Christian activists to transform the society they refuse.

Doreen Massey (1996:104) suggests that, "spatiality is always and everywhere an expression and a medium of power". And those with power dominate the way in which space is utilised and can effectively plan those without power out of access to space – whether it is political, economic or social space. Massey suggests the need for a reorganisation of space and power in order to create a more humane and just urban environment.

The same happens in Sao Paulo, Johannesburg, and the City of Tshwane (Pretoria). In the last 20 years in Brazil, the poor have occupied building after building in central Sao Paulo. And today, there are more people living in so-called "vertical 'favellas'" in the inner-city areas of Sao Paulo, than in the "favellas" on the outer fringes of the city. This is a spatial strategy, sometimes informal, sometimes well orchestrated, to make the poor and excluded more visible politically and to give them more access economically. Space – and land – is often at the heart of the struggle of the poor in Sao Paulo and other Brazilian cities.

Since the late 1990's, informal traders are moved from Yeoville, Berea, and other inner-city areas . They struggle to find a permanent space where they can make a simple, decent living for themselves and their families. When the local authority wants to create cleaner, more orderly environments, they build markets for the traders where the traders have to pay for access to a stall. Often they have to pay more than they are able to afford. Instead of strengthening informal trade, this action effectively excludes many of the traders.

In Pretoria, like many other cities, slum landlords have taken over empty office buildings in the inner city. Without any basic conversion of the building for residential use, they move people in charging them market-related rentals but without offering basic ablution and other facilities. And because the demand for space close to services and employment is so high, these buildings are always fully occupied.

Around Burgers Park a public open space in the inner city of Pretoria, there is a perpetual cat and mouse race for space between drug users/male sex workers, a local hotel owner and the police. The male sex workers want an identifiable pick-up zone to ply their trade. The hotel owner wants a clean and safe space for his tourists. He feels that the presence of male sex workers is contrary to that. And the police are co-opted to serve the interests of whoever "sponsors" them.

Essentially, the battle for space is a spiritual battle (in the broad sense of the word). It is a battle for the soul of the city, a battle of values with profound political, socio-economic, cultural and even moral considerations.

The spatial arrangements in the inner city tell stories of local culture and counterculture; of monuments to exalt political and economic powers; of who are welcome in a particular community, and who are not. The stories express the prejudices of local residents, politicians and businesses.

3. Global trends, local exclusions

Local urban spaces become mirrors of what happens globally in arenas of greater connectedness for some and the increased exclusion of others. Manuel Castells reminds us of this fact when he says that the greater the connectedness between powerful people globally, the greater the disconnectedness of powerless people locally.

According to Merrifield and Swyngedouw (1996:11), a result of globalisation is the "accelerating and spatially deepening uneven processes of 'creative destruction' [that] leaves urban communities uprooted and displaced while propelling others on to new dizzy and commanding heights". The greater the mobility, movement and access offered by the new technologies, modes of communication, and multimedia (all associated with the global economy) the more the already privileged are strengthened and the lack of access that impoverished people and nations have is increased.

The following are a few examples of how local inner-city areas are affected.

3.1 Privatising the public sphere

Globally, there is a movement towards *privatising the public sphere*. Private sector groups "acquire management rights over public spaces by funding physical and aesthetic improvements" (Zukin 1996:236). The responsibility

of parks, streets, pavements, and even public utilities are transferred to private sector groups. And because these groups provide the funds, they can decide how to use the streets, and who are in and who are out.

An example of this is a new and popular mechanism for managing inner-city areas called City Improvement Districts. Over and above the required existing taxes, property owners in a specific area of the city pay taxes, which then are used by themselves to fund improvements of the area in which they operate for example, the employment of additional cleaners, additional security personnel, and stalls for informal traders and so forth.

Potentially this could be a helpful mechanism for creating a local and sustainable funding base for constructive development and self-management by a local community. The problem is that this base is usually created by property owners who are not necessarily interested in a social contract, but only in profit. It often excludes those who are not property owners but only tenants of landlords. It can become a rather exclusive mechanism that gets used in many instances to institutionalise xenophobia, racism, or anti-poor sentiments through various measures of social control. However, this does not *have* to be the case.

The proliferation of shopping malls and theme parks is another expression of privatised space, replacing – and sometimes simulating – public spaces. It is strange how people rush to Monte Casino (a casino/shopping mall/hotel designed as a simulated Italian town) to see washing lines in the streets but how the same people fight to get washing removed from windows of inner-city apartments.

Traditionally, public spaces were "the terrain for struggles, encounters, and protests. These are places symbolic of collective solidarity and of collective experience, where political encounter and dissonance is aired" (Merrifield and Swyngedouw 1996:14). By killing public spaces, the possibility of collective expression, debate, experience and protest is minimised, creating an apathetic mass instead of a vibrant and active citizenry.

3.2 Renewal/displacement

Another global trend is so-called *urban renewal programmes* that aim to create clean and safe cities for potential investors who are playing the game of the global market, often by way of public-private partnerships. The City Improvement Districts are sometimes the mechanisms used to drive these renewal programmes. But often "clean" and "safe" are just terms used to cover up what is actually meant, which is to remove the poor somewhere else, to close down informal trade, and to make access for the vulnerable increasingly impossible.

David Harvey (1996:20) indicates how such interventions to renew the city often just move "impoverished people from one slum into another". In August 2002, to redevelop Marabastad in central Pretoria, 2 000 squatters were removed to Mamelodi extension 6 with no or little access to their former places of trading and the virtual destruction of a local informal economy and community. At the same time, it was a perpetuation of past spatial arrangements moving people away not on the basis of race, but of income. The local Councillor said, "We need foreign investments in the inner city and Marabastad in its current state would discourage people from investing".

Another such intervention is the renewal project in Sunnyside Pretoria, where the Department of Trade and Industry has constructed a new campus for their headquarters serving as a lead urban renewal project to lure new investments into that part of town. But to do so, almost 500 units of low- and moderate-income rental housing were demolished not to be replaced, with little or no compensation for those who had to leave their homes.

The creation of this office park is not the issue, but lack of integration of different functions and people and lack of connectedness to the existing neighbourhood and its community are issues. Urban renewal is often just moving local challenges elsewhere without addressing the roots of the problem.

Another example is Times Square in New York City, where over the past 15 years a major clean-up and renewal campaign has taken place remarkably changing the face of what used to be a rather infamous part of town. Disney Stores and other dizzying enterprises have come into town – almost a virtual neighbourhood. However, many people were displaced to do this. And now locals who live in cheap hotels or single room residences in the area say, "We cannot even afford to buy coffee at the corner shop; it has now become too expensive for us". That is if the corner shop survived.

3.3 From spontaneous diversity to social control

Although today cities are mainly marked by heterogeneous populations such *spontaneous diversity* is often reacted to by tightened forms of social control. Mechanisms such as those mentioned before become the facilitators of such control.

At a local level, this becomes clear in the ways in which powerful people increasingly "insulate themselves in hermetically sealed enclaves, where gated communities and sophisticated modes of surveillance are the order of the day" (Merrifield and Swyngedouw 1996:11). Those with access use their access to regulate the poor and their movement. It is talked of by some as the "militarisation of space" (cf. Merrifield and Swyngedouw 1996:11 in reference to the work of Mike Davis) whereby the powerful

employ all the means they can to protect themselves from the poor. They say of Manila in the Philippines that a third of the city is hired to protect another third of the city from the remaining third of the city.

The creation of security villages, the introduction of CCTV cameras and 24-hour surveillance of streets and parks are all measures of social control. Planners make use of zoning to include or exclude often in very subjective ways. In South Africa, this is mostly done by white middle-class men who plan for inner-city neighbourhoods where they will never live themselves. Naturally, the levels of crime and violence require proper management of public space but the challenge is how to manage this in ways that are "non-exclusive", "non-militarist", and non-discriminatory. (cf. Smith 1996:132, in reference to David Harvey).

The privatisation of public spaces and the accompanying instruments of social control lead to increasing exclusion (sometimes subtle and sometimes blatant) of the more vulnerable sectors of our communities. It often translates into practices that infringe upon the rights of vulnerable people.

At the Waterfront in Cape Town, where garbage bins overflow with excesses of wasted food, Security officials patrol and as soon as a person who looks homeless goes near a bin, they get chased away. At the Waterfront, Lazarus cannot even get to the crumbs.

Neil Smith (1996:129) refers to the politics of space in New York City in the 1990's. He speaks of the "criminalisation and dispersal of homelessness" as one of the clear examples of "a defence and reconstruction of the lines of identity privilege", whereby the most vulnerable people of the city are systematically excluded and even criminalised if that is what is necessary.

In Pretoria until the beginning of 2003, about 100 to 150 homeless people used to sleep night after night in front of the building where the National Minister of Social Development has his offices in the city centre. The response to the homeless people was twofold, they were sprayed off the verandah with fire hoses every now and then, and money was given to an NGO that, for various reasons, the homeless did not want to relate to. The mandate given to the NGO was to clean this space of the homeless. However, this happened without any discussion with the homeless people themselves. Essential basic services are commodified and the receivers of services are excluded even by the very government department that wants to see proof in funding applications that programme beneficiaries have been part of project planning.

Since then, a collaborative effort has been launched – with mixed success – to create a city shelter that could accommodate the people who used to sleep there. The government Department involved agreed to invest

in the pilot phase at least. However, since the relocation of the homeless community to this shelter, a new homeless population has slowly found its way to the same location. Piecemeal responses to large numbers of people who are practically excluded from society will not facilitate long-term change.

3.4 Investment and Disinvestment

In order to secure foreign investments, local authorities want to "create a climate for investment". Some of the previously mentioned examples illustrated the dislocation of vulnerable people who do not help to create the "good image" necessary to influence potential investors.

However, there is also the reality of local disinvestment. There is a direct relationship between the explosion of new suburban shopping malls in the east of Pretoria and the vacant shops and buildings in the inner city. After 1994, Banks redlined large parts of the inner city of Pretoria and refused to provide finance. Often these disinvestments had devastating effects on local neighbourhoods. Only recently has this started to change rather slowly.

The other reality is that even those businesses that remain in the city often are not locally rooted and locally owned. As a result, all the profit filters out to wealthier suburbs, minimising the possibility of a sustainable local economy.

Regarding government investment into areas such as housing, current policies and practices often perpetuate past urban spatial arrangements. The cheapest housing is built furthest away from real economic access. And the so-called social housing sector struggles to provide housing for the poorest inner-city people due to rigid and inflexible policy frameworks, or models of social housing that are not necessarily contextually appropriate.

We have created a church-based social housing company in Pretoria. Because we refuse to pay our staff salaries in line with those paid by other social housing groups and the private sector, we are told that we are undercutting the market. These groups seem to think that it is more important to uphold the market than to increase access to housing for the poor. Therefore, in order to sustain unrealistic salary packages in the social housing sector the cost of newly developed housing units are unaffordable for the poorest sectors of the community. The very sector that aims to give the poor access to housing is itself anti-poor.

Depending on the perspective, local informal economies in places such as Marabastad could be seen either as an asset/investment in the inner city, or as a liability that will prevent so-called "real" investments and therefore has to be removed. Often, it is a matter of political will. The Warwick Junction in Durban represents an approach where the informal economy has

been recognised for the asset it is. Informal traders were well integrated into an urban regeneration plan for that part of the city, enhancing the development of a vibrant African inner city. Meanwhile, the Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality maintains the soulless city that Pretoria is often portrayed to be.

3.5 Public-Private Partnerships – but where is the community?

Processes such as those described above, often take control away from local people and place it in the hands of politicians, technocrats and corporations who decide for us how we should be and live in our local neighbourhoods.

The mechanism often used is that of public-private partnerships at the expense of the so-called third sector that is community groups, non-profit organisations, churches, and so forth. The community is often co-opted or assumed into the "private" part of partnerships, despite its values, focus and interests being significantly different.

Although in the official jargon of so-called developmental local government there is public participation, the real decisions are mostly taken by the economic and political powers. When the people of Marabastad were moved, no public participation process was followed and no community-based input was considered. (This was an example of power from outside versus power from within; big systems deciding for small places).

That is why it is so important for the little stories and the tall stories of communities to be uncovered and told so that we can begin to imagine an alternative scenario of what could possibly happen.

The Methodist Church in Britain has made a strong case by saying to local government, "Unless you take us seriously and work in partnership with us because we have street credibility, our cities will never change". John Vincent (2000:167) refers to this report saying that the long-term economic vitality of inner-city areas depends on how well local government works with local communities, because the seeds for regeneration and development that are inclusive and liberating are already there.

4. Critical Moments in an alternative Christian spatial praxis

In urban contexts of spatial contestation, how should faith communities, or people of faith, relate their faith appropriately? I would like to suggest the following critical Moments be used to create an alternative Christian spatial praxis:

1) *Alternative* to Christian engagement that just maintains the status quo and is ignorant about urban political and spatial dynamics.

2) *Spatial* in its deliberate engagement with the processes that define and determine spatial dynamics and patterns in local neighbourhoods

3) *Christian* by relating the faith of local communities to their experiences of spatial contestation, and by retrieving the memories of the historic journeys and struggles of God's people as journeys between land and landlessness, and

4) *Intentional* about exploring alternatives to spatial, economic and other exclusions.

I suggest a Christian spatial praxis that is rooted in an economics of community and sharing and a politics of justice. This is a deliberate alternative to an economics of exclusion and a politics of oppression that mobilise various sophisticated and unsophisticated mechanisms for preserving urban spaces for people "like us" and from the "other" whoever the "other" might be. Usually they are poor, homeless, refugees, asylum-seekers, informal traders, people with chronic mental illness, or any similar categories that are systematically planned to be removed from view.

4.1 Creating a presence

The incarnation of Jesus was essentially a spatial strategy of transferring himself into the brokenness of our world and eventually dying in that space where robbers and lepers became outcasts of society. A Christian spatial praxis would deliberately seek to become present in communities and places where space is contested. Besides being present in our church buildings and our ministers walking around wearing clerical collars, it will include participation in public meetings, in the struggles of daily living, in understanding those processes that shape the local urban fabric.

I recently received a letter from a homeless man containing suggestions of things we can do together to address homelessness. He started the letter by saying he is not at all sure whether he should address the letter to the Church because to him the Church is now the African National Congress (ANC) at prayer. (At present, the ANC is the democratically elected ruling party in South Africa; in the past, under an apartheid government, the Dutch Reformed Church was known as the National Party at prayer). Whether he is right or wrong, the questions are, where do we create a presence, how, and with whom? Are we seen to be on the side of those who have the power to create islands of exclusion at the expense of those who lack access to space that will create sustainable and healthy livelihoods? Or can we be trusted to stand with those who are most vulnerable?

For us to resist the new gods, we first have to be present with the people that are excluded by these gods. Not so much for their sakes, but for us as a Church to hear their voices, to be converted, and to understand.

The African-American scholar Belle Hooks (1990:143) speaks of "choosing the margin as a space of radical openness". It is a place in

solidarity with oppressed and excluded people, but it is also a place intentionally chosen to be in; it is a place of resistance and a place of creative and "radical openness and possibility" (Soja 1996:192). Or, as Belle Hooks (1990:152) herself says – the margin is "the inclusive space where we recover ourselves, where we move in solidarity to erase the category coloniser/colonized. Marginality is the space of resistance. Enter that space. Let us meet there."

Unless the poor are free, the call to opt for the poor has not gone away. The need for liberation still remains and the need for the Church to choose the margins needs to be affirmed. Only in choosing this space would the global and local expressions of the Church be able to offer resistance and creative alternatives not only to globalisation but also to local urban renewal programmes that exclude, privatise and criminalise. As long as we remain part of the dominant discourse, we will find it difficult to resist and to take the lead.

The Catholic author Nicholas Boyle (1998:91-92) suggests that the global Church in our global times, "need(s) to draw its moral strength not from its international presence but from its claim to represent people as they are locally and distinct from the worldwide ramifications of their existence as participants in the global market".

As Church, we need to create space where the stories alternative to the grand narratives of the market can be heard. Boyle speaks of these as "the little narratives of the victims of the grand process, the stories of what the big new world is squeezing out or ignoring, they will be told on the small scale and full of details, which the new world will dismiss as superficial and inessential".

These little stories, discovered and gathered as we maintain a presence in "small" places, need to be told and re-told as the alternative stories, as the stories of resistance that remind us that all is not OK with the processes of globalisation. Once we start to recover the little stories of struggle and exclusion but also of resistance and hope, we will find in these the seeds of the alternative community of the household of God. Practically speaking, it simply means being in places where we can speak face to face to the single mother who has just been evicted, to the low-income families who heard that a new road is going to replace their apartment building and they have to find an alternative (that often does not exist), to the homeless person or informal trader that always has to move on to the next possible space that will provide safe shelter for living and earning a meagre income.

It also means that our very presence as a Church and the way in which we use and develop our spaces should reflect the values and vision of which we speak.

4.2 Confronting death

Johan van Zyl suggested that this is not a battle, but a war. And in wars, people die. And indeed people are dying. Urban spatial and economic exclusions lead to social, emotional, economic, and even physical death. When I first delivered this paper, someone from a peace movement found the language of contest and war in my paper disturbing. However, if there is a contest or a war we should not deny it. How we respond to it is another issue.

As we become present enough to be confronted by this, we first have to confront death in our own hearts – the death of our own ignorance; our apathy; our intellectual captivity; the death of our own inability to transcend the hopeless reality around us with clear vision; the death of fatigue as we engage in the contest ourselves. But we also need to allow the voices of death to confront the Church and its captivity, the Church and its complacency in the face of contestation.

Only once we acknowledge the death in our midst, and confront the numbness of our own souls can the Spirit start to breathe into us visions of something different. While we are numb, we cannot hear the creative Spirit. While we are in the mainstream, we miss out on the creativity of the margins.

Isaiah names the death in the city. In chapter 5 verse 8, he says, "You buy more houses and fields and add to those you already have. Soon there will be nowhere for anyone else to live, and you alone will live in the land". Communities of faith should be discerning communities in the midst of contested spaces – to read the signs, to tell the truth, to name death. The picture of Isaiah 5 is the picture of urban realities everywhere in the world, where land and space are monopolised by some at the expense of the urban poor. In our preaching and social action, in the media and our private conversations, we should name death as it is dealt by exclusionary spatial practices and policies.

4.3 Allowing an alternative imagination

But the prophets also imagined something different and better, offering hope where it now only sees despair. And so later on in Isaiah 65, we are introduced to a vision of people building houses and living in them, people sharing the profits of their labour, children and old people enjoying healthy lives, and enemies living reconciled lives together.

An alternative Christian praxis has the pastoral task of nurturing among our people a new imagination (cf. Brueggemann) and discovering new strategies for urban living, standing in the sign of Jesus' abundance (John 10:10). Sharon Zukin (1996:241) says, "The power to impose a visual frame also suggests new political strategies". As churches, we need to

present new visual frames, visions, and dreams of the kind of community we believe God desires. And these visions must help provide new mission strategies as well as political, economic and spatial strategies to redeem the space of the city for its people.

We need new visions. We need new images and metaphors. We need to work hard for Lazarus and the rich man to sit at the same table to eat. The British urban theologian John Vincent (2000:53; 165) speaks of the "Messianic banquet" as a key concept in their work in Sheffield, an image drawing them towards the new possibilities. Eating plays a central role in whatever they do, sharing a meal or having a fundraising lunch or business breakfast. His one colleague speaks of "food sharing theology" – like Jesus who broke bread and said, "eat, this is my body" so too we will do well to create those points of real human connection in our communities where we will share bread and not crumbs, where we will overthrow tables that are exclusive and just for the rich, where we will be subversive in occupying spaces that the market dictated for exclusive uses.

This entails not just "pie in the sky"- visioning of what could be, but very practical and viable strategies and proposals that could be implemented to demonstrate the alternatives to dominant urban spatial processes. It requires us to engage with at-risk communities, low-income families, and homeless people in dialogue with city planners and policy makers, so that together we can start to carve out visions of what could be.

4.4 Affirming community; seeking the common good

Another critical Moment in creating an alternative Christian praxis is to challenge the kind of faith that is privatised. We have to make people understand that what we do affects others and what others do, affects us. We are interdependent. We belong to the same human community. And these assertions need to be translated into a praxis that engages exclusive and commodified spaces, economic exclusion mechanisms of social control that push out the poor, xenophobia, racism, and classism.

Often those who develop policy, manage urban spaces, and are steering private sector developments are also members of faith communities, yet their faith and their professional lives and practices are entirely separate. We have to start conversations that affirm that we all actually belong together, that our faith belongs to our daily lives and that the processes of our cities – how we renew urban areas, where and how we develop housing, our budget priorities – are actually religious, spiritual or theological issues because they relate to our values.

As communities of faith, we need to embrace and nurture a vision for the common good. That means we simply cannot allow the narrow profit interests of some or power interests of others destroy the fabric of whole

communities. And we have to recover the notion that Biblical faith is indeed a communal faith.

4.5 Management of local resources

In 1993, Walter Brueggemann wrote a little book entitled *Using God's resources wisely: Isaiah and urban possibility.* Citizenship is about participating in the management of the city. And if we believe what we confess when we say that the earth is God's and everything in it, then part of our challenge as citizens of the city is to make sure that the resources of the city that belong to God will be managed in ways that are equal and just.

If we believe that we are interdependent in the human community, we have to find ways to make sure that the local resources of God are shared fairly within this community.

- We have to find ways to influence the annual budget of our city.
- We have to develop the tools to analyse local government spending and challenge it where necessary.
- We have to work with communities to break free from the oppression of debt. The City of Tshwane has debt of R16 billion.
- We have to be creative about vacant land and buildings and how to use them to achieve socio-economic transformation.

This is part of the new imagination. Finding ways to facilitate or enhance spatial justice through how resources are distributed, whether it is to get banks to change the practice of redlining into reinvestment; public buildings being retained for the common good as affordable housing, social or recreational purposes, etc.), instead of being sold off to the highest bidder, and budgets being allocated for the creation of decent public open spaces in poor neighbourhoods. Since the earth is God's and everything in it, all aspects of urban spatial dynamics need to be interrogated in terms how best God wants his people to live humanely and with dignity.

Perhaps a good place to start would be for the Church to model an alternative way of using resources through how it invests its land, property skills, and finances into restructured spatial relationships. Examples could be the creation of diverse housing options on church land; redesigning church buildings to include housing; facilitating family housing for domestic workers in suburban areas to allow them to live closer to work; opening church facilities as homeless shelters; doing an audit of church land and developing strategies for reinvesting it; pooling church financial resources to start micro-finance institutions for low-income housing finance; investing professional skill voluntarily to provide technical assistance to communities wanting to do housing; purchasing abandoned urban buildings and refurbishing them for small enterprise development, art co-operatives, recreational facilities.

4.6 Creating models and processes as we seek to stand with the poor

A critical part of an alternative Christian praxis is that we ourselves – as communities of faith – will be involved in creating the kinds of models, processes, and signs for which we are advocating. I alluded to this in the previous paragraph. It is problematic for us to challenge the governments and corporations of the world without being able to offer alternative models and signs of where those models have been effectively implemented.

City spaces are "vital crucibles of power ... around which theories (and models [my insertion]) of justice and 'radically open' empowerment are (*can be* [my italics]) constructed" (Merrifield and Swyngedouw 1996:13, in reference to Henri Lefebvre).

Henri Lefebvre indicated that any strategy of empowerment would include a spatial strategy, "a struggle not just *in* but *for* space, a reconquest of spaces expressive of lived difference, of desire, of body" (reference by Merrifield and Swyngedouw 1996:13).

We need to create the kinds of models that will give concrete expression to the vision of prophets like Zechariah who saw public spaces where old men and women could walk, and streets where girls and boys will be playing because the city belongs to all its people. This could take the form of innovative housing developments bringing together people of different income levels and backgrounds; brokering land or property where small enterprise or informal trade can be facilitated in the midst of and as part of flourishing communities; creating accessible and affordable recreational and cultural spaces where the poor can also enjoy the beauty of the city.

In the case of our housing company, thus far two churches have offered their church properties to be redeveloped in a way that retains the worship space and other spaces for regular church activities, but at the same time allows for redevelopment to include affordable and special needs housing for people normally excluded from housing provision.

4.7 Creating increased access to sources of power

John Friedmann (1992) suggests that empowerment is about creating access to the following eight bases of social power: defensible life space, disposable income, finance, social networks, social organisation, information, knowledge and skills, and spare time.

In creating alternative models, part of our work is to help facilitate access to those sources of social power that will help people to have greater quality of life. And we can do that either through creating access ourselves in partnership with communities, or through lobbying access with local

authorities; however, we need to have that as a clear goal and a clear programme of action.

Ensuring access for all people on different steps of the housing ladder to what is called "defensible life space" clearly should be part of a Christian spatial praxis. But creating access to defensible life space does not have to happen in isolation from some of the other sources of power that Friedmann mentions. We need to develop comprehensive strategies that could enhance sustainable livelihoods. Greater access to finance would allow people to access their own housing. Access to a disposable income would enable people to choose from diverse housing options. Access to information would enable people to explore housing subsidies that are available, but unknown to them.. Our strategies to outwit those that want "to live on the land alone" should be very practical, ranging from information, to housing finance, to spatial reclamation, to housing development.

As we work with others to create housing options closer to job opportunities, we also address Friedmann's interesting source of power that he calls spare time. Gavin Taylor our friend and colleague who is the local Methodist Bishop, suggests that the greatest problem of poverty is that it takes all your time. Contrary to popular opinion that the poor has lots of time because they do not work, the reverse is true. The queues to find a job, the wait at the public hospital, the wait for public transport to get from your fringe city to the place where jobs are, indeed take all your time.

We were surprised at the outcome of a small housing development we did in partnership with a local church on their property. We created tiny units of 10 square metres with a communal kitchen and bathroom facilities. It was intended to offer a real foothold into the city so that people could move on quickly. We found that many stayed on much longer. The combination of fast access to their jobs, and housing being embedded in a supportive community were more attractive to the end-users than we could ever have foreseen.

In addition to the eight bases of power Friedmann suggests, I thought that spirituality and cultural resources should be regarded as two additional bases of power or empowerment. To my mind, when many of the other resources are unavailable, these two resources often sustain people until such time as they can slowly access other resources or livelihood that are more material or physical. Friedmann confirmed this in a private electronic conversation saying this was indeed his experience in relation to the indigenous peoples of North America, who often retrieved cultural and spiritual resources to sustain life under very difficult circumstances. For many, the concept of land is dear to their spiritual or cultural beliefs. Retrieving the wisdom they have on issues of land and space could be an important strategy as we seek greater spatial justice.

4.8 Advocating for life (resistance; public participation; alternative proposals; discipleship)

Once we create models of best practice (see section 4.6) we no longer advocate in a vacuum. We know alternatives are possible. I want to suggest four areas of focus for our advocacy work:

 1) *Resistance*. We have to learn how to resist that which is not helpful to our communities, whether it is a new policy, programme or development project. This should be done only after proper assessment of the negative impact on the community and with them ensuring our facts are properly established.

 2) *Public participation*. Communities of faith need to engage in public participation processes, constructively contributing towards policy and planning processes and trying to ensure that local communities have greater ownership and a real voice in decision-making about local places. At the same time, we have to be realistic in realising that public participation is not always real; often it is a smoke screen for the sake of political correctness. Also, there are community leaders who are not honest representatives of their communities. Rather, they are involved in processes to look out for their own interests. We have to lose our naïve notions of participation and community, and learn to be as shrewd as the serpent.

 3) *Alternative proposals*. What is often impressive about Brazilian social movements is the level at which they engage professionals from different fields to support them in developing well-informed alternative proposals. It is one thing to object, but another to present viable alternatives based on prior experience and best practice. Communities of faith often have in them some of the best technical expertise in the field of spatial land or housing concerns. Drawing upon their knowledge is as yet an under utilised asset.

 4) *Discipleship*. A central part of our advocacy programme should be the re-evangelisation (or discipleship) of those in our faith communities. It is a great challenge to help business people, government officials, and politicians to relate their faith to their work; to relate the subversive gospel that affirmed the poor to the decisions they make in their boardrooms and council chambers; to consider the consequences of their spatial decisions and actions on vulnerable members of the community. It is the challenge to get beyond my divided self and be able to distinguish between my soul (my inner life and faith experience) and my role (my public life and profession).

4.9 Going beyond city-church dichotomies: allowing the city in the church, allowing the church in the city

Not only do we have to create a presence in the city, but we have to allow the city to become more present in our churches to re-create our "sacred" spaces. We need to bring issues of spatial exclusion, displacement, homelessness, HIV and AIDS, violence and crime, corruption, and poverty into the liturgy. When we celebrate Holy Communion and break bread, it should be symbolic of all the different ways in which we will share our lives economically and otherwise with the poor of the city.

We need to develop rituals born out of our spatial and other experiences on the city streets. What originally drew me to Gutierrez was how he rooted his theological reflection first of all in a lived faith, in a deep spirituality, in a real quest for what it means to follow Jesus. We could develop liturgies that speak specifically to issues of land and housing, public open spaces, or the lack of them, abandonment and beauty, always asking how best to follow Jesus in relation to these various issues.

Simultaneously, we could imagine public liturgies that link faith and the city. Recently on Palm Sunday, about 200 people from different churches walked in the streets carrying palm branches and posters speaking about God's concern for the city, our concern about the drugs on our streets, the closure of our clinic, limited access to our public park. It became a public ritual, linking faith to the streets and asking questions that implied we are part of the answer, as much as the city authorities and citizens of the city in general.

Our liturgies and rituals should help create awareness within the Church and outside, they should foster responsible citizenship for the common good, they should help locate suffering and imagine resurrection of the streets, spaces, people and buildings.

4.10 Participation in broader movements/partnerships of solidarity

Sufficient local stories, models, and seeds connected to each other, might help to create the kind of movements that we need to resist death.

Edward Soja (1996:191) professor of urban planning suggests a "politics of justice that is relational, contextualised, situationally specific, and achievable primarily through strategic coalitions that confront and redirect the social, spatial and historical workings of power". We need to form coalitions of solidarity, both locally and globally, to resist, to imagine, and to create something new.

Susan Fainstein (1996:34) likewise refers to David Harvey who said, "Social transformation emanates from a coalition of people with a shared moral opposition in opposition to various forms of oppression".

In 2000, at an Urban Convocation arranged by the Claremont School of Theology, it was stressed by speakers such as sociologist Saskia Sassens and Anglican urban theologian Andrew Davey that the global nature of the Church must not be underestimated in its ability to play a crucial role in addressing the concerns we have regarding some of the effects of the global economy, and in proposing alternatives where exclusion and death were the results. Stanley Hauerwas (2000:44) also speaks of the potential role that the Church as an international agency could play in response to the global market, not only in curbing the devastating effects locally, but also in offering alternatives.

There seems to be a correlation between the workings of the global market and the shaping of local urban spaces. The absence of the grass-roots Church (at least in South Africa) from movements such as the World Social Forum, where alternative economies are explored, or even the World Summit should be of concern. And perhaps local faith-based movements need to be nurtured who are about the mission of Jesus, but simultaneously are more intentional about participating in the kind of global movements that are resisting exclusionary politics and economics.

Participation in global social movements will mean collecting stories of hope and being changed by them, sharing how communities are shaping their own spaces in radically inclusive ways, learning how communities are creating local economies, and hearing of the development of local mechanisms that are fostering high levels of self-reliance. But at the same time, it will mean standing in solidarity with all others who are confronting exclusive and death-dealing global powers and policies, and proposing and modelling alternatives.

5. Towards an economics of community and a politics of justice: reflections on the journey of the Tshwane Leadership Foundation

I suggested ten Moments of an alternative Christian spatial praxis, but these Moments are really to be rooted in an alternative economic and political imagination. Instead of an economics of exclusion and affluence, our faith and actions should envision an economics of community and deep sharing, expressed in alternative economic arrangements both locally and globally. Instead of a politics of exclusion and oppression, our faith and actions should envision a politics of justice and fair access for all expressed in radical participation of people in shaping their own lives and the futures of their neighbourhoods.

An economics of community and a politics of justice will enhance an ecology of sustenance, ensuring that the way in which we use and develop space would contribute to future generations and their wellbeing, whilst at the same time nurturing the earth and doing justice to it.

Of course, such a vision would have profound spatial implications. Now Lazarus and the rich man will sit at the same table and share their resources and gifts. Sitting at the same table would imply a prior shift in spatial economics and politics that would allow for people as different as Lazarus and the rich man to share space, to live on the same block, both to have access to housing options suitable to their incomes in proximity to their places of work and recreation.

In reference to this parable, the African-American ethicist Theodore Walker speaks of an ethics of crumbs as opposed to an ethics of breaking bread. And he refers to breaking bread in a symbolic way as all the different ways in which we as church will share our lives and resources to create housing, and economic opportunity, and literacy programmes, and food relief in partnership with those we meet on our journey.

Both Jim Wallis (1994:179-185) and John Cobb (1992:72-77) suggest an economics of community, which is based "on the assumption that we are interdependent and therefore we cannot engage in individual activity that will destroy the common good" (De Beer 1998:361). The wellbeing of individuals and communities are the yardstick in communal thinking about economics, and the most vulnerable among us are a further "factor in evaluating the morality of our economic activity and ideology" (De Beer 1998:362).

5.1 Spatial dimensions in the work of the Tshwane Leadership Foundation

The Tshwane Leadership Foundation is an ecumenical community foundation in the inner city of Pretoria, South Africa. In 1993, six inner-city churches formed a partnership that became their vehicle for social ministry and investment in an inner city that has undergone profound racial and socio-political changes.

The work of the Foundation has always explored notions of community and justice, and nowhere is this better expressed than in the contest for inner-city space. This is where people are included or excluded, where community is affirmed or destroyed, where justice is done or people denied their rights.

It will suffice to introduce the following three Moments in the journey of the Foundation that relate to the spatial dimensions of its work as examples of one faith-based community's attempt to make sense of spatial challenges. It is by no means a comprehensive case study of the work of the Foundation, neither is it suggested as an answer to the spatial challenges faced by urban communities.

5.1 Partnerships

In 1993, the Foundation started as a partnership of inner-city churches then known as Pretoria Community Ministries (PCM). Starting with no

*resources or blueprint, the intention was to create an intentional presence
outside the walls of the Church among the most vulnerable people and
communities of the inner city.*

> ➢ Without incarnating ourselves in solidarity with those who become
>   the victims of spatial contestation, we will not be in a position to learn
>   about their marginalisation and to become their partners in a quest for
>   spatial equity and justice.
> ➢ Any Christian spatial praxis that is serious about engaging the powers
>   that confront inclusive spatial arrangements will have to consider
>   forming coalitions and partnerships both ecumenically and with
>   broader civil society.

5.2 Challenges

*Throughout the years, the Foundation faced the following specific
challenge:*

1. There was no non-racial facility in the city for homeless women.
2. Under-age children ended up on the streets, and in child prostitution.
3. Adult homeless people were isolated members of the community and
   harassed on the streets.
4. Informal traders were chased around the city in their attempt to
   create a simple livelihood.
5. Inner-city housing was at risk: subsidised housing was demolished to
   make way for new roads; vacant office buildings or rental apartments
   were taken over by slumlords who exploited tenants; overcrowding
   was the order of the day; and the demand for affordable housing
   closer to concentrated employment opportunities grew daily.
6. In the early 1990's, banks disinvested from the city writing off local
   spaces and contributing to decay through their policies and practices
   of redlining.
7. Since 2004, banks and national government departments have been
   reinvesting, pushing up costs of land and property in the same
   spaces, leading to gentrification and increasingly limited access to
   those with low incomes.
8. The central park in the city – Burgers Park – is a contested space
   between private sector and community interests and the local
   politician is torn between the two.
9. Social and recreational amenities in the neighbourhoods of Berea
   and Burgers Park are virtually non-existent for the 20 000 residents,
   the majority of which are youth and students.
10. The neighbourhood of Salvokop consists of 174 rental houses owned
    by a single state-owned company. The legal tenants are keen to own

their houses but weaken their case by subletting accommodation that leads to overcrowding and the growing number of illegal structures in backyards. Will the landlord sell the land and displace the current population in its entirety? Or will innovative ways be found to regenerate this neighbourhood whilst at the same time including the tenants? What will happen to the illegal residents?

Our faith needs to be expressed in action and our love in deed. Incarnating itself in the communities of the inner city, the Foundation was introduced to the concerns above and had to discern appropriate responses. A number of strategic processes developed in response.

5.3 Development of five strategic responses

The first response was to create communities of concern

The specific actions were opening a community house for women at-risk; inviting young girls into a residential community of support; creating space known as the Street Centre in one of the local churches where homeless people can be safe, can express themselves and can take the first steps towards their re-integration; creating a care facility for homeless people who are terminally ill.

Each of these communities created space for people who were marginalised to find their own voice again. In almost all these cases, abandoned or unutilised inner-city houses were converted into community houses. And in at least two cases, this then sparked a bigger vision for the neighbourhood in which they were located.

Often people who came through these communities were ready to take the next step into independent living. But the market did not provide inner-city housing that was both affordable and decent.

➢ Nurturing local communities are an important base for engaging in spatial contestation.

➢ Creating intentional communities of care is a strategy to overcome spatial exclusion.

The second response was to create a caring housing institution

Yeast City Housing became the first social housing association in the City of Tshwane owned by the churches of the inner city and committed to developing and managing secure, decent and affordable housing, focusing on low-income people and people at risk.

Yeast is committed to create more than shelter, building lives and communities through its provision of shelter. It faces many challenges related to lack of funds, management problems, on-going maintenance, accessing land and property for housing development, and the trap of institutionalism. But it also offers signs of hope to build upon.

Today, this company manages 297 rental units ranging from transitional, communal, and special-needs housing to self-contained family units. We are in the process of preparing the development of another 500-800 units that will help convert abandoned or vacant inner-city spaces into viable neighbourhoods, inclusive of low-income people and those with special housing needs.

One of the partners with whom Yeast developed a joint housing project is the City Methodist Mission. In an incredible way, they converted their property to accommodate worship space, a conference centre, a 27-unit communal housing project, a day-care centre for 40 children, an AIDS clinic and care centre, as well as employing 30 people in six different small enterprises. Theirs is an amazing example of the recycling of local space in a way that is life-giving, inclusive, and enhances urban beauty, viability, and a strong sense of community.

➢ This became a forum in which inner-city residents and suburban professionals could come together to make housing in the city work, sharing resources innovatively and creating new tables upon which to share.

➢ In each housing development, local space is assigned with new value and meaning that is often quite different from the mainstream value or meaning attached to it.

➢ Every unit represents a family who otherwise would not have access to housing in the proximity of their work places. These families often use the opportunity to consolidate their lives and social status, and access new opportunities for them and for their children.

➢ Each development represents space that is inclusive of the poor. Each development in a small way therefore is a subversive act against spatial design that excludes the majority of the city's residents.

➢ The housing provided contributes to beautifying the city, arguing that housing for people with lower incomes does not have to be ugly. It suggests that ethics and aesthetics belong together. In the first few years of operations, besides providing increased access for low-income people, Yeast has brokered an investment of R18 million into new physical infrastructure. It is planning to invest another R80 million over the next five years.

➢ Economic opportunities are available both in that families are now able to consolidate their lives and that they have secure tenure. In addition, there is the possibility of creating small local enterprises complementary to the housing, such as day-care facilities, supermarkets, and laundries.

The third response was the creation of a dedicated business unit

Tshepo Enterprises helps to connect homeless people to skills and sustainable employment. It facilitates two local enterprises upgrading un-utilised urban space to provide local services and local jobs.

In recent months, Tshepo was restructured to focus more specifically on creating an income-generating enterprise, the profit of which will be reinvested in local social development. In the process, old inner-city property might be purchased, redeveloped and utilised in ways that will create local employment, redistribute profit locally, and re-weave the urban fabric in ways that enhance both urban beauty and viability.

The woman who manages the laundry lives in one of Yeast's housing projects. Her rent pays the salary of a cleaner. The cleaner has a child in the day-care centre run by the Foundation. And the fee for the child's day care will go towards paying the salary of the teacher who lives in one of Yeast's other buildings. If there is profit in the laundry, it goes towards either strengthening the laundry itself, or towards creating another small enterprise. Most conventional inner-city businesses take the profit home with them after 5pm, thus minimising the value for the neighbourhoods in which they originally generated it.

Future challenges include exploring locally owned financial mechanisms such as community banks, or credit unions so as to institutionalise self-reliance in the local community even further.

> ➢ Tshepo has sown the seeds of an economics of community in which local enterprise will be developed and the profit redistributed and multiplied in the local community, either in cash for services, or in reinvestment into other social programmes.
> ➢ Local communities have the ability not only to organise themselves in ways that could facilitate the economic empowerment of individuals and neighbourhoods, but in ways that build local community and sustainability.

The fourth response is continuously to organise towards being a movement

The Foundation participates in local community and resident forums where local issues are highlighted and responses debated. It created a Consortium for civil society agencies, building capacity for citizens' participation in urban planning and management processes, and fostering partnership between different civil society initiatives. The Consortium facilitated a training programme of 20 inner-city leaders. The intervention led to an action plan being developed for the Berea-Burgers Park neighbourhood, which consists of a strategy for its physical regeneration that includes people who are socio-economically excluded and also the various uses that make for a healthy neighbourhood. It recognises the need to build stronger local coalitions to network more intentionally with advocacy planning groups nation-wide, to participate in policy debates and inputs, and to

connect with similar communities and movements globally to be part of the imagination of global alternatives.

> ➢ The contest for space requires broad-based partnerships and coalitions going beyond our religious and local affiliations. We need to learn the skills of organising and relating to local and global social movements.

> ➢ We need to become more sophisticated as communities of faith, drawing upon the wealth of technical resources latent in our communities, in developing plans and proposals aligned to an alternative imagination of what our neighbourhoods could look like. This would enhance our advocacy and policy work, demonstrating that it is indeed well informed and not merely whims of passion.

The fifth response was to recover its rootedness in the local Church

Often, there was disconnection between the presence, solidarities, and engagement of the Foundation and the extent to which its partner/parent churches understood or actively supported it. In 2006, it resolved to strengthen the original partnership of churches, exploring together what the relationship between the Foundation and the churches should be 14 years since its birth.

> ➢ Together, the local churches that "own" the Foundation have managed to sustain its presence in inner-city spaces. It represents a way of dealing with urban space that is either enhancing an economics of community and a politics of justice, or perpetuating exclusion and oppression intentionally or (mostly) unintentionally.

> ➢ The local churches as key partners and companions of the Foundation could play a profoundly prophetic role in how it re-imagines and re-stories its space in relation to urban marginality.

> ➢ The local churches as liturgical spaces could help shape a vision of urban space as a gift to be shared, instead of a commodity to be owned, or a threat to be feared.

Space is about power; it is about economic access; it is about the soul of the city. How we use inner-city space is a reflection of our exclusion/inclusion, individualism/community, and oppression/justice. External spatial expressions speak loudly about the condition of the inner soul.

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