Notes

1. *Jewel and the Catch* is available from the UCLA Film and Television Archive's Outfest Legacy Collection.

2. Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code is the most common section under which nonprofit organizations file for tax-exempt status. For this reason, nonprofit organizations are often referred to as 501(c)(3) organizations.

3. Huarpe is a native tribe from the Cuyo (northwest) area of Argentina known for agricultural skills.

4. *Acrylics Don't Smell!* is not available for screening.

5. Guerilla filmmaking is associated with no-budget filmmakers who bypass any formal production arrangements, such as securing locations and permits.

6. *The Man in White* is available directly from the filmmaker.

7. Santeria is a religion that combines certain traditional African religious beliefs and some Roman Catholic ceremonies.

8. bell hooks, "Artistic Integrity: Race and Accountability," in *Reel to Real: Race, Sex, and Class at the Movies* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 69.

9. Ibid., 70.

10. *The Appointment* is distributed by Urban Entertainment (Los Angeles).

11. *Ernesto* is distributed by the Partnership for a Drug-Free America (New York).

12. Festival listings are available on the Web or can be found in resource books such as *The Ultimate Film Festival Survival Guide*, by Chris Gore, or *The Film Festival Guide*, by Adam Langer.

13. *Ocean Waves* is available directly from the filmmaker.

14. *La Guerra Que No Fue* (*The War that Never Was*) is distributed by OUAT! Media (Toronto, Canada) and VOY Pictures (Los Angeles).

15. Michelle O'Donnell, "Urban Tactics: Sweet Business; Bitter Feud," *New York Times*, September 22, 2002.

16. Søren Kierkegaard was a nineteenth-century Danish philosopher.

CHAPTER 5 *Indigenism, (In)Visibility*

NOTES ON MIGRATORY FILM

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Indigenous identities can unsettle a host of unlikely bedfellows, from globalizing corporate forces and nationalistic agendas to oppositional political schemes. Since 1978, my independently produced films and videos have consistently focused on local crises in which indigenous cultures emerged as unwanted houseguests for some coexistent, dominant culture. Indigenism, that is, proved unruly for those on both the political right and the left. And this has probably been a good thing, or at least a useful lesson, for anyone who produces cross-cultural films or is interested in alternative media and political change. In this chapter, I discuss two pressure points that have recurred in five of the films I have produced: first, the ways that "indigenism" is repeatedly put up for grabs and hijacked as a free-floating signifier, and second, the ways in which this free-floating aura has come back to bite the hands of those who seek to appropriate or adopt indigenism as their own identity or brand.[1] All of my creative works have centered on cultural investigations of one sort or another, and most have focused, at least in part, on either the systematic, strategic erasure of indigenous identity or the unruly tactical resuscitation of indigenous identity.

Although initially focused on cross-cultural migration issues and migrancy themes, five of my films—*Personas Desplazadas: The Miskito Indian Refugees* (1983), *Kuije Kanan: Managalase Tattooing* (1985), *Freak Street to Goa: Immigrants on the Rajpath* (1989), *Amor Vegetal: Our Harvest* (1998), and *Rancho California (por favor)* (2002)—ended up engaging systemic interconnections between some form of indigenous visibility (deployment) and indigenous invisibility (erasure). Acknowledging that the documentary gaze traditionally renders others in an objectifying, colonizing fashion, my approach has always been to consider my own complicity and ideological baggage when moving into any local dialogue or conflict. Blanket critical or theoretical prohibitions against representing the other are typically offered from

positions of academic privilege. Most of these intellectual taboos ignore the sad fact that othering habits frequently emerge as integral parts of local sociopolitical systems and conflicts. In most of these cross-cultural quagmires, indigenism is rarely evident in any pure, isolable form or accessible to the filmmaker in a stable or clean state. Filmmakers, academics, and activists owe it to themselves and their constituents to more carefully pick apart the layers of outside interests that commonly broach, exploit, and manage indigenous racial identities in public.

Given the sometimes thick interconnections across cultures in which indigenism is an issue, my response is to try to unpack the local and regional systems of social logic (and illogic) that promote the idea of the indigenous "problem" as innate or ultimately unsolvable. Such regional systems regularly grant indigenous groups forms of insularity that fit easily within the dominant social order, even as they efface more unruly aspects of indigenism. Before closely considering this erasure/performance dynamic in more detail in two films, I would like to briefly describe the place of race and indigenous identity in two of my earlier documentaries, *Kuije Kanan: Managalase Tattooing* (25 min., filmed 1984, released 1985, 2005), and *Freak Street to Goa: Immigrants on the Rajpath* (60 min.; filmed 1980, 1986; released 1989–1994).[2]

Managalase village elder demonstrating how the tattoo process was traditionally accomplished, years after body tattooing was outlawed by the government in a shift to a cash economy. After this legalized cultural erasure occurred, this primary visual form of male and kinship identity was reenacted for the benefit of younger generations. Siribu village, Oro Province, Papua New Guinea, 1984. (Photograph © J. Caldwell.)

Salvaging, Resuscitating, and Posturing Indigenism

Kuije Kanan (literally "thorn-hit" in the Managalase language of northeastern Papua New Guinea) most closely engaged the traditional mode of "salvage anthropology." As an ethnographic documentary on the traditional art of body tattooing among the Managalase people, the film documented the disappearing cultural practice of tattooing by having several surviving elders in the village of Kavan demonstrate and recreate the practice for the camera. Full-body tattooing was once a central part of adolescent male initiation in the villages. Thirteen-year-old boys would be housed in the darkness of womblike huts for several months (of "gestation"), during which time their skin turned lighter (to "better show up the tattoos") and their bodies were fattened up ("to look like pigs"). At the conclusion of this symbolic pregnancy, the boys would exit the huts as part of a large ceremonial "sing-sing." Many hogs were slaughtered, and blood and red paint were splattered on the boys' bodies to emulate birth. As part of a village-wide sex role reversal, women would dress like men and play the drums of men, while adolescent girls would chase after and solicit the boy initiates.

Body tattooing and male initiation were one of the crucial ways by which Managalase society maintained and perpetuated its distinctive identities, cultural practices, and social organization. Through these practices boys left the context of the mother's family and became part of the father's family. Initiate tattooing changed sibling relations by bodily connecting each boy to his newly initiated "cousin-brothers." From the point of tattooing and initiation on, male initiates lived together in the village's common "men's house" until marriage. Attracting a suitable mate was directly tied to the power and significance of one's tattoo.

The sadly predictable outcome of contact with various European

Managalase body tattooing. Left, adult male with full body tattoo as the result of collective adolescent male initiation. Right, the inked and bloodied embossed skin and surface of a young tattoo subject during tattooing reenactment in 1984. Siribu village, Oro Province, Papua New Guinea, 1984. (Photographs in diptych © J.Caldwell.)

colonials, and then with the Australians who governed Papua New Guinea after World War II, was that body tattooing and male initiation were deemed economically and morally unacceptable. And so the process was outlawed and discontinued. A combination of interests—nearby plantations, missions, and the Australian government—prohibited the practice, mostly because it took the most valuable workers out of a community for inordinate amounts of time, and—worse yet—derailed their parents from productive work as well (since the parents now spent many months gathering food to bring to their sons in the seclusion huts). These indigenous practices, therefore, were simply not tolerated by the emerging, artificial, pan-tribal nation-state, which was determined to shift its residents to a cash economy. Nearby, coffee and sago palm oil plantations paid wages to male workers who had once survived by gardening and hunting, and Australian and Chinese trading stores gladly took back those wages in exchange for new consumer goods. The last full village initiation ritual took place in 1951, shortly before the eruption of the Mount Lamington volcano; the last partial body tattooing and initiation took place in Siribu village in the early 1960s. The reenactment, demonstration, and explanation by the surviving, fully tattooed village elders for our film took place in 1984.

Return village screening of 1984 *Kuije Kanan* body tattooing documentary for the next generation, in May 2005. Kavan village, Oro Province, Papua New Guinea. (Photograph © W. McKellin.)

The disastrous impact of the tattooing prohibition is detailed elsewhere, and is beyond the scope of this essay.[3] The tattooing and initiation prohibition turned the acutely gendered system of the Managalase upside down, and so sent both Managalase familial descent lines and land claims into disarray. Both matrilineal and patriarchal functions lost logic and agency, as the Managalase struggled to participate in a cash economy of the new nation-state of Papua New Guinea. *Kuije Kanan* offers a classic example of how unruly racial indigenism was managed and rationalized away, and how such erasures precipitate unending and unforeseen social complications. The documentary represented a simple and direct attempt to allow the surviving elders to demonstrate and resurrect this culture-defining practice for other villagers, their families, and children. More than mere cultural salvage, therefore, the project can be seen as a very provisional way in which villagers visually resuscitated indigenism to help maintain and perpetuate Managalase tribal identity in the face of the sea change of consumerism that now defined the younger generations.

Freak Street to Goa: Immigrants on the Rajpath documented the lives of Western expatriates who dropped out of First World society in the 1960s and early 1970s and migrated to India and Nepal, where they remain to this day. Indigenism emerged as a secondary theme in *Freak Street*, although this ethnographic film does not fit easily within the traditional model of anthropological preservation. After an earlier project in Nepal in 1980, we filmed the countercultural subjects of *Freak Street* in 1986–1987. Originally titled *The Migratory Patterns of Hippies on the Subcontinent*, we followed the lives of ex-hippies as they made their annual migrations overland from the mountains and valleys of Kathmandu in Nepal (where they "summered" for six months) to the white beaches of Goa in southwestern India (a former Portuguese colony where they "wintered" for six months). Although partly drawn to the zoological nature of this migratory habit, we intended to underscore several things as we began: first, that the United States was not the symbolic bastion of manifest destiny that the Reagan-Bush administration rhetorically made it out to be; second, that not all residents of underdeveloped nations were risking all to break into "fortress America"; and third, that intelligent, socially conscious Americans, sickened by the right-wing duplicity of the United States in the 1980s, were also permanently migrating in the other direction (to the Third World), and doing so productively. Indigenous racial identity became an issue in two ways. First, although many hippies were drawn to India and Nepal for religious reasons—and the possibility of adopting an Asian, Hindu, or Buddhist identity in the nearby ashrams—we discovered that many

Four of the last surviving male elders with full body tattoos from childhood adolescent initiation, in May 2005. Siribu village, Oro Province, Papua New Guinea. (Photograph © W. McKellin.)

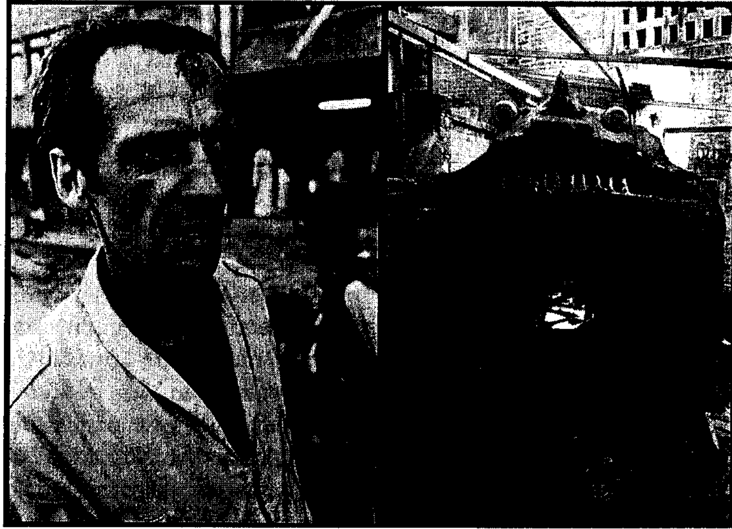
Immigrants on the Rajpath. Hippie outpost in Kimdol area of Kathmandu, Nepal. Long-time expatriate, poet, and performer Eight-Finger Eddy makes the semi-annual migration between Nepal and Goa, India, to follow the weather and to avoid imprisonment for visa violations for residency beyond six months. (Photographs in diptych © 1989, J. Caldwell.)

Indians and Nepalis pretty much considered such aspirants from the United States and Europe a joke. According to this view, a white European person's identity cannot be jettisoned, since the Hindu identity (to Indians) is not something that can be opportunistically adopted or discarded like a new set of clothes.

Most of the surviving expatriates whom we featured survived in part because they never presumed to become indigenous or Indian (unlike the squads of Western Hare Krishnas regularly arriving by plane or tourist bus). Nor did our expatriate immigrants share affinities with the American "converts" to Tibetan Buddhism at temples in Nepal, like Swayambunath (converts whom some older surviving expatriates occasionally and cynically termed trust-funders). Unlike many from the "first waves," who had died from heroin use or disappeared, the four individuals we featured were all in their late forties and fifties, had locally pursued artistic businesses or artisanal production of one sort or another, and had made peace with their forever hybrid, in-between identities.

Each gave accounts of how many earlier friends had died from the harsh conditions involved in reverse migration. Complicating matters further still, we encountered indigenous peoples living and working among the hippies (such as the Newaris in Kathmandu and the Himalayan mountains) whose cultural identities freely mixed and matched elements of Hinduism, Buddhism, meat-eating, and animism.

The Western fantasy of a pure, spiritual India seemed in retrospect like a wishful dream concocted by economically privileged but politically depressed Americans. The fact that two of my filmmaking partners, co-director John Lalnunsang Pudaite and sound recordist C. Thanthieng Khobung, were indigenous Hmar people from the restricted tribal state of Manipur in northeastern India (south of Assam, west of the Myanmar border) also complicated things. As non-Buddhist, non-Hindu Indian citizens, they offered explanatory problems for local interview subjects, who freely generalized about Hindustan identities. As we filmed, it became increasingly apparent that indigenous Indian and Nepali identities were, often as not, fanciful fabrications as much as they were embodied realities. These symbolic indigenisms, popular in all kinds of cross-cultural rhetoric, proved in hindsight to be as problematic as the pan-provincial Indian nationalism that had been invented and violently imposed by the British in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. With nationalism and colonialism apparently passé, indigenism has emerged as a favored rhetorical ploy that is used and misused by all sorts of cross-cultural



Immigrant "Woody" rode a bicycle from Germany to India and Nepal via Afghanistan. An artist and baker, Woody build a ceremonial oven-sculpture (right), which indigenous Newaris dedicated with the sacrifice of a goat, slaughtered as part of a community *Puja*. Working extensively with the Newaris and locals, Woody maintains bakeries in both Kathmandu, Nepal, and Goa, India. (Photographs in diptych © 1989, J. Caldwell.)

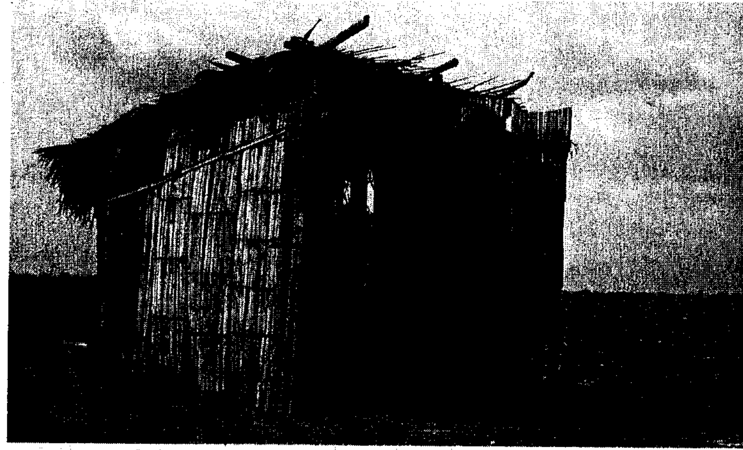
Dick Brown (left) and Jim Goodman (right), both veterans of the U.S. Army, dropped out and have permanently migrated to Nepal, India, and Southeast Asia. Dick writes and manages a Nepali band and runs a miso factory (as from-the-ground-up development work). Jim writes epic poetry (including *Mao's Long March*) and started a Nepali textile business to produce traditional "indigenous" textiles as a countermeasure against "synthetic" Western imports. Jim was last seen in the Golden Triangle area of Thailand, where he continues his work. Our sound recordist on the film *Freak Streat to Goa*, C. Thanthieng Khobung, is an indigenous member of the Hmar tribe in the Manipur state in northeast India (between Burma and Assam). (Photographs in diptych © 1989, J. Caldwell.)

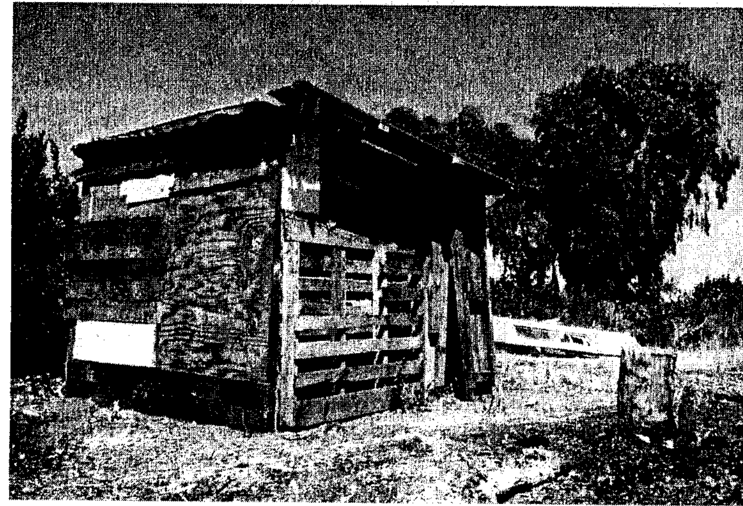
players. Earnest free-thinkers invoke "their" indigenism to counter exploitative U.S. culture, European commercialism, and globalization. At the same time, the Newaris in Kathmandu Valley pretty much stayed to themselves, well versed as they are at surviving in a highly stratified, complicated, caste-driven social order on the subcontinent. The film, when completed, went on to some success on the festival circuit and broadcast in the United States and abroad.[4] Indian film critic Vijaya Mulay praised *Freak Street* as an exemplary model for reverse ethnography, given our refusal to represent Nepali or Indian culture so that we might focus instead on Western expatriation (or reverse migration) in South Asia.[5] *Freak Street* premiered the opening night of the Margaret Mead film festival in 1988, together with Dennis O'Rourke's film *Cannibal Tours*. O'Rourke's film also disregarded ethnography's classic othering of indigenes in Papua New Guinea in favor of self-critiquing Western tourists who opportunistically (and sometimes callously) celebrate indigenous identity.

Antithetical Indigenisms: Miskito Indian Refugees *(Nicaragua/Honduras, 1983–1984) and* Mixteco Migrant Workers *(Oaxaca/San Diego, 1995–2002)*

I became increasingly interested in issues of self-representation even as I continued pursuing themes of migration and cross-cultural relations in my films. In 1996, I began my involvement with nonprofit agencies in the community media and organic gardening project called La Cosecha Nuestra, which focused on improving nutrition and establishing "food security" among lower-income neighborhoods in Southern California. One of the results of this initiative, which involved numerous nonprofit agencies in northern San Diego County, was the thirty-minute documentary *Amor Vegetal: Our Harvest* (1998), a "collective video dialogue" by immigrant worker residents of Escondido, California. My partner Devora Gomez and I completed and distributed the film, then observed the callous ways this community's self-expression was institutionally contained by others outside the community. This appropriation by official institutions of collective, from-the-ground-up self-expression underscored an important lesson for me. After *Amor Vegetal*, I began to pursue more personal ways of speaking or filming across cultures that might provide distinctive insights that can complement and thus support local cultural self-expressions. The rest of this chapter traces my sometimes awkward search as a filmmaker to deal with and understand a series of raced, cross-cultural landscapes that surrounded the Cosecha Nuestra project. Some of these landscapes looked like pitched battles (which were politically managed). Others looked more benign, like creations of nature (even though they felt suspiciously manicured).

After the popularly supported Sandinistas overthrew the U.S.-backed Samoza dictatorship in 1979, the new Nicaraguan government sought to unify and develop the country by including even the remote communities in the country's eastern regions in its development plans. Traditionally ignored by a succession of largely corrupt federal governments, a largely independent culture had emerged over the decades along Nicaragua's Atlantic coast in a region called La Miskitia. The indigenous "Miskito Indian" communities in that part of Nicaragua were different in almost every way from Nicaraguan citizens in and around Managua. Most Nicaraguans were Spanish-speaking, Catholic whites or mestizos based in cities and towns, or campesinos who worked in the largely semi-arid and mountainous hilly areas of central and western Nicaragua. On the other side of the mountains, the indigenous Miskitos were dark-skinned, spoke an English pidgin dialect





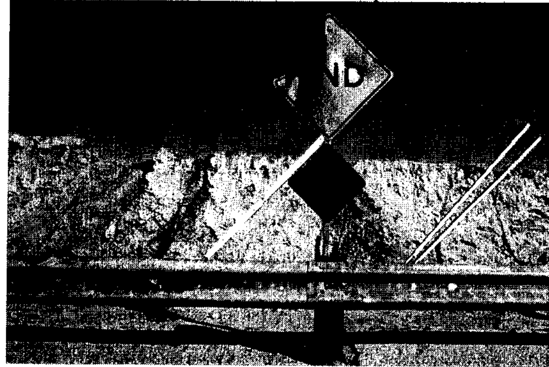
Two different wars, two different decades. Top, Nicaraguan Miskito hut in Mocoron village near Contra bases along the Rio Coco between Nicaragua and Honduras, Central America, 1983. Bottom, migrant worker home of indigenous Mixteco Indians from Oaxaca near gated designer-home community in Carlsbad, San Diego County, California, 1999. (Photographs in diptych © 1983, 1999, J. Caldwell.)

rather than Spanish (from trading contacts with the British on the Gulf Coast), were largely Protestant and Moravian (rather than Catholic), and, outside of coastal port cities such as Bluefields, subsisted on a combination of farming, fishing, and hunting in the pine forests, tropical waterways, and lowlands of the eastern region. The two cultures could not have been more different, and many Miskitos reacted to progressive Sandinista attempts to install new schools, government centers, and clinics in the eastern region with alarm.

This widespread suspicion of the Spanish speakers from the west was almost immediately exploited by U.S.-backed *"contratistas,"* many of whom were ex-soldiers of ousted dictator Samoza. While a few villages burned after initial confrontations with the Sandinistas, contra forces immediately seized on the situation by figuratively and literally throwing more matches into the fire. Contra forces quickly mobilized to "rescue" and evacuate Miskitos even as they burned other villages across the region. Opportunistically offering "protection" to the ostensible "victims," the Contras led the Miskitos north of the Rio Coco into Miskito regions of Honduras. There, on a vast and muddy plain in the lowlands, over 10,000 Miskito Indians converged on a site called Mocoron. A group of nonprofit relief agencies (including Médicins Sans Frontièrs, Oxfam, and World Relief), under the coordination of the UN's High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), stepped in to provide minimal housing, food staples, and potable water for the refugees. By the time my colleague and partner Joel Sheesley and I arrived in March 2003, endless rows of thatched huts and shallow groundwater wells laced the treeless and muddy landscape as far as the eye could see. "Rescuing" the indigenous Miskitos now apparently meant confining them—without their traditionally abundant natural sources of food and water in the forests—to the static life of refugee camp hut-dwellers—convenient for the Contras, but not for the Miskitos.

But the logic of this staged "indigenous" setting soon became dramatically apparent. Miskito families complained that armed squads of Contras came from hut to hut, forcibly recruiting any available male adolescents to go back and "rescue" their homeland and fight their enemies, the Sandinistas. Cut off from their traditional seasonal crops and lands, the normally invisible and mobile Miskitos became sitting ducks, static targets, for a range of political interests that quickly exploited their indigenous status. President Reagan began hammering away at what he termed the "Communist threat" the Sandinistas posed to the Americas and warned that Soviet tanks would soon be at the banks of the Rio Grande if the Sandinistas were not stopped. Reagan invoked an "exhibit A" in his call to arms against the "godless" Nicaraguans: the Sandinistas' "genocidal" killing of "innocent Miskito Indians." Cold-warrior Reagan—at least in his clarion calls in State of the Union addresses—was (rhetorically, at least) a radical "Indian rights activist." An even bigger "staging" of indigenism, however, was emceed by the 82nd Airborne out of Fort Bragg, North Carolina. In

two of the most dramatic media events of 1982 and 1983, the Pentagon used the Mocoron refugee camp as a backdrop. Battalions of U.S. airborne troops staged parachute drops as part of "Big Pine I" and "Big Pine II" for the benefit of carefully assembled international news crews, alongside the carefully positioned indigenous "victims" of the Sandinistas. This effectively provided international journalists with a kind of one-stop shopping, enabling dramatic news stories (in a single press junket away from the capitol Tegucigalpa) about American military might and political will as defined against the backdrop of Sandinista genocide against indigenous people.



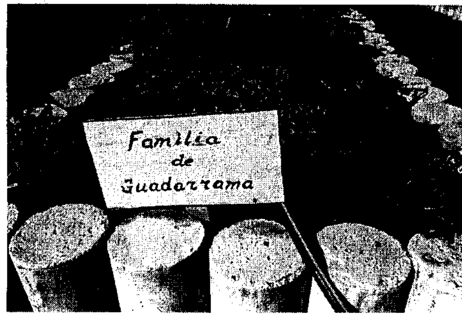
Out of sight, out of mind. Making indigenous Mixteco American workers invisible by legally zoning—within suburban city limits—no-man's-lands, utility right-of-ways, floodplains, and brush-covered arroyos. Top, wall above Kelly migrant camp, Carlsbad, California. Middle, reclamation of wildlife after migrant camp eviction in Carmel Valley, California. Bottom, cul-de-sac and berm concealing migrant camp in Coachella Valley, east of Palm Springs. (Photographs in triptych © 2002, J. Caldwell.)

Yet the Miskito refugees and the UNHCR workers were not as easily flummoxed by Washington's orchestrated media event and dramatic "proof." Our film included Miskito leaders mocking Reagan's newfound sympathy for indigenous people, and aid workers numb from trying to either justify or explain U.S. exploitation to the outside world. Of even more concern to us as filmmakers was depicting the way the hastily established, and massively funded, area infrastructure around Mocoron was completed and then used. Hundreds of thousands of dollars of international relief funds were channeled in and around Mocoron to build an extensive network of roads and airstrips.

Ostensibly intended to provide humanitarian aid, these new airstrips and roads from the remote port cities of Puerto Lempira and La Ceiba provided a level of logistical expediency and efficiency never before available to the Honduran and U.S. military along the Rio Coco and La Miskitia. Miskito indigenism had become a free-floating signifier that was quickly and ably exploited by the Contras, the Samozistas, the U.S. military, and the suspect and ineffective Honduran government (at the time the second most impoverished country in the Western Hemisphere). Strangely, indigenism became the new basis for American military intervention even as it served as the poster child for American foreign policy in Latin America.

Flash-forward. Exterior. Rural-suburban San Diego County, U.S.A. 1994–2002. Indigenism also circulated as a theme and a force in the migrant worker camps that intersected the arroyos of some of the most affluent, gated, designer-home communities in the United States: Del Mar, Carlsbad, Solana Beach, Rancho Santiago, Escondido. Initially intending to film counterarguments against the then vitriolic anti-immigration rhetoric at the time of Proposition 187 in 1994, my partner Devora Gomez and I quickly discovered an indigenous community that once again didn't fit a clean binary model of left and right politics. By the mid-1990s, more than 50,000 indigenous Mixtecos from the mountainous regions of Oaxaca in southern Mexico had emigrated for work in California. Like the Miskito Indians in Nicaragua, the Mixtecos of Del Mar and Escondido did not speak Spanish, or spoke Spanish as a second language, and so were culturally cut off from American Latinos much as the Miskitos were from the Sandinistas. Unlike the politically heralded and showcased Miskitos, however, the Mixtecos had attained an astonishingly invisible status throughout the sunny suburbs of Southern California. We set about to understand how and why this invisibility had been established and maintained, and worked on four different video productions to achieve this. Two of the productions were completed and distributed (*Amor Vegetal* and *Rancho California*), one production was used for documentation only (*Indigenous Translator's Project* for the courts), and one was started but not completed owing to political problems and lack of funding (*Pro-Familia*, involving video workshops on domestic abuse in the migrant community).

Anti-immigration rhetoric demonized all migrants as "Mexicans" and "illegals." At the same time, resurgent, flag-waving Mexican nationalism evident in the anti-Prop 187 rallies in Los Angeles and San Diego totalized immigration in a different way—one that created a monolithic nationalist bloc that covered over all sorts of cultural het-



The La Cosecha Nuestra community project in Escondido, California, used donated land, surplus meeting spaces, and logistical support from NGOs, along with fencing, compost, manure, tools, and supplies from local businesses, to create a community garden for the migrant worker community in south Escondido. The first garden coordinator was indigenous Mixteco worker Arturo Gonzales. The second coordinator was an indigenous Kanjobal-Mayan worker from Guatemala, Victor Gomez. The participatory community video *Amor Vegetal*, which included dramatizations about nutrition and cross-cultural perspectives on food and health, was produced by community members for use in local immigrant clinics and as a discussion starter in community meetings. (Photographs in triptych © 1998, J. Caldwell.)

erogeneity within the migrant worker communities. Yet the Mixtecos we interviewed in the camps saw themselves as self-governing and indigenous, not as Mexicans. A collective historical hatred had developed over mistreatment by a succession of central governments that had pillaged and punished the indigenous peoples of Oaxaca over six centuries (this included a string of Mexican governments, the Spanish colonial empire in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the genocidal Aztec invaders before that). Over hundreds of years, a deep-seated suspicion of any outsiders who presumed to speak for the Mixtecos had developed. This distrust, and the racial and labor caste system that continues to fuel it (with light-skinned Mexicans of European descent at the top, mixed-race mestizos in the middle, and indigenous "indios" at the bottom) was imported, largely intact, from Oaxaca via large plantations in Sinaloa to its ultimate destination, California. In this racialized system, workers in the lowest class ("Oaxaqueñitos") are marked by the darkness of their skin and short stature. In the mid-1990s, crew bosses marketed the Mixtecos across California as "the perfect picking machines" because of their short stature. The Mixtecos' reaction to this systemic form of domination and marginalization—including their Frente Indigena Oaxaqueño Binacional's cultural strategies of "self-autonomy"—prevented extensive forms of political coalition building with other activist groups. Yet the same strategies of autonomy also encouraged and enabled Mixtecos to organize internally and binationally (across the U.S.-Mexico border) to force employers and consulates in both Mexico and California to observe fair labor, fair housing, and workplace safety laws.

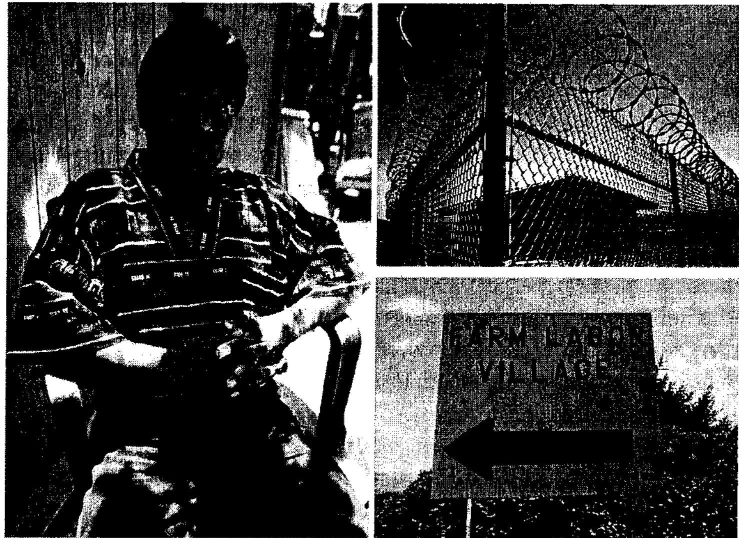
One video that we produced as part of the nonprofit community garden initiative, *Amor Vegetal*, was based on collective expression, improvisational scenes, a teach-the-teacher methodology, and from-the-ground-up self-representation. This project both succeeded at its goals and, to some ex-

Top, camcorder self-representations by Mixteco/Oaxacan families in Kelly migrant camp, Carlsbad, California, are featured in the hour-long film *Rancho California* (2002). Bottom, production still from improvisational filmed scenes on food security produced for the half-hour participatory health video *Amor Vegetal: Our Harvest* (1998). (Photographs in diptych © 2002, 1997, J. Caldwell.)

tent, failed.[6] The local chamber of commerce and conservative city government were far from threatened by the newfound presence of indigenous workers in their midst. Rather, they used the project to celebrate the fact that underprivileged "immigrants can help themselves," and to underscore the happy multiculturalism that supposedly pervades comfortable suburbs such as Escondido without burdening the taxpayer. Given the ways that indigenism was easily assimilated and thus politically written off in the *La Cosecha Nuestra* and *Amor Vegetal* projects, I changed my sights. I resumed work on a very different film that I hoped would engage the complex but sordid issues at work in completely cross-cultural environments such as Escondido.

In *Rancho California (por favor)*, I decided to shift away from any attempt at creating a pure ethnic space for expression and instead try to articulate the many material layers and symbolic boundaries used by the public to construct and assign race. What emerged, on camera and in interviews, was a very real sense that the rural-suburban landscape in the area of the camps was meticulously managed. Local housing and labor interests tended the area via roadside landscaping, zoning laws, utility right-of-ways, construction permits, subdivision gates and walls, and informally sanctioned contact zones where migrant camp workers and residents actually met on a regular basis. Essentially, these physical barriers, legal constraints, and ambiguous spaces raced the area, and showed how integrally the lives of the residents up on the hill were intertwined with the lives of the campesinos and their families in the mud and ditches of the arroyo down below. Although the Mixteco community organizers deftly deployed their indigenous identities in work, labor, and legal settings, those same identities seemed to vanish in the lush, scenic underbrush that camouflaged the camps down below the walls of the gated designer-home communities above. Several of my UCSD students from the area denied that such camps existed. These (fairly symptomatic) denials made me look for how racial identities were being conventionalized as natural phenomena in Southern California's picturesque landscape. Taking this approach to filming—visually detailing cross-cultural boundaries, barriers, and contact zones—would also clearly implicate me, as a Southern California resident, in the naturalized erasure of indigenous difference in the region. Such an approach guaranteed that my own complicity would not be covered over by the filming.

It was fairly easy to understand how the conventionalized, quasi-Mediterranean picturesque that defined the suburbs could camouflage and erase indigenous difference. After all, the adage "out of sight, out of mind" allows nearby homeowners a kind of repose that was usually unavoidable at a 7–11 convenience store or when passing a roadside hiring center for day laborers. I was far more surprised, however, at a very different landscape trope that was marshaled deep within some of the bigger nearby ranches that housed migrant workers in ramshackle huts. Behind barbed-wire fences, deep within the ravines of a sprawling ranch near Pala, I filmed a factory-like approach to migrant housing and work that seemed far more brutal than the Central American conditions the Miskito refugees faced when I filmed them during wartime fifteen years earlier. Some fifty to one hundred huts were scattered up and down one ravine. Most of these huts were propped up and tied down within a few yards of the same stream (mostly irrigation runoff) that scores of adolescent boys and young men used as a water source to bathe, wash dishes, and use in food preparation. Other men up- and downstream used the same agricultural runoff for latrines. This deleterious multitasking efficiently combined a range of lifestyle resources for the Mixtecos and cost the rancher renting the huts nothing financially. At another camp, in the mudflats on the Hedionda lagoon in Carlsbad, I came across shallow groundwater wells dug in the mud that were almost identical to the groundwater wells the Nicaraguan



Left, Arturo Gonzalez, an indigenous Mixteco community activist, organizer for "Frente Indigena Oaxaqueño Binacional," and first La Cosecha Nuestra community garden coordinator. Top right, razor wire and chain-link fencing above three migrant camps hidden in arroyos between Carlsbad, Oceanside, and San Marcos. Bottom right, sign directing travelers to migrant camp in the towns of Arvin-Lamont, California (which were the sites of the 1930s "Oakie" migrant camps, whose dormitory foundations are still visible in present-day labor camps used by Mixtecos and others). (Photographs in triptych © 2002, J. Caldwell.)

Miskitos dug and used throughout the refugee camp in Mocoron. If one's hut is low enough or close enough to the water table (which is almost always the case in lagoon areas), a three-foot-wide hole in the mud no more than two feet deep could easily provide a constant source of easily retrievable water that one could use in cooking, drinking, and bathing. This resource was, apparently, as important in Southern California in 1998 as it was in Nicaragua and Honduras in 1983.

Third World conditions were the norm and pervaded scores of camps throughout northern San Diego County. But by what logic had these conditions become socially acceptable in the region? A legal case against one rancher near Pala exposed the tortured paradigms that legitimized the conditions. After being threatened by legal advocates for housing his workers outside and in the dirt, the rancher provided a concrete slab, ostensibly to provide a more "humane" living space for his heretofore mud-dwelling workers. With each new seasonal crop, the rancher typically hired scores of workers. Now, however, he gave his migrant workers the confined concrete slab to pitch small tents on, at least initially. After a week or two the rancher would move the workers away into the hills and allow newer workers their portion of tent-days on the slab. When legal proceedings brought the rancher into court, the presiding judge in northern San Diego County accepted the rancher's "transitional" concrete-slab-with-tents as an "acceptable" compromise. The judge reasoned that when he served in the Marines, tents were accepted by the military as a legitimate form of housing in tactical maneuvers or war zones. Therefore, he reasoned, tents would certainly be acceptable for seasonal migrant workers of questionable legal status in San Diego County. Intended as a compromise informed by common sense, the ruling betrayed the tortured logic of the region. Yes, the Marine Corps bivouacs in tents on the battlefield, but the rancher's workers in Pala were minimum-wage, tax-paying American workers about as far away from U.S. military intervention as one could get. They certainly weren't picking American strawberries and bell peppers in a war zone.

This legal case was an exception that proves the rule. When migrants lose their cultural camouflage, they become newly visible. Such visibility tends to disrupt the local status quo, sometimes forcing local cultural paradigms to adjust to maintain legitimacy. The abject conditions of the Pala camp, once made public, easily unseated the fresh air trope of Southern California as a picturesque Mediterranean world. In its place, the courts sanctioned a new paradigm for the camps—of justly deserved hardship—apparently based on the implicit warlike conditions of California's suburban bedroom communities.

Performing and Complicating Indigenism

The various films I've discussed in this chapter all began by focusing on issues of migration and cross-cultural change. Yet during production, they all demonstrated a range of ways in which indigenous identities are performed for cultural advantage, sometimes very problematically. Looking back on the two and a half decades during which these projects were pursued suggests the complex ways in which indigenous identity is deployed and performed. Like a political football, indigenism is regularly stripped from its communal and embodied roots, and quickly becomes rhetorical grist in political and cultural wars that go far beyond any idea of essential identity or identity politics (see Table 5.1).

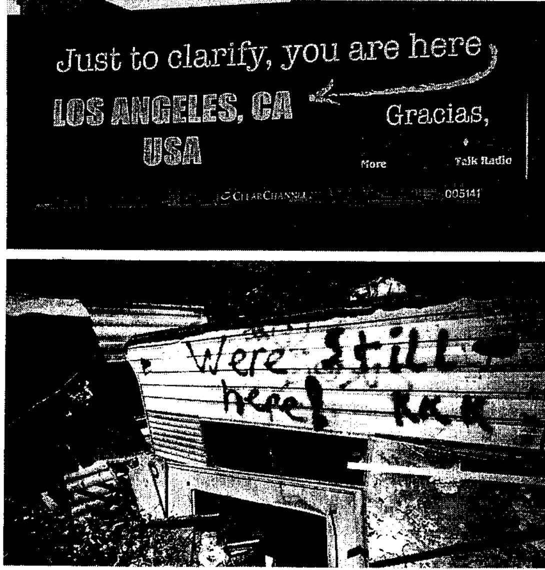
In the four production cases discussed here, indigenism functioned in contradictory ways: as poster child for American foreign policy (Miskitos), as an unruly enigma for organizers and crew bosses (Mixtecos), as cultural costuming and identity posturing (Newaris/hippies), and as a direct target of modernization and the rationalized economies that accompany it (Managalase). The rhetoric deployed in these instances similarly showed just how open to different uses and interpretations indigenism becomes in a cultural conflict. Indigenes are victims (Miskitos), indigenes are usurpers (Mixtecos), indigenism is nationally imagined (Newari/Buddhist/Hindu), and indigenism is reduced after government intervention to forms of cultural eye candy (Managalase). Table 5.1 details many more such flexible permutations at work in the worlds of the films discussed here. Most troubling to me is not that indigenism enters political struggle but that it has become such an integral weapon in the arsenal on both sides of many struggles. The U.S. government used the Miskitos in its 1980s political campaign, which was built on strategic racial essentialism. Yet the Mixtecos in the 1990s mastered tactical racial essentialism and what they termed bi-nationalism to confound their traditional enemies and force the application of fair-labor laws, employment rights, and occupational safeguards in the United States. Perhaps the most sobering lesson in all of this is how indigenism is used far beyond simple models of identity politics, through systematic conventions of deployment/visibility (Miskitos), erasure/invisibility (Mixtecos), syncretistic posturing (Newaris/hippies), and retrospective resuscitation (Managalase).

This very systematicity, both social and historical, deserves critical vigilance on the part of filmmakers, activists, and academics. One of my goals as a filmmaker is to force cultural issues and social problems to speak to questions other than their own, or other than those that

Table 5.1 Performing Indigenism: Cultural Politics, and Alternative Media Strategies

	Miskitos Nicaragua/Honduras *Personas Desplazadas*, 1983–1984	**Mixtecos** Oaxaca/San Diego *Rancho California*, 2002, and *Amor Vegetal*, 1997–1998	**Newaris/Hippies** Kathmandu, Nepal *Freak Street to Goa*, 1986–1989	**Managalase** Papua New Guinea *Kuije Kanan*, 1984–2005
1. Conflict(s)	Contras vs. Sandinistas, Contras vs. Miskitos, Sandinistas vs. Miskitos, U.S. vs. Sandinistas	Mixtecos vs. Mexicans, ranchers, employers, homeowners, and Latino foremen and crew bosses	Hippies vs. Western values, Indian/Nepali governments vs. street-level expatriates	Plantation and government prohibition against male initiation and tattooing
2. Role of Language	*Indigenous* creole language, *pidgin* English vs. Spanish	*Indigenous* Mixteco language vs. Spanish (*as second language*)	*Multilingual* settings in Goa and Kathmandu	*Indigenous*, plus pidgin English as trade language
3. Indigenous Community's Role	*Indigenes as handy poster child* for American foreign policy EXTREME VISIBILITY	*Indigenes as unruly enigmas* for U. S. Latino and labor organizations EXTREME INVISIBILITY	*Indigenism as a costume*, toleration of expatriates CASUAL POSTURING	*Indigenes as target* of modernization RESUSCITATION
4. Political Methods of Government	*Strategic racial essentialism*, protector of helpless indigenes; Reagan as Indian rights activist	*Calculated legal confusion* about which laws apply (OSHA, INS, fair housing, labor law, etc.)	*Strict visa limitations* for expatriates; totalitarian control of indigenes	*Rationalized efficiency*, and attempted unification under pan-tribal nationalism
5. Political Methods of Indigenes	*Transnational moral lobbying* to ecumenical organizations and NGOS; *agnostic political assertions*	*Binational organizing* vs. U. S., Mexican government; cultural autonomy, *tactical racial essentialism*	*Cultural syncretism* by Newaris and Hippies, *multicultural affinities*	*Gift culture payback* as basis for human interactions, *preemptive economy*
6. Ideological Contradiction(s)	Indigenism does not fit within *binary U. S. cold war model* (capitalism vs. communism)	Indigenism does not fit within *binary U. S. immigration policy* (legals vs. illegals)	Indigenism is *not transportable;* exotic government PR hides brutal caste relations	Indigenism as *cultural/artistic feature* guts it of social agency and force
7. Resulting Rhetoric	*Indigenes as victims*, protecting U. S.'s vulnerable "back door"	*Indigenes as usurpers*, Third World invading U. S.'s "back door"	*Indigenism as imagined* nation, and financial lure	*Indigenes as eye candy* for tourist culture
8. Dominant Media Strategies	*Staged media events*, airborne assaults alongside Miskito UNHCR refugee camp "stage"	Emphasize *out-of-control migrant fertility*, childbirth, and destruction of U. S. schools and government	*Information management:* government solicits tourism, but controls foreign filmmakers	*Exotic as trade genre:* ethnographic colonial gaze as commodity
9. Counter-Media Strategies	Show *consensus exploitations* in relief work, and Nicaraguan nationalism among Miskitos	Show *consensus culpabilities* and "little racial tactics of habitat" vs. totalizing political fixes	*Reverse ethnography;* made fake film for government censors; filmed secretly	*Participant recreation:* oral histories; elder pedagogy for youth

are typically used to frame them. Indigenous racial identity seems to be one of those issues that merit continual reconsideration, especially given the ways that indigenism is exploited and used, problematically, as a free-floating signifier. The approach I've outlined in this essay is, of course, inevitably provisional. Forcing films to confront the constructed and contested nature of indigenous racial identity may make it easier, arguably, to engage racism in the lived world. Racial conflict, in many of its worst manifestations, results when people opportunistically invoke or glibly marginalize indigenous identity as an innate, a priori problem. Racial categories that appear natural rather than culturally constructed and maintained, that is, may only facilitate cross-cultural solutions involving violence. Making race natural in this way severely limits the possibilities of active, critical engagement in the now ubiquitous cross-cultural spaces that increasingly define us in California and the nation.



Billboard colonialism. Top, Spanish-language broadcaster creates furor with white anti-immigration groups by placing L.A. "in" Mexico. Yet even indigenous Central Americans in Pico-Union district in L.A. were upset at being grouped together as "Mexicans" in the backlash. Middle, KFI fights back with nationalistic billboard of its own. Bottom, gang of white suburban youths from Rancho Penasquitos in San Diego County beat up and stab migrants in camps, then tag their huts with KKK slurs. (Top and middle photographs © Jeff Share, 2005; bottom photograph © 2002, J. Caldwell.)

Let's move beyond indigenism as a free-floating signifier, an exploitable cultural costume and posture, and consider it more closely and patiently: as historically specific, socially constructed ways of managing and making sense of human and group behavior. The real masters of this process are as creative at deploying indigenism as any artist in another medium: the indigenous Miskito and Mixteco activists and organizers that I met and worked with. While they model how indigenism can be used tactically for cultural resistance and progessive change, the rest of us would do well to stall the strategic schemes that continually rip indigenism from its moorings in order to build suspect passing ideologies.

Notes

1. Although the terms for signs that no longer have fixed meanings—"free-floating signifier" and "empty signifier"—were developed by Umberto Eco, Jacques Derrida, and Jean Baudrillard, I prefer Alan Sekula's pragmatic deployment of the concepts as cultural images that are literally "up for grabs" and primed for endless appropriation and inflection by a succession of new "owners." See Alan Sekula, "Photography Between Labor and Capital," in *Mining Photographs and Other Pictures*, ed. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh and Robert Wilkie (Halifax, NS: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1983), 194. A very good summary discussion of the intellectual roots and various permutations of the idea of the free-floating signifier and the empty signifier in the theories of Eco, Derrida, and Baudrillard is Daniel Chandler, *Semiotics: The Basics* (London: Routledge, 2002), 74–76. A critique of these key postmodern concepts is found in Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 387.

2. Each of my cross-cultural projects was cooperative in different ways. I want especially to acknowledge my partners, without whom each of these films could not have been completed: J. Lalnunsang Pudaite, co-director, C. Thanthieng Khobung, sound, and T. S. Hale, cinematography, on *Freak Street;* William McKellin, anthropologist, on *Kuije Kanan: Managalase Tattooing;* Joel Sheesley on *Personas Desplazadas;* Devora Gomez, assistant director and sound on *Rancho California* and co-director and story editor on *Amor Vegetal: Our Harvest;* and the La Cosecha Nuestra garden community in South Escondido, co-creators, on *Amor Vegetal: Our Harvest.*

3. Detailed authoritative accounts of these processes are contained in the research of my colleague on the *Kuije Kanan* project, anthropologist William McKellin. See "Kinship Ideology and Language Pragmatics Among the Managalase of Papua New Guinea," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (University of Toronto, 1980), and "Hegemony and the Language of Change: The Pidginization of Land Tenure Among the Managalase of Papua New Guinea," *Ethnology* 30, no. 4 (October 1991): 313–324.

4. These screenings included film festivals in New York, Berlin, Amsterdam, Chicago, and Hawaii; network broadcasts on SBS-Television Australia; and domestic broadcasts on WTTW-PBS Chicago from 1989 to 1994. The film was distributed internationally and nontheatrically during those years by Filmmaker's Library, New York.

5. See Vijaya Mulay, "Panther Panchali (The Story of the Road)," *Jump Cut* 45 (October 2002), online.

6. This community gardening–media project is discussed more fully in John Caldwell, "Representation and Complicity in the Suburban Campo," *Aztlan: Journal of Chicano Studies* 28, no. 2 (Fall 2003): 205–226.

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