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Like a Scattering from a Fixed Point: Austerity Fiction and the Inequalities of Elsewhere

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Abstract:

After the financial collapse of 2008, Ireland imposed a program of fiscal consolidation that was designed to address the debt concerns of the nation. The implementation of austerity measures became the inverse to the high-flying years of the Celtic Tiger. Mike McCormack's *Solar Bones* and Mary Morrissy's *Prosperity Drive* represent examples of post-austerity literature in how they engage with ideas of austerity as an inverted capitalist narrative of success. Their books examine a post-austerity Ireland where the influence of global capitalism has resulted in a disruption of local communities. Both McCormack and Morrissy critique post-austerity Ireland to show the psychological, emotional, and human cost of the nation's transformation into a post-austerity country.

Keywords: Austerity, Globalization, Mary Morrissy, Mike McComack, Neoliberalization

Across many genres of fiction and non-fiction, the collected literature of the Celtic Tiger and its aftermath often presents a sense of shock and confusion. From the beginning of the boom to the implementation of austerity measures, the dramatic changes that occurred in Ireland seemed to dislodge the country from a firm grounding in ideas about its past and present. This sense of disorientation is found in both the writers trying to grapple with the events of the Tiger and the general populace trying to survive the post-Tiger environment. From the outset of the Tiger, Ireland had a full-tilt transformation into a neoliberal country riding the waves of a pre-9/11 belief in the benign expanse of global capitalism[1]. The profound transformation of the

[1] While the Tiger was in full throat a litany of economists, social theorists, and journalists adopted a "benign view of the link between economic growth and social well-being" that embraced the changes to Ireland almost without question; as a result, any socio-cultural

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Irish economy, framed as it was in the context of neoliberal values, had the "unfortunate tendency" to assert that the boom was "an end in itself rather than […] a means to the end of a better quality of life for all in society" (Kirby 2010, 50). The idea that this economic transformation was good for its own sake masked more complex and systemic issues that occurred during the Tiger. The neoliberal language used to describe the Tiger had the effect of obfuscating the realities of the boom. The language of risk and reward, investment and loss, and regulation and freedom seemed to permeate all discussions about the social conditions in post-Tiger Ireland.

In analysing the contours of how the economic realities of Ireland's rapid globalization – including the boom and austerity – complicated the way Irish authors wrote about their experiences, it is important to note how the role of a hyper-awareness of global forces disrupts and changes local notions of Irish identity. Eamon Maher and Eugene O'Brien argue that in order to fully understand the realities of the Tiger – including the impact of migration – it is vital to examine the interaction between cultural products and economic forces. They assert that the "realms of language, fiction, drama, film and public culture provide a supplement to the economic aspect of society, as they both contribute to, and are largely constituted by, the economic paradigm" (2014, 13). Post-Tiger and post-austerity fiction depict the changes to Irish migration as it becomes enveloped in the language and ideology of global capitalism. Mary Morrissy's *Prosperity Drive* and Mike McCormack's *Solar Bones*, both published in 2016, represent a continuing trend in contemporary fiction that Mary McGlynn notes are critical "reassessments of economic agency and the potential for social mobility in the wake of the Irish economic crash" (2018, 184). The works of Morrissy and McCormack fit within this new strand of austerity fiction due to their analysis of the role of migration and movement, which examines how contemporary Irish people navigate a world that privileges transnational mobility as the extreme openness to the values and narratives of neoliberal globalization.

Morrissy and McCormack portray how the Irish both conform to, and push back against, the global influence that resulted in local disruptions of Irish identities, homes, and communities. Both authors shape the influence of globalization into a narrative of a global elsewhere that is simultaneously vague in its scope and concrete in terms of its impact. The global elsewhere of austerity fiction is a paradoxical element that both normalizes certain inequalities inherent to globalization – such as relations to debt – while fostering feelings of alienation when the realities of these inequalities manifest in local communities. Morrissy's and McCormack's books depict the inner

changes that would have been seen as problematic, such as traffic congestion or work-related burnout, were brushed off as the growing pains of a new, better Ireland (Kirby 2010, 82).

lives of their characters as representing an alternate connection to space and identity that can function in opposition to the global economic pressures of "elsewhere" that shape and disrupt their characters' relationship to Ireland. Their texts focus on the interiority of their characters to create a narrative juxtaposition that places the global background of their texts against the feelings, emotions, and values of their characters. Morrissy and McCormack use the interiority of the characters to make their inner lives the focal points in a critique of the "unconscious aspects" of the "repressed and suppressed narratives" of the Tiger that "may help us to understand more fully what happened in [that] period and, more importantly, why it happened" (Maher and O'Brien 2014, 13). This argument traces how austerity fiction develops the notion of an ominous global elsewhere in order to articulate how *Prosperity Drive* and *Solar Bones* are both texts that dig into the unconscious aspects of a post-Tiger, post-austerity Irish life to engage, directly and indirectly, with the emotional and psychological cost of living in a world with a turbulent global elsewhere.

1. The mainstreaming of austerity as a standard interaction between national and global spaces

Austerity, similar to the Tiger that came before it, has become an integral part in analyses of the fallout that occurred after the financial collapse of 2008. As governments scrambled to address the damages caused by the global banking crisis, austerity became a key recovery strategy promoted by politicians and economists[2]. In general, austerity is a form of fiscal consolidation where governments seek to cut spending or raise taxes, which results in widespread and involuntary unemployment (Wren-Lewis 2017, 18). In discussing how austerity programs manifest in ways other than strictly economic or political, Vickie Cooper and David Whyte describe austerity as a damaging act of institutional violence – such as rising housing costs, eviction rates, and homelessness – that has been normalized in popular discourse as a necessary way for governments to respond to a crisis (2017, 24). This normalization hides the fact that the violence of austerity "pervades people's lives over long periods of time" and, therefore, results in a consistent slow burn of an "ever present *threat* of physical and/or psychological harm" (*ibidem*). For Cooper and Whyte, then, austerity acts akin to a headache that sits behind the eyes, constantly causing pain and dis-

[2] The economic crisis is an incredibly complex event that involves multiple national and international actors. Ireland's position in a post-2008 global landscape was a product of national policies that promoted a deeper integration into the economy of the European Union (Reidy, White 2017, 102). Broadly speaking, the economic crisis was not simply a national issue nor a global issue, but was the result of this new relationship between Ireland and the mechanisms of global capitalism.

comfort. Also, to extend this metaphor, the headache also has the potential to turn into a deadly tumour at any point.

Daniel Finn describes that, after the financial crisis, two interconnected messages were circulated in the press about the future of Ireland and the role austerity would play in securing that future. These two messages worked to argue that the "sacrifice" of austerity would help a "return to the *status quo ante*" of the Tiger, which would then help prevent any repeat of "the bad old days" (Finn 2018, 33). Both of these narratives obscure how austerity would be instituted by presenting it as a dutiful sacrifice that would forestall any further slippage into the "bad old days" of Irish history (with all cultural, historical, and political spectres contained in that phrase). Along with the threat of a return to a "bad" Irish past, political parties – especially those on the right of the political spectrum – "used simple analogies between household and government budgets" to defend cuts and other austerity measures. This analogy equated the basic act of families saving money to have a better life with a massive government project that planned to cut services and benefits (Wren-Lewis 2017, 33). The impact of this messaging also ignored that even before the financial collapse, Ireland "already had the second-highest rates of poverty and inequality" in Western Europe (Finn 2018, 36). Any attempt, therefore, to course-correct back to the good old days of the Tiger – as opposed to a return to the bad old days before the Tiger – implies a return to a standard of neoliberal globalization that had high levels of social and economic inequality. Due to this pervasive narrative of sacrifice and good citizenship, austerity can mean different things beyond an economic philosophy and social program. Austerity can be seen as a "concept" driven by an elite political and business class to justify particular "neoliberal objectives and expressions of macroeconomic shock" where the benefits and costs of austerity are unevenly spread across parts of a nation (McHale, Moore-Cherry and Heffernan 2017, 7-8). Cooper and Whyte more forcefully describe the experience of austerity as "disproportionately target[ing] and affect[ing] working class households and communities" to buffer the cost-cutting of "concentrations of elite wealth" (2017, 11). These arguments separate austerity as a concept from how it is a lived-experience, which focuses on how the goals of austerity never quite align with the experiences of austerity; in other words, the principled image of fiscal consolidation is undercut by the very implementation of those plans that require an economic shock to fix the economy.

Ireland, as it is presented in Morrissy's and McCormack's texts, is being strained through a narrative prism of austerity, even if this is done in a subtle and nuanced manner[3]. McCormack's Marcus Conway and Morrissy's cast

[3] Though, it could be said, that Morrissy and McCormack present different "Irelands" that describe the country at different times throughout its history.

of characters – all of which have a tangential connection to the community of Prosperity Drive – move through narratives in which background forces carry the weight of global concerns that press on the local issues directly confronting the characters. Both texts work to represent this slow, institutional pain of austerity in the examination of characters that confront an austerity of global plenty where the movement of goods and people increase while the emotional and psychological health of their characters are damaged. Even though the nature of austerity, and its slow violence, are not the central focus, Morrissy's and McCormack's books align with Susan Cahill's description of post-Tiger authors as critical of the idea that historical progress follows a linear model. Cahill frames post-Tiger fiction as written in a specific cultural moment that exposes "the disturbances and disruptions that complicate linear models of progress" (2011, 185). The narratives of Morrissy and McCormack do not follow a linear structure as both progress in loops and recursions that swing the reader through various times and places. McCormack's text is written in a stream of consciousness where Marcus's life and thoughts are recounted in one continuous sentence. While more traditional in its structure, Morrissy's short stories still lacks a stable and consistent narrative as it shifts between various characters. The narrative structures of both texts reflect how the global context of their stories – neoliberal globalization – disrupts and, at times, damages the lives of their characters.

2. The individual human scale: crisis novels and the hazard of the global

The presence and push of global pressures are clear in McCormack's novel because even though the narrative unfolds solely in the mind of Marcus – an intensely local and intimate setting for a novel – his thoughts are constantly pressed on by global concerns and worries. *Solar Bones* follows the thoughts of Marcus as his consciousness shifts between the stages of life and death. The formal experimentation of the novel represents an extension of the listlessness and self-doubt of a post-austerity environment. Marcus's thoughts – and the novel as a whole – are carefully constructed by McCormack to wander forward and backward through the timeline of Marcus's life. As his thoughts flow, the reader sees Marcus attempting to locate his identity in an expanding nautilus of Mayo, Ireland, Earth, and the universe. He describes himself as "an engineer whose life and works concerned itself with scale and accuracy, mapping out and surveying so that the grid of reason and progress could be laid across the earth" (McCormack 2016, 92). Marcus thinks of his work as an attempt to reverse-engineer the messiness of his life into the same sense of order he feels as a surveyor and urban planner. Marcus understands the world according to the logic of a subdivision where "horizontal utilities" are the material linkages "that drew the world into settlements and community" (*ibidem*). Yet, this ordered world patterned after the model of a distribution grid does not provide

him with any fundamental "wisdom"; instead, he is left only with a "giddy series of doubts" and "an unstable lattice of questions" (*ibidem*). The matrix of interconnected communal utilities is transformed into an unstable ground full of doubts and uncertainties. This relationship between order and uncertainty mirrors the narrative style of the text as the interconnected moments of Marcus's life lead to an unstable lattice of emotions and memories. The narrative contains a consistent tension between the belief that the world can be subdivided into ordered spaces and a growing sense that there exists only a chaotic otherness underneath the systems and utilities. This uncertain tension dislocates the certainties Marcus has about his identity and Ireland.

The idea of an ordered and properly balanced world is an appealing thought for Marcus as it allows him to see his "job of caring for [his] particular family" as the "most banal thing in the whole world as there were millions of men everywhere who, at precisely the same time, were doing the same thing" (77). By imagining his life as a point in a banal global experience full of familial routines, Marcus hopes to find a sense of comfort in the idea that the world moves to the same morning rhythms and small rituals as his life in Ireland. For Marcus, the normalness of a banal experience of everyday life depends on framing the larger context of the world as calm and without crisis. Yet, the very structure of the text unsettles this belief in banality by pushing or pulling Marcus through his memories and never lets the readers fully locate themselves in a secure rhythm of the text.

One of the main reasons why Marcus seems unable to ground himself in his memories, and in some respects the wider culture of contemporary Ireland, is his attempt to find a stable platform for understanding his identity shifts as globalization impacts the country. When Marcus negotiates a deal with an Irish quarry for an urban planning project in Ardrahan by "faxing them a cheaper quote for the same stone quarried on the other side of the world in South China", he engages with the neoliberal aspect of globalization that privileges capital over space (65). The local business in Ireland is always enmeshed in a global economic lattice as the sixty-mile difference between Marcus and the quarry in Ardrahan is superseded by the closeness of capital offered by the company in China. The closeness of the space of capital that overwrites the relationships between local Irish communities is representative of what Suman Gupta has noted to be the natural "geopolitical dimension" of post-crisis novels (2015, 460)[4]. For McCormack, the geopolitical dimen-

[4] Gupta argues that novels interested in the financial collapse are particularly focused on the experiences of Western nations, especially those of the United States and the European Union. She notes that the issues and fallout created by the global financial crisis were not "particularly manifested […] in China, India, Canada, Australia and some other states" (Gupta 2015, 460). According to Gupta, this makes crisis novels less about a postcolonial or decentralized version of the world and more a product of how Western nations experienced the financial crisis.

sion found in *Solar Bones* is always a persistent element of worry, concern, and discomfort for Marcus as he can never quite locate himself in the new world of post-Tiger, post-austerity Ireland.

The geopolitical dimension of austerity novels is unique due to the precise manner in which divisions between local and global spaces are intimately folded together to create a new understanding of space. Any divide – cultural, economic, or social – that exists between local areas and global forces is made into a continuum where the power relationship between local and global spaces is continually shifting, fluctuating, or turning inside out. As Gupta notes, the financial crisis of 2008 has been felt acutely in "the USA and EU member states" because "their geopolitical dimension in the current capitalist – neoimperialist – order" is what, centrally, "confers a global air to the financial crisis" (460). The centrality of the USA and EU in relation to the mechanisms of global economics is what made the crisis a global issue as opposed to any true concern for the impact of global capitalism on non-Western nations. The geopolitical dimension of austerity novels is the fear that, due to nationalistic economic constructs, the centrality of Western nations will be disrupted by global pressures. Gupta argues that crisis fiction "tend to draw a line from vividly evoked localities (offices, homes, cities) to hazily or abstractly grasped global determinations and repercussions" (462). This abstract construction of the global nature of the financial crisis frames the background pressure of neoliberal globalization as a force that disrupts the local settings, such as those depicted in McCormack's novel. The reader follows the vivid locality of Marcus's mind as he tries to grapple with how the changing nature of Ireland, and the world, are rocked by global determinations and repercussions.

Throughout the novel, McCormack has Marcus's thoughts and memories become distracted and disrupted by news reports that reflect how the geopolitics of post-austerity Ireland insert global issues into local frameworks. For instance, when he hears the news in the morning, he thinks:

> the time signal which led in the news, the sound of which always assured me that now the day was properly started, the world up and about its business with all its stories of conflict and upheaval at home and abroad cranking into gear, its tales of commercial and political fortune convulsing across borders and time-zones with currencies and governments rising and falling, the whole global comedy rounded out by the weather. (McCormack 2016, 118)

As the text unfolds, the global news is a lingering spectre of crisis and austerity that, at any moment, dramatically alters the day-to-day routines of Marcus's life. His morning routine of listening to the news – which Marcus feels is a part of his "responsibility as a citizen" – highlights how the background of McCormack's book contains a persistent global threat "convulsing" across the "whole global comedy" of international commerce and

politics. The idea that Marcus understands the world as a global comedy reflects, again, the idea that the machinations of global commerce and politics do not follow a logical and ordered plan. The news of an unstable world directly counters Marcus's belief in a banal world of normal rituals, which undercuts his certainty about his privileged position of comfort and safety. Marcus notes that there is "conflict and upheaval" happening at "home and aboard" to reflect how Ireland has a role in the tale of commercial and political fortune that connects the disparate parts of the globe. Marcus's thoughts about global news and conditions place those issues in a complicated and shared relationship with his thoughts about Ireland and his family. There is no stable border between home and aboard as the problems impacting one help shape the reality and landscape of the other.

McCormack's placement of global forces – with their power to cross national borders with ease – into the mind of Marcus subtly asks the reader to question the role Ireland plays in a pervasive and intrusive global structure of communication and business. Despite Marcus's belief that the global nature of "history's vast unfolding" is "unlikely to touch me with the violent immediacy of bombs or bullets," he cannot shake the thought that global crises could "lay their electric fingers on me in some other way which could push my life into some new alignment or along some other route" (McCormack 2016, 119). The electric fingers of globalization do not just reflect the medium through which Marcus receives his information but hints at the technological aspect of the global financial collapse. For many in Ireland, the aftermath of the financial collapse was presented in a virtual language where issues of liquidity, debt, bank guarantees, and bailouts were "electric fingers" pushing large sections of the Irish population into a new alignment with global capitalism. Marcus has a vague sense of dread about this new alignment, or route, because it reflects a critique of how the Irish understood the background issues of global capitalism that caused the financial collapse.

McCormack's text also underlines Gupta's argument about "crisis novels" in that his narrative is concerned with how the shifting tides of global commerce have created a dislocated and disoriented feeling that Europe is not a safe-guarded and dominant hub of globalization. Gupta notes that crisis novels tend to emphasize a "strong localization of narrative" that is "accentuated by concerns that radiate seamlessly away from and outside (perfunctorily registered) nation-states" (2015, 462). Following this point, McCormack depicts Marcus's "news habit" against these radiating global concerns that impact his life despite his position as an Irish, and European, citizen. He states: "While I might have some abstract recognition of myself as a citizen – a fully documented member of a democracy with a complete voting record in all elections since I had come of age – I never had any intimate sense of history's immediate forces affecting my day-to-day life" (McCormack 2016, 119). Marcus's focus on his identity as a voting citizen of Ireland underscores his belief that

his active participation in national politics and plans can orientate his position in the abstract flow of history's immediate forces. It is a belief that the electric fingers of global capitalism cannot dislodge a privileged individual such as Marcus from his secure place in the hierarchy of globalized nations. The awareness of the forces of history, however, undercuts this feeling of confidence due to the realization that his local identity as a voting citizen is threatened by historical forces outside of his control.

History is intimately placed in McCormack's novel as an invisible force that exists, simultaneously, inside and outside national borders. He increasingly views the health and care of his wife Mairead who is suffering from a virus caused by a cryptosporidium outbreak in Mayo as related to, and in ways ignored by, a globalized Irish media that has its attention placed elsewhere[5]. He feels that this crisis is being ignored due to a focus on "global issues which commanded the main headlines" (120). McCormack's text, however, uses Marcus as the joint through which the text connects the global issues and crises with an Irish locality. For instance, Marcus grows angry at the "latest update with its gradual escalation and rising numbers", which are only addressed in "broad strokes" by the "municipal authorities" (*ibidem*). Marcus is "simmering" with anger at the reporting about the cryptosporidium outbreak because it leaves "the individual human scale of the thing untouched, the human grit of the situation untold" (*ibidem*). Marcus has localized the reasons and causes of the outbreak to the suffering of his wife. The viral, and invisible, nature of cryptosporidium is a manifestation of the virtual forces of globalization that can cause markets to collapse. It represents, for McCormack, how unseen viral forces can sweep through local communities and cause damage to unsuspecting individuals. Marcus understands the post-financial crisis world as an unseen force that, like an outbreak of a disease, is damaging and disrupting his personal life. The external pressures of the world – global crises or viral outbreaks – are dangerous and disruptive forces that can, invisibly, step across national boundaries to damage the lives of individuals. Despite global politics existing only in the background, the impact it has on Marcus's life and mental state is acute and pointed.

3. "What's going on in the background": global elsewhere and collapsing identity

Along with the impact of the global as a pervasive and potential threat to the stability of local identities, the characters in post-austerity narratives also follow a spatial dislocation in terms of transnational movement. The locales of post-austerity texts do not stay focused on the counties of Ireland

[5] In 2015, the Westport Public Water Supply identified the presence of a cryptosporidium outbreak in Mayo.

but spread out to include the global context of a world still struggling with the effects of the economic collapse of 2008. Where McCormack internalizes the global background by localizing it in the head of his narrator, Morrissy's text uses a patchwork style to present her Irish characters as a part of a global elsewhere throughout which they move and live. Both authors use narrative techniques that force the reader to navigate dramatic shifts in time and place, which reveals how background influences can connect to the lives of their protagonists.

Morrissy presents the Dublin suburb of Prosperity Drive as a small part in a larger global network where the economic forces of neoliberal capitalism continually interpellate local spaces. Her suburb is not so much the central setting but is an emotional backdrop to analyse how contemporary Irish life is one thread in a geographic tapestry of crises. Morrissy's collection of short stories was modelled after James Joyce's *Dubliners* and like it, works to form a panoramic view of Ireland. In an interview, Morrissy describes how *Prosperity Dive* focuses on more than just a Dublin community: "the stories spring from a fictional suburban street in Dublin but, of course, it is impossible to write about Ireland without coming up against the theme of emigration […] So, the 'diaspora' theme is built into the content, and this also reflects the form of the stories which is like a scattering from a fixed point" (as cited in Salis 2016, 311). The fluid depiction of space in Morrissy's text, her scattering of narratives and characters, mirrors McCormack's use of the news to present a pervasive global element always positioned in the background of post-austerity Ireland. Morrissy embeds the global as an important element that her characters must explore or confront as they inhabit Ireland's present and past. Her text reflects Carla Power's comments that, after the economic explosion of the Tiger, Ireland "awoke" from its colonial "nightmare" and "instead of escaping it, the Irish are increasingly willing to explore it" (as cited in Brewster 2009, 25).

One of the ways Morrissy explores the nightmare of a post-Tiger global environment – namely, Ireland under austerity – is to push her characters into uncomfortable situations within a global world. Similar to McCormack, Morrissy highlights how the background pressures of global capitalism encroach on the emotional and psychological lives of her characters. The story "Body Language", for instance, follows the character of Trish Elworthy as she mentally travels through her memory while she physically returns to Ireland to visit her dying mother. Trish is framed as a fully transnational person who, in contrast to Marcus's desire to be fixed to a local spot, has always "wanted to be elsewhere" (Morrissy 2016, 234). She remembers Prosperity Drive as a "stifling landscape" and views her home "with a good deal of self-righteous, adolescent gloom" (237). When she moves to Italy, she feels "emphatically elsewhere", but eventually even this elsewhereness is simply "a passing phase" that, along with the landscape of her new home, retreats to a

"homely distance" (237-239). Morrissy's story underscores how the need to be elsewhere depends on reliable places to be considered elsewhere. The nature of constructing a reliable elsewhere is a way for her characters to create reliable forms of certainty that can put up borders between local and global spaces. Trish's belief that a reliable elsewhere exists allows her to reaffirm her complicated angst about Ireland and her upbringing. Both Morrissy's and McCormack's texts are concerned with how notions of a global elsewhere can have an important role in shaping the life of their Irish characters. McCormack's Marcus is constantly worried about the balance between a stable elsewhere and his local community, whereas Morrissy's Trish relies on the stability of a European elsewhere to provide her with a landing place to escape her local community.

The ease with which Morrissy's Trish can assimilate into a European elsewhere represents what Joe Cleary terms the "ascendency of the new neoliberal regime" in Ireland as the "country's ongoing integration into the world-economic system is so widely credited as a process of emancipation" (2004, 232). Trish's thoughts reflect Cleary's point about Ireland's ascendency into a neoliberal Europe as she enjoys the idea of "being in the heart of Europe and not secreted away on a tiny speck in the Continent's armpit" (Morrissy 2016, 246). Trish's desire to emigrate is not simply motivated by a sense of self-loathing for her Irishness but is a desire to live in a place with a "lack of associations" (240). Having a lack of associations equates, for Trish, an escape from her personal and familial history into a comfortable elsewhere of Europe. Similar to Ireland's integration into Europe, Trish's fairly easy assimilation into life in Italy marks her as a privileged neoliberal individual. Her Irishness is no longer connected to a "revolutionary history" but codes her as an acceptable European citizen (Cleary 2004, 234). It is akin to a feeling of normalness that represents stability and safety from feelings of anxiety.

The core of this story, however, turns the idea of a global elsewhere inside out as Trish's return visit to Ireland brings back a painful memory of fracture and loss that is directly tied to the notion of being elsewhere. Trish remembers that during an engagement party for her sister Norah that her soon to be brother-in-law made a flirtatious touch on her shoulder. This touch occurred while the family was taking a photo by the water. This photo is the central piece of the scene and underscores the ominous notion of elsewhere that impacts Trish's understanding of the world as separated into distinct spaces. Even though Trish describes the photo as an awkward portrayal of the group, Norah keeps the photo because of "a huge cruise ship" in the background (Morrissy 2016, 243). The ship is described as the central image of the chapter:

> The ship filled the entire background – a giant white wall of glinting windows, a riveted fortress on the move. There must have been six floors of decks and the pas-

sengers were crowded at the rails, a sea of indecipherable faces, some waving, others sending out semaphore flashes with their cameras, others just standing there, forlorn with farewell. The whale-ish ship dwarfed the three of them and blotted out everything else – the jaunty sky, the choppy waters, the landmark beacon at the mouth of the harbor. (243-244)

The ship in the photo represents the enterprise of a global elsewhere with a collection of "indecipherable faces" that blot out the entirety of the landscape. This is the elsewhere to which, eventually, Trish escapes to avoid the feelings of uncomfortableness she feels about her family and her brother-in-law. As a representation of a global elsewhere, the ship is an ominous "fortress on the move" that is a force that helps disrupt the focus of the photo. It is a force that completely alters the frame of the photo, moving the importance from an Irish family celebrating to a globalized ship carrying a "sea" of humanity to an international destination. Similar to the promise of a global elsewhere that Trish believes offers her an escape, the cruise ship promises a withdrawal from the anxieties of local Irish life. Norah highlights the importance of the ship by calling it "surreal" and stressing the true nature of the photo is "all about what's going on in the background" (244). The surreal nature of the photo is directly tied to how, as an image of a global elsewhere, the ship upends the relationship between the local landscape and the background of elsewhere. The firm boundaries between local space and an elsewhere are broken as the force of the ship overcomes the entirety of the photo. The family drama that is the central plot of the chapter is diminished by the role of the background as it covers and changes the focus of Morrissy's text. Trish's uncomfortable relationship with her native country is no longer framed, by the text, as solely reducible to a family drama but is a part of wider global influence that pushes people into a different relationship between home and elsewhere. Similar to McCormack's protagonist, Trish and her family are caught in the context of a global elsewhere that disrupts their local relationships and intrudes on their space.

The emphasis on the background of the photo continues, in the vein of austerity fiction, to invert the relationship between global space and local Irish communities. As a representation of an ominous global elsewhere, the cruise ship undercuts Trish's belief in a stable global elsewhere that maintains an established boundary between native and foreign spaces. At the end of the story, Trish feels she and her sister are left in "absurdity and grief" at the death of her mother (249). The decision to end this chapter on the grief over a lost parent makes Trish's attempt to melt into a global elsewhere unsatisfying. The emotional end of the chapter in "absurdity and grief" points to Norah's proclamation that "it's all about what's going on in the background" where the role of Ireland in a new global elsewhere is confusing and disorientating. Despite Trish's best efforts to reinvent herself in Italy, Morrissy's text imposes a "forlorn" global influence that keeps her from actualizing a new

identity. The folding over of her mother's death with the image of a forceful global other reflects how Trish is unable to construct a stable and segmented narrative of her life. This inability to envision a world of stable borders and relations is key to how austerity fiction expands on Gerardine Meaney's assertion that "the domestic and familial are vortices of economic and political forces" (2010, xi). The vortices of familial and political themes in Morrissy's story reflect the confusing and chaotic place of Ireland in a post-austerity world where the background represents a world of global opportunities and dangers that cannot be relegated to remain in the background.

4. Inequality of movement in post-crisis migration

One of the effects of the Tiger that was heavily influenced by neoliberal discourse was the role of migration to Ireland. While the Tiger was in full force, the narrative of a global elsewhere was flipped from a space to escape to a place from which new and returning Irish would originate. Reports and stories about people moving to Ireland, both those returning and new arrivals, were portrayed as an important indicator of the success of the neoliberal Tiger. Ireland was framed as a neoliberal paradise where the incoming population of new arrivals and returned migrants could all join the good times of the boom. Donal Donovan and Antoin E. Murphy summarize these feelings about migration as a moment when an entire narrative had been rewritten: "net migration, a hardy perennial of the Irish economy and society up to the 1990s, had disappeared and the airports were full of immigrants from Eastern Europe flown in primarily on the hugely successful low-cost Irish airline, Ryanair" (2013, 1). In many respects, the numbers and data backed up this narrative that negative net migration was a thing of the past. Beginning in the late 1990s, the rate of people moving to Ireland increased for over a decade, "reaching a high point of almost 17 per thousand of the population in 2006" (Barrett, Bergin, and Kelly 2011, 1). This influx of people moving to Ireland emphasized how continual movement both to and from the country was now a positive part in the fabric of Irish life. Ireland's new position reflected the belief that the country had shed its position as a colonized country with a history of exporting goods and people. It was part of a neoliberal narrative that suggested one could move to Ireland to make money and travel abroad from Ireland to make global investments.

Similar to other issues born or exacerbated by the Tiger, migration was another aspect of the boom that was skewed by the language of neoliberal globalization. As the Tiger crashed, the pattern of migration reversed, which revealed the fragility of this narrative of migration. Kieran Allen and Brian O'Boyle describe how the return to mass emigration occurred in a "remarkably short period of time […] almost as if the Celtic Tiger was no more than a brief period of fantasy" (2013, 51). The fantasy period of the Tiger did not,

however, result in a return to the pre-Tiger norm of emigration and exile. After a post-2008 spike in mass emigration, 2018 represented the first year since 2009 where Ireland was a net importer of people (Kenny 2018). Instead of falling back into a pre-Tiger version of Ireland, this contemporary shift in Irish diasporic theory highlights how migration embraces "ostensibly post-modern conditions," such as "transnationalism and globalization" (Delaney, Kenny, MacRaild 2006, 46). In essence, then, migration to and from Ireland continues to be shaped by global and neoliberal principles that combine both narratives of prosperity and austerity. This continued transnational turn in Irish migration made the country a node, or hub, in a much more diverse and interconnected network of human movement where the traditional divides of exile, ex-pat, and emigrant have become fluid and different concepts.

The way the narrative of global capitalism influenced and mainstreamed issues of inequality also shaped the narrative surrounding the movement of people to and from Ireland. Bryan Fanning has noted that even though "prosperity fostered a quiet transformation of Ireland" it soon "became apparent that, left to themselves, the Irish aboard might not return in sufficient numbers to meet the demands of the Celtic Tiger labor market" (2014, 119). Despite the popular narrative that the Celtic Tiger reversed the long history of emigration – a narrative that was often presented as Ireland healing itself – the reality was that Ireland had entered the supercharged enterprise of neoliberal globalization that required more bodies in order for the economy to function[6]. As a result, to maintain a deep workforce, migration became framed as a double-sided issue where the movement of people was, for some, an investment in personal and professional development and, for others, an act of survival. Ireland built a "neo-liberal approach to immigration" where, in order to meet the needs of a productive globalized nation, the country "had become radically open to immigration, but at the same time made it considerably harder for migrants to become Irish citizens" (122). This bifurcated approach to immigration was a direct product of the language of neoliberalization that, despite the inherent inequality, framed transnational movement as a positive part of the contemporary experience.

[6] A continually replenished workforce is a key component of neoliberal capitalism as the idea of an ever-increasing economy requires an endless supply of workers. Ireland's approach to managing immigration during the Tiger can be directly connected to Milton Friedman's declarations about the value of unofficial workers. Friedman asserts that an undocumented labor force is "a good thing for the illegal immigrants [and] a good thing for the citizens of the country" (1977). Friedman frames an undocumented workforce as a good thing "because as long as it's illegal the people who come in do not qualify for welfare, they don't qualify for social security, they don't qualify for the other myriad of benefits that we pour out from our left pocket to our right pocket" (1977).

In "Diaspora", Morrissy highlights the unequal disparity between Irish migrants to critique the neoliberal narrative of positive migration. Morrissy's story splits the narratives of its protagonists along the neoliberal line where people are deemed official and unofficial migrants. The narrative switches between Mo Dark, an Irish citizen of colour that grew up on Prosperity Drive, and Trish as she returns to Italy after a job interview[7]. By setting her story in a Spanish airport, Morrissy outlines an uneven relationship between Trish and Mo, who were childhood sweethearts back in Ireland (2016, 51). "Diaspora" recreates, and inverts, the moment when the young couple had planned to leave Ireland, but Trish had cold feet and did not join Mo on the journey. Trish and Mo are placed on opposite ends of the inequality spectrum as Trish is interviewing for a new job where Mo is struggling as a homeless person. Morrissy sets this story in a global elsewhere of an airport, which an important space in a global system of migration and movement because airports stress the "urgency of the present moment" (Augé 2008, 82). The airport represents a temporal and spatial dislocation in which culture, society, and life proceed "as if space had been trapped in time" due to the constant circulation of people (84). In trapping her characters in an airport – a space that emphasizes transit and movement – Morrissy freezes her narrative to focus on the inequality found in the differences between Mo and Trish.

When Mo first notices Trish at the airport, he is aroused by the memory of their past relationship but is quickly depressed since he feels "disfigured or emaciated" due to his current condition (Morrissy 2016, 52). Mo describes his life as "permanently in transit" where he can never earn enough money "to get back on the carousel of life" (62). When Mo hears that an anthropologist studying his airport community has termed them "airport vagrants", Mo recognizes how this label "makes him" and his position in the airport "sound transitory, a rite of passage, not a destination" (64). The categorization of Mo as an airport vagrant remakes him into an unofficial migrant that exists on the margins of European society. He is no longer Irish because that category has been overwritten by the status of being an airport vagrant. Mo's position in the text reflects how Ireland's post-Tiger immigration plan created a

[7] Although it is beyond the scope of this article, it should be noted that the story "Assisted Passage" has a difficult connection to the other stories of Irish diaspora presented in Morrissy's text. While other stories show a nuanced approach to the way global capitalism creates damaging social divides along race, gender, and class lines, this chapter has a scene that is problematic in terms of its racial politics. The main character, an Irish woman emigrating to Australia, has an empowering sexual relationship with an unnamed Egyptian man. She becomes pregnant from this romantic encounter and views her pregnancy as a transgressive act against the gender politics of pre-Tiger Ireland. In many respects, this scene is a representation of an act that seeks "to bring the Orient closer to Europe [and] thereafter absorb it entirely" (Said 1979, 87). The story could be included in any further study of how race functions in post-Tiger Irish literature.

neoliberal schism between those with so-called legitimate claims to Irishness and those like Mo that were deemed suspect due to "the impossible equation" of being a "brown baby" in Ireland (66). The description of Mo as an "impossible equation" underscores how his position as a migrant reflects a pattern in global migration where the "invisibility of migrants" is a central part in maintaining the inequality of working and living conditions (Gilmartin 2017, 202). Mo's role highlights how he has a connection to Ireland while at the same time erasing him from narratives surrounding traditional Irishness.

Trish's narrative further underscores the invisibility of Mo's position as she gets a glimpse of him yet is never shown to engage with him fully. Even though she hopes that she can reconnect with Mo, Trish still initially views him as a "complete stranger" and a "hobo" (Morrissy 2016, 67). This categorization of him as a stranger and hobo represents how Mo's identity has been over-coded by his position as an airport vagrant. Despite Trish's feelings of guilt over not joining Mo in the past, she is never seen to make a connection with Mo in the airport. Her initial thought that Mo is a "hobo" immediately shows how Trish views all the men of the airport community. To her, they are faceless people that are, at best, a nuisance to be ignored. Morrissy keeps the two characters separated with only the hint that they may form a connection. Trish hopes to talk with Mo and explain why she did not join him years ago in "some mad notion that she can undo everything" (67). The lack of connection between the two characters reflects their completely divergent experiences in the neoliberal global diaspora.

Morrissy uses the notion of a neoliberal global diaspora to reflect on Ireland's status as a diasporic destination. "Diaspora" ends when Trish thinks she sees Mo, but when she turns to call out to him, he ignores her. The reader is never given a chance to see if Mo and Trish could overcome the many ways they are separated. Instead, the reader is left with the impression that Mo remains invisible to Trish just as migrants remain invisible to official governments and agencies. Morrissy's story argues that Irish citizenship, like most formations of national identity caught in the continual global diaspora, follows the neoliberal trend where rights and visibility only "adhere to a limited group of people who belong to a nation"(Robinson and Santos 2014, 14). As a result, there will be people such as Mo that will always "fall outside of the nation" and therefore be excluded from national rights (14). Morrissy's text aligns with Thomas Docherty's assertion that migrant readings reflect how literature "materializes a community" and determines "the shape of the world, and the attendant idea of citizenship" (2018, 843). Trish and Mo, as Irish citizens, are materialized by Morrissy in a world of global inequality where they cannot engage with each other and are separated by a system of global capitalism that establishes an unequal structure for migrants in a global elsewhere.

5. Entrepreneurial Migration and the Risks of the Global Elsewhere

Along with critiquing how neoliberal patterns in migration work to maintain structures of inequality, austerity fiction critiques how narratives of neoliberalization often frame migration as an entrepreneurial activity. Ireland, like most of the West, was agreeable to the influence of neoliberalization because it related to narratives of Irish emigration that presented the concept as a path to acquire marketable skills. Fanning has shown that, in Ireland, migration had been thought of as a way for an individual to express agency and enterprise. He argues: "Emigration in a sense came to be presented as developmental. It afforded those without the skills needed to find employment in Ireland the opportunity to become eligible for return" (2014, 125). Emigration became, for some, not a difficult or desperate choice for survival but an entrepreneurial and aspirational activity that could allow the individual to return home in a better, more successful position. This changes the very act of migration into an investment of time in building skills more agreeable to the global labour market. This ideology is captured in Mo's explanation of his emigration from Ireland where, "somewhere along the way, work drifted out of his existence and his existence *became* his work" (Morrissy 2016, 65). The experiences of emigration are flattened out to a simple expression of labor.

Surprisingly, the idea that migration was a form of personal development continued after the recession. Irial Glynn and Philip J. O'Connell write about how, after the financial collapse, the motivation to leave Ireland was not solely tied to basic economic necessities: "While unemployment was a major driving factor, underemployment and lack of job satisfaction also spurred many to emigrate" (2017, 301). Glynn and O'Connell, while noting that harsh economic circumstances were a factor in emigration patterns, have found that this tendency to view migration as an act of professional development extended to the lives of Irish migrants after arriving at their destinations. Emigration allowed "many to experience a higher standard of living" and were "much happier with their jobs, salaries, and employment prospects" (302-303). Overall, the migratory patterns that occurred after the financial collapse could be argued to be important to Ireland's recovery because "it is very likely that Ireland would have experienced even higher rates of unemployment" if not for emigration (303).

McCormack engages with this neoliberal description of contemporary migration in the way Marcus interacts with his son. Darragh, Marcus' son, is on a trip of personal discovery and fulfillment as he works low-paying jobs in Australia. Darragh is working in Australia by choice since he comes from a financially stable family and is described as having a "gifted" if undisciplined "academic mind" (McCormack 2016, 31). Marcus believes his son is having "adventures down under" as a part of an extended adolescence where the "whole Waltzing Matilda thing" mainly entails hanging out around a

"campfire in a woolen hat" and "skulling cans of Four X" (58). In this context, the whole experience of emigration is normalized as a process of personal enjoyment and "adventure" where young Irish people can learn about themselves in a global elsewhere. Even Skype conversations are just part of a routine for Marcus that includes looking at "news sites" and "Amazon" (64). The whole nature of Darragh's time in Australia is presented as a very casual experience where technology shrinks the distance between Ireland and Australia by allowing face-to-face conversations about "sport, politics, and local gossip" (83).

McCormack, however, undercuts the normalcy of Darragh's adventure down under by revealing how the distance of migration – a life lived in a global elsewhere – comes with an emotional cost. Even though Marcus can have face-to-face conversations with his son via the internet, he acutely feels the distance and separation. After Darragh shuts down their Skype connection, Marcus feels "the connection [is] broken now" and the "immense distance closed down in an instant," which leaves him with only a sensation that "the world is nothing more than the four walls of the room within this house" (32). The technology that allows for more direct conversation between father and son creates a more distinct feeling of loneliness and absence. After feeling the collapse of distance when the Skype connection was closed, Marcus has a strong feeling of confusion: "a feeling of dislocation as if some imp had got in during the night and shifted things around just enough to disorientate me, tables, chairs, and other stuff just marginally out of place by a centimetre or two, enough to throw me" (33). McCormack draws a direct line between Marcus's conversation with his son and the "feeling of dislocation" where things appear to be slightly out of place. The absence of Darragh is part of this disorientating feeling because even though Marcus can have conversations with his son over Skype, he still feels the absence of shared physical space as a disorientating force. The lack of physical closeness is replaced by a technological closeness that fails to replicate the face-to-face connection. Marcus's reaction to the migration of his son is a part of an emotional price that undercuts any narrative that argues contemporary migration is just a normal stage in a world where personal development requires an engagement with a global elsewhere. Marcus's feelings of dislocation and disorientation are similar to the results of a study done on Irish people over the age of 50 that found an increase of depression and feelings of loneliness among the parents of migrant children (Glynn and O'Connell 2017, 303). Darragh's grand adventure – which is made possible by the migration patterns of contemporary neoliberalization – privileges his status as a person, like Morrissy's character Trish, that can escape into a global elsewhere. His escape, however, is framed in the text as creating a painful and emotional cost for Marcus who carries the weight of Darragh's absence, despite current communication technologies.

The conclusion of the novel underscores how the post-austerity Ireland of *Solar Bones* is one where the impact of a global elsewhere is part of the growing restlessness that marks the end of the text. As the novel reaches its end, Marcus becomes "agitated beyond all comfort" with a "grating current" that forces him to "keep moving, drifting from room to room like one of those sea creatures who cannot stay still for fear they may sink and drown" (McCormack 2016, 222). Marcus's final thoughts again interact with an abstract background force that he sees a "vast unbroken commonage of space and time, into that vast oblivion in which there are no markings or contours to steer by nor any songs to sing me home" (223). The end of the novel forces Marcus to interact with a cognitive experience that shares a similar structure to a global elsewhere where space and time are placed into continuous flux. He is trapped in a continual present that leaves him agitated and uncomfortable without any ability to locate himself in the ordered world he so craves to experience. It is a general feeling of crisis where the only action that can be done is to continue the restless wandering of life. Or, as Marcus expresses it, there "is nothing else for it but to keep going, one foot in front of the other, the head down and keep going, keep going, keep going to fuck" (*ibidem*). The agitated desire to keep moving forward is not dissimilar to the attitudes of post-austerity Ireland where, despite the narratives of sacrifice, the only possible action is one of existential survival. The final words of Marcus make for a narrative that does not end in a typically novelistic manner but simply stops, which leaves him to trudge endlessly in a blank oblivion of an extended moment. The end of the novel mirrors a deflation of austerity where the richness and detail of McCormack's language are narrowed down to a repetition that leads to an agitated state of unsatisfied searching.

Although not the concluding story in her collection, Morrissy's "Love Child" offers her strongest critique of the costs of living in a global elsewhere. The narrative follows Julia Fortune as she travels to New York to end her life. Throughout, Julia's attempt to shed her Irish nature by embracing a new identity is undercut by the very nature of living in a global elsewhere. For instance, Julia wants to distance herself from a standard narrative that includes "bedding down at some ready-made address in Queens with half a dozen other illegal Paddies" (Morrissy 2016, 128). Instead, Julia understands her departure from Ireland as a "Hollywood film" that has been mixed with an "Irish version" where "two inarticulate people" are attempting to "give the other the brush-off" (129). Julia is attempting, quite forcefully, to brush off her connection to Ireland by leaving it behind.

As a contained narrative, "Love Child" pushes its setting back into the 1980s to use the "New Irish" period of the Irish diaspora as a historical lens to critique the reality of post-austerity migration. Linda Dowling Almeida describes the "New Irish" as a "more transient population than previous generations of migrants" (2001, 6). The "New Irish," she asserts, were not "de-

fined by the traditional markers of religion and nationalism but determined instead by some future vision as yet undefined" (6). Morrissy's text makes Julia representative of this "New Irish" migration because the idea of a migratory class of Irish undefined by traditional cultural markers is similar to how post-Tiger migrants understood themselves a part of something new. The irony, of course, is that Julia is travelling to New York to negate any future in her goal to commit suicide. She wants "to sleep in a city that never wakes" (Morrissy 2016, 140).

Morrissy frames Julia's entire experience in New York as caught in a double-bind of diaspora where the newness and opportunity promised by a new start are unable to be separated from the culture and memories of Ireland. This double-bind is highlighted by Julia's time spent in the "Hotel Nathaniel", which is a dilapidated hotel that is carrying the legacy of a transnational past since its previous name was the "Alhambra" (124). Julia's fragmented sense of self is reflected in this "ghost hotel" where, she believes, the residents live "caged, solitary lives" (127). Her belief that the residents are caged and solitary replicates the assertion that the passengers on the cruise ship seen in the story "Diaspora" are isolated and indecipherable on their moving fortress. The interior of the building reflects this experience of a global elsewhere back toward Julia and the reader. She feels "the doors" of the building "kept making nervous forays as if they ached for closure but some neurotic hesitancy prevented them" (126). Similar to Julia's experience as a dislocated individual, the New York hotel is caught between the identities of a regular American (the Nathaniel) and a residual foreign past (the Alhambra). The theme of overlapping identities is persistent throughout the chapter where each new identity cannot find closure due to a neurotic hesitancy. There can never be a full transformation into something completely new because the lingering ghost of another, different, identity is always present since the Hotel Nathaniel still retains its "motif of Middle Eastern splendor" (127).

The conflict of identities is continued when Julia adopts the identity of her American friend, Henrietta Gardner, who died in a childhood accident back on Prosperity Drive. When meeting a fellow resident of the hotel named Gloria, Julia gives her name as Hetty and begins to merge her background with that of her friend (142). She tells Gloria, for example, that the death of her friend "Julia" is the main cause of her depression. This mixture of American and Irish identities creates a new, unique, global identity for Julia but does not offer her any sense of escape. Instead, it only sharpens her sense of isolation and depression. Julia thinks "of all the dislocating experiences of the past 24 hours, this was the strangest, hearing herself being described posthumously in the third person" (144). This is the most dislocating experience for Julia because it represents a symbolic transformation into a new identity. The choice to have Julia adopt an American identity not only mirrors the migration patterns of many Irish citizens but also parallels how the very na-

ture of the Tiger relied on Ireland joining a neoliberal model of statehood that is heavily associated with an American political and cultural identity. Even though Julia is a part of the New Irish migration of the 1980s, Morrissy crafts her situation and desires in a very post-Tiger environment of a dislocating global elsewhere. She becomes more American, and more global, right at the moment her future is coming to an end. Morrissy presents the transformation of Julia's character as a metaphor for Ireland's transformation during the Tiger; essentially, it is a moment of complete transformation that does not produce a new future or reality but can only represent the end of an era.

In the end, Julia burns her passport and imagines her "past" as fading into a "charred blackness" (145). This image of a destroyed passport critiques the post-Tiger idea of Irish migration as one that always includes the possibility of return to a new and better future. Morrissy's text reveals how any understanding of contemporary migration cannot focus on how the movement of people is a beneficial action of professional development that is required in the neoliberal and globalized world. Julia's fateful trip to New York is a story that undercuts any notion of migration as a life-affirming action that always changes the person for the better. Like McCormack, her text draws attention to the unseen emotional and psychological costs of migration. Morrissy and McCormack present movement within a global elsewhere as never quite matching up to what the narratives of neoliberal globalization promise.

6. Conclusion: global futures and elsewheres

As the economic forces of the Tiger transformed Ireland, the narrative of neoliberal capitalism stressed a desire for newness as a defining cultural element of Ireland's transformation. It was a desire, as stated by former Taoiseach Bertie Ahern, to refute "the cynics" that "may be able to point to the past" in order to stress that the Irish "live in the future" (as cited in Foster 2008, 1). Of course, the future predicted by Ahern was entirely different from the future that occurred after the financial collapse. The language and reality of austerity replaced the promise and potential of prosperity.

As writers of austerity fiction, Morrissy and McCormack articulate a post-Tiger relationship between Ireland and globalization. Their narratives depict an environment where issues of global capitalism are folded into the emotions, lives, and communities of their characters. They present instability as a threat of an elsewhere that crosses international borders. Yet, despite being framed as a dangerous elsewhere, the role of uncertainty has become enmeshed and hidden within the memories and experiences of the characters. Instability weaves its way into the fabric of Irish fiction as an awareness that the background of potential global crises is always intimately placed in the structures of local life. Irish austerity fiction pulls the context and background of neoliberal capitalism into the foreground to reflect how, after 2008,

the complex nature of the global financial crisis is not only an economic and political issue but also one that is deeply embedded in the emotions and thoughts of the individual.

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