

## INSECURITY AND SEGREGATION: REJECTING AN URBANISM OF FEAR

Luca Pattaroni and Yves Pedrazzini

Sociologist, Laboratory of Urban Sociology (LaSUR) , Ecole Polytechnique Federale, Lausanne, Switzerland

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*Security discourses taking place in contemporary cities – in both developing and developed countries – feed defiance and legitimize an “urbanism of fear” based on controls that increase social and spatial segregation. Inversely, a sustainable city is an inclusive one capable of making a place for all kinds of people in a shared world. This is a plea for ambitious urban planning policies.*

A sustainable city is an inclusive city that accommodates all kinds and classes of people in a common world. By contrast, the current-day “security discourse” – the scaremongering language of politicians and the media – institutionalizes the way we think about public safety and legitimizes an “urbanism of fear” in most contemporary cities. In both developing and developed countries, a growing feeling of insecurity leads to increasing social and spatial segregation. The means of combating fears and insecurity force the separation – and even the destruction – of classic forms of urban cohesion, rendering the city both unbearable and unsustainable.

In developed as well as developing countries, this ever more clamorous “security discourse” has two major consequences on the growth of cities, even as it obscures safety’s link to real delinquency: (1) certain fringes of the population, especially poor people and youths, are perceived as vectors of insecurity; and (2) planned urban redevelopment feeds an incontestable market of security systems and services. These two phenomena induce what we propose calling an “urbanism of fear,” where a series of socio-technical systems (or material devices, juridical norms, political institutions and social behaviour) splits the city apart socially and physically. These fear-based material and institutional settings produce a new

physical arrangement and social ordering of the city.<sup>1</sup> A new urban order – an “archipelago of fear” – emerges, displacing the ideal of a modern city in which strangers can peacefully coexist in common public spaces. We will hypothesize that part of the violence in contemporary cities derives from the disdain and contempt inherent in these fear-based socio-technical systems, due to the humiliation they engender on a daily basis. The city of fear thus appears profoundly intolerant and intolerable.

### **Diversity Challenges Cities’ Sustainability**

In light of the increased mobility and heterogeneity that comes with globalization, urban social and territorial sustainability increasingly appears as a desideratum rather than a concrete project or cornerstone for organizing everyday systems and operations. Sustainability runs up against several complex realities, especially those improperly grouped together under the rubric “urban violence.” Delinquency, criminality, corruption and riots: these notions forge an idea of the city as a dangerous place, one that is soon “verified” by experience.

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We are thus witnessing an urbanism of fear<sup>2</sup> emerge in cities of both developed and developing countries – a concept that owes as much (or more) to the police officer’s vision of the city as the architect’s. Reactivating inclusive urban projects takes on new urgency: measures to ensure safety and reduce city-dwellers’ fears translate into urban planning and architectural operations “securing” increasing areas of city terrain, to the point that the market for security systems and services has become one of the most profitable ever. The fundamentally political task of making the city a safe place should not carry the price of segregating or disdaining part of the population, or sacrificing the vision of an inclusive city.

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<sup>1</sup> Our inspirations here comes partly from the work of Michel Foucault and his concept of “dispositive” as an heterogeneous set of narratives, institutions, architectural settings, laws, administrative decisions, moral principles and so forth (Foucault 1994).

<sup>2</sup> An analogy to Mike Davis’ (1997) concept of “the ecology of fear.” See also Nan Ellin’s (1997) work on “the architecture of fear.”

Indeed, historically this tension between order and segregation is central to policy and urban planning work (Pattaroni 2007).

### **Urban Order: Socio-Technical Systems to Open and Close the City**

The development of cities can be read as an evolution in the way various socio-technical systems place city dwellers in urban and social space, e.g. where they live, work, shop, play, meet and so forth. Over time, these material systems and the societal models they imply have changed in important ways. The ordering or placement of urban dwellers based on their social status gave way to ordering them based on the position of places themselves, and on the boundary between public and private spaces (Lofland 1973). The modern ideal of liberty and equality encouraged pacified public spaces open to all, even in cities highly segregated spatially (Box 1). The modern city's founding ideal was to create a space where each person could be safe (among other things) independently of his or her status or income. This ideal rested on a number of political principles as well as congruent socio-technical systems: a state monopoly on violence (national police force), suppression of discriminatory regulations, and systems to facilitate "vulnerable" people's mobility (children, the handicapped and old people). A culture of urban civility complemented the separation between public and private spaces; taking one's place in the city depended upon a proven ability to respect others.

**The authorities lost their monopoly on violence to a very diverse array of private agents and security systems, all of which tend to fragment public spaces.**

Conversely, the gradual rise of the "magma of safety concerns" (Garcia-Sanchez 2006) stifles the goal of teaching civility to all citizens. Mechanical systems replace mutually civil conduct, through barriers, automatic security systems and other means of physical repression. In the bigger picture, this swing towards physical control matches the abandonment of the modern ideal of a city accessible to all. The authorities lost their monopoly on the legitimate use of violence to a very diverse array of private agents and security systems, all of which tend to fragment public spaces. These material controls diminish mobility and deprive large segments of the population of access to certain areas of the city. Potentially, this physical rather than civil control involves exposing people to danger: money – and sometimes status or membership in some community (ethnic, cultural, sexual) – becomes a requirement for safety. These transformations take place slowly but surely. In the space of a few years,

security discourses have generally given way to instituting this new urban order – territorial constellations whose appearance gives us the term “archipelagos of fear.”

### **From Delinquency to Security Discourse**

Today, security policies feed a culture of mistrust and insecurity. This comes largely from the degree of uncertainty that separates real crimes – the ones that become news items in the daily papers – from the *feeling* of insecurity. In reality, a progression in such feeling rarely correlates with actual increases in delinquency: the feeling depends not only on “objective” facts, but also on the way a society thinks about the feelings’ progression and that of “delinquency” (Widner *et al.* 2004). It is obvious that many media outlets and political speeches play a significant role in developing a climate of insecurity, given that they usually focus on delinquency in an alarmist way, describing the perpetrators as unmanageable and incorrigible. In developed countries as much as developing ones, security discourses emerge that profoundly change social relationships within cities and their built environments.

We are not trying to deny the reality of delinquency and urban violence here: “The probability of falling victim to an act of delinquency or violence is substantially higher in an urban area than a rural one” (SWC 2006-7:45). That said, the same study also notes that communities with a large excluded population “suffer a higher level of crime and violence than communities that are well connected to main roads and power structures” (SWC 2006-7:45). Responding to urban insecurity is not sufficient; rather, it is also necessary to think about the links between insecurity and segregation.

**For more than twenty years, this atmosphere of insecurity has been created and maintained by both the media and public rumour**

Pedro Garcia-Sanchez shows how an “atmosphere of insecurity” has been created in Caracas (Garcia-Sanchez 2006: 128) since the late 1980s. Despite sometimes radical breaks in policy, both the media and public rumours have created and maintained this climate of fear – “bring[ing] up facts, scenarios, unfortunate incidents or advice on how to protect yourself from danger every day” by focusing discussion on major figures of small-time urban crime, bandits from poor neighbourhoods (Pedrazzini and Sanchez 1998). Next come multiple “civic security” associations that give shape to the security discourses and gradually include them in

everyday life. From then on, these converging narratives, scattered events, fears and fantasies establish confusion and anxiety in “the heart of public space” (Garcia-Sanchez 2006). The average citizen feeds off a feeling of insecurity that transforms his view of fellow citizens. Instead of maintaining a “civil indifference” for a passing stranger, keeping him at a distance while giving him a modicum of trust, he becomes suspicious. A real transformation of social ties within the city takes the form of “surveillance sociability.” The ties grow closer at the level of immediate neighbours –the people whom one “knows well” – while mistrust governs relations with the “stranger,” always seen, in an almost paranoid way, as a potential aggressor (Garcia-Sanchez 2006).

### **From Security Discourse to an Urbanism of Fear**

The Caracas example shows how an increase in security discourses causes fear to spread and leads to a defensive reconfiguration of urban space. In particular, hundreds of barred control points with sentries (*alcabalas residenciales urbanas*) have sprung up in the city within ten or fifteen years, generally due to private initiatives, which restricted the physical mobility of residents. All kinds of gated residential communities have also appeared, from the simplest to the most sophisticated, as they have in many cities in developed and developing countries (see Caldeira 2000).

**This new arrangement of cities, driven by security discourses, results in the transformation of daily practices and judgments**

The barriers clearly draw an interior and an exterior space. There is no grey area between inhabitant and passer-by, but rather a relatively clear division between the inhabitant who is identified and therefore authorized, and the stranger who seems suspicious and must be kept at distance, barred from entry. The areas subject to these controls suffer from these practices despite their status as normally accessible public places: their inhabitants explain that even if they lack the right to prevent access by “strangers,” they try to make it “difficult to get through” (Garcia-Sanchez and Villa 2002:235). There is a negative appropriation<sup>3</sup> or colonization of these spaces that defines the main outlines of a “private urbanism” (Garcia-

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<sup>3</sup> We use the word “negative” here because, while one often “appropriates” the spaces one regularly frequents, the question here is how far this “taking” is exclusive and inhospitable to other uses and people.

Sanchez and Villa 2002). This new arrangement of cities, driven by security discourses, results in the transformation of daily practices and judgments. It feeds feelings of insecurity on one side, and increases feelings of social contempt and disrespect on the other.

We are clearly witnessing the emergence of a market for security services in Venezuela; it started in the 1980s, especially during the terrible urban riots of 1989. The number of security companies exploded after that, going from 72 in 1987 to 509 in 1997, a 700% increase in ten years. This market's most ostentatious effects are the proliferation of private police and security guards, and an exponential increase in the more or less professional installations of barriers, alarms and defences – cutting through urban and domestic space in every sense.

The growth in the market for security services affects not only cities in developing countries. Indeed, it is even larger in developed-country cities: a 2000 evaluation revealed a 30% increase in the market for security, compared to an 8% increase in developing-country cities (GRHS 2007). In the United States, for example, the number of private “police” has exceeded the number of public police by three to one since the 1990s. In developed as well as developing countries, security is an enormous market: according to a 2006 survey, security providers' sales reached €350 billion, a 9% increase over 2005 (Manach 2007).

### **Urbanism's Horizon of Violence**

Contemporary urban policies sin against residents through a double denial of recognition, refusing the most elementary rights and social esteem to some people

While some city-dwellers understandably need to address their feelings of insecurity and the existence of genuine delinquency, many of the so-called solutions lead in one way or another toward a new “horizon of violence.” The German philosopher and sociologist Axel Honneth links contemporary ills to the denial of recognition, to “social contempt” (Honneth 2000). The denial can take three forms: the absence of love, of legal recognition, or of social esteem. In the absence of love and affection, a person loses self-confidence; in the absence of legal recognition, the basis of self-respect; and in the absence of political recognition, self-esteem. We thus depend on other people and institutions to fully exist and to lead satisfying lives. Institutions can therefore humiliate and deny recognition even when they are trying to be just (Margalit 1996). That denial underpins the reluctance of some people to claim their welfare

benefits, or their humiliation at being treated “like a number” – like a thing – by the bureaucracy (Margalit 1996).

The “horizon of violence” of these institutional and material settings leads us to question not only the fairness of solutions, but also their decency, their avoidance of humiliation. (Margalit 1999). Contemporary urban policies sin against residents through a double denial of recognition, refusing the most elementary rights and social esteem in some cases. In France, this appears in the mistrust of immigrant Arab youth and the stigma attached to unemployed or illegal alien status. One response to humiliation is anger. When anger can be channelled into a critical voice, the response is sometimes denunciation. When anger cannot be channelled, it leads to violence.

### **The Semantics of Fear**

The “semantics of fear” not only creates feelings of insecurity everywhere; it also leads to “demonizing” suspects and guilty parties (Garcia-Sanchez 2006). This changing view of delinquency figures prominently in most security discourses worldwide. It is especially prevalent in the United States, where the delinquent currently tends to be perceived as a fundamentally bad person – rather than as the product of a bad environment, formerly the prevalent view – who requires severe punishment because he or she is incorrigible. This is not a uniquely American discourse: research in Switzerland shows that the people who feel the least safe also have the most negative views of delinquents. Delinquency is perceived to be the result of an individual’s deviance – delinquents are “bad” or “disturbed “ – rather than a result of a social process (Widmer *et al.* 2004).

The growing climate of insecurity seems to close the door on more measured analysis of delinquency and preventative policies. Fearful visions of reality appear suddenly and open the way for repression. In France, this fear emerges in popular views on what should be done about the poor suburbs (*les banlieues*) where many first- and second-generation immigrants live in social housing. According to Emanuel Renault (2002: 1), “analyses are performed through the prism of insecurity, so poor neighbourhoods are no longer seen as places of suffering so much as sanctuaries for illegal activities requiring a penal response.”

The precariousness or instability taking hold in French *banlieues*, and more generally in all large cities in developed countries, is that of “disaffiliation”

The prism of insecurity erases social circumstances and denies the suffering of the people committing violent acts. The works cited here on humiliation and recognition prompt another reading of urban violence as well. If one listens to young people in French *banlieues*, one hears a recurring request for respect. These youths speak of a powerful feeling of social contempt that parallels the fear they themselves instil (Renault 2002). This sense of contempt arises from their experience of constant suspicion, and from the loss of the social and professional ties that are traditional sources of recognition. The precariousness or instability taking hold in French *banlieues*, and more generally in all large cities in developed countries, is that of “disaffiliation.” People become vulnerable when they they lose their jobs and social networks, and can no longer draw on these sources of recognition to counter the disdain of the dominant classes (Renault 2002:2).

The establishment of a “watchful sociability” results in a powerful exclusion of the poorest and the stigmatized, who are denied recognition even by people from their own milieu. As they feel more useless, violence becomes more likely. The violence is not directed at living standards, but rather “against the vectors of social contempt, against the environment inasmuch as it imposes a degraded self-image” (Renault 2002:3). The resulting frustration erupts into the delinquency, petty crime and urban violence that appear on the evening news programmes.

There is no direct link between poverty and violence. A whole set of intermediary mechanisms come into play, especially those linked to the experience of social and spatial inequality. More than the lack of money, the experience of “relative poverty” and frustrations associated with the loss of self-esteem appear to be the main drivers of urban violence. Thus, “inequality and exclusion exacerbate insecurity, which in return perpetuates a vicious cycle of poverty and violence” (SWC 2006-7: 145).

Consequently, the current fight against urban fear means that real criminal events and those that merely increase feelings of insecurity receive the same treatment. In this light, even if there are currently “some reassuring signs of a decrease in levels of criminality in big cities” across the world (SWC 2006/7: 150), there is no parallel reduction of security discourses. Nor



has the trend towards an urbanism of fear abated, an urbanism allowing ample space to socio-technical systems that segregate and materially exclude certain fringes of the population. Indeed, security policies seem like ineffective half measures, inflating the problem more than they reduce it.

### **Are Archipelagos of Fear the New Shape of Urban Order?**

Given the foregoing, are we witnessing a new urban order that will replace the modern city constructed around an ideal of universally accessible public space? Architectural ramparts and boundaries permanently affect the built environment of the “defensive city.” The price of defensible landscapes and parcels explodes, even in times of crisis. The landscapes and material settings born of security urbanism emerge in very different social and territorial conditions and, while there is not yet a generic defensive city, the same models of security spaces take diverse forms the world over, e.g. gated communities, protected towers and guarded residences. This “globalized” model induces a fragmentation of urban space aimed at facilitating control. Once its public spaces have split into paradoxically private spaces, the city increasingly takes on the shape of an archipelago – one where each island is equipped with security systems according to its owner’s or renter’s affluence, and each island is also more easily policed from the exterior. That leads to a new socially and spatially polarized morphology of contemporary cities, dismembered into secure enclaves and poor ghettos (Davis 1977).

On one side, we have Disneyland transformed into Fort Apache. On the other side, the campfires of homeless people flicker throughout ruined city centres

In modern and postcolonial urban societies, this fortification of social classes is not always perceived as a planned catastrophe, one that will eventually render any city – or any place – impossible and unsustainable. On the contrary, many leaders and urban residents seem convinced of its relevance or even its necessity. This principle of safety depends on a progressively defensive autonomy for some parts of the city, along with the inexorable abandonment of other increasingly vulnerable, but always more violent, parts of the city – more violent because lost in urgency and hopelessness. On one side, we have Disneyland transformed into Fort Apache. On the other side, the campfires of homeless people flicker throughout ruined city centres. Between them circulate police patrols, night watchmen and

secured roadways. Little remains in the middle anymore. Public spaces, streets, squares and markets that functioned as intermediate spaces disappear. These spaces are privatized “for reasons of safety,” or turned into wastelands reclaimed by the underclass. The progressive loss of “the street” – a public space gradually grown so deserted that walking one at night is suspect – arises from a planned strategy of privatization. It is a very serious loss indeed, for this was the space where the “classically” segregated city allowed rich and poor to cross paths and coexist. By contrast, in the manifold city now emerging, different classes can practically circulate “in parallel” within their reserved areas, moving in their own networks without being aware of adjacent ones (GRHS 2003:22).

Shopping centres reinvent the city by calming its fears, air-conditioning it, and populating it with polite salespeople and innocent buyers

Even the disdained participate in the spatial prohibitions, and reinforce the boundaries of their ghettos by tinkering with them. They too seek to experiment with the privatization of space for safety reasons. Entire blocks of social housing in the centre of Mexico City thus take on the look of veritable fortresses forbidden to strangers. That said, it is on the elites’ side of the city, known as “Luxury City” (Box 1), that this trend appears most clearly. The “city under surveillance” typified in such sites features three categories of space: one is residential, the second reserved for prisons and other detention centres, and the third used to construct secure commercial enclaves, managed and defended like autonomous territories. The quasi-military withdrawal of public spaces into shopping malls and athletic clubs, with their architectural and technological fortifications, is not solely a triumph of consumerism. Shopping centres reinvent the city by calming its fears, air-conditioning it, and populating it with polite salespeople and innocent buyers.

### **Safety as a Luxury Product**

In a context of growing urban segregation, property privileges gradually give way to access privileges. Safety becomes a service and provides admittance to society; it is sold like a luxury product. The most striking recent buildings contribute to this urbanism of security. Examples run the gambit from the *Torre Agbar* by the French architect Jean Nouvel in Barcelona (2005), or the *Archivo Distrital* by the Colombian architect Rogelio Salmona in Bogotá (1990), to the Walt Disney Concert Hall (called “Death Wish” by Mike Davis) by the

American architect Frank Gehry (2003), and the renovated and secured Bunker Hill neighbourhood, both in Los Angeles (Davis, 1997).

To classic urban fragmentation is added planned fragmentation of territory divided according to degrees of safety or danger

To some degree, real estate developers also contribute to the materialization of fearful societies. It is not a given that their contribution means they subscribe to this ideology of security; it is more likely they simply respond to demand and make a good living doing so. Nonetheless, their technical talents have pushed the urbanism of fear towards a dramatic radicalization of the process of spatial segregation. To classic urban fragmentation, they now add planned fragmentation of territory divided according to degrees of safety or danger. It is striking to see how nearly all of the residential buildings in the city centre of Geneva, Switzerland, have closed-off their central entryways with numeric keypads. The paradox remains that all these systems to render the city more secure never really make it truly safer. The feeling of insecurity even seems to increase as the obsession with safety grows: as Mike Davis suggests, “The social perception of threat becomes a function of the security mobilization itself, not crime rates” (Davis 1997: 205). Furthermore, for the people excluded from secured spaces, the fragmentation of the urban environment may also entail an increase in fear (SWC 2006/7: 147).

## CONCLUSION

Thus, this urbanism of fear is also a frightening urbanism. By surfing the wave of insecurity, it produces an imaginary global geography: cities are generally perceived as barbaric in developing countries, but henceforth in large numbers of developed countries as well. People in cities are violent. Disorder reigns supreme. As the sociologist Zygmunt Baumann emphasizes, “Paradoxically, the cities originally constructed to provide safety for all their inhabitants are these days associated more often with danger than security” (Baumann 2003: 29). The image as well as the practical form of the contemporary city induces a segregated universe where civil indifference – the minimal condition for peaceful urbanity – gives way to generalized mistrust.

The current urban condition therefore appears unsustainable because it signals the failure of the inclusive ideal of sustainable development. It is an economic failure because segregation and fear reduce the “competitiveness of cities” (SWC 2006/7: 147). It is a social failure because socio-spatial inequalities and barriers to mobility increase mistrust of other people, along with delinquency and violence. Furthermore, it is an environmental failure because an increase in slums makes it difficult to enforce ecological management (Berque et al. 2006). Conversely, an inclusive city should be able to calm security discourses and reintroduce the delinquent into the human community. It should promote an urbanism of recognition, capable of giving everyone a place in the city and the means to live the life to which he or she aspires. Such are the conditions for urban society’s future existence, in developed as well as developing countries.

### **Box 1 Segregation and Urban Violence**

Urban segregation is not a new phenomenon; it is central to the modern Western city. Whereas rich and poor lived side-by-side in pre-industrial cities, an increasingly marked spatial segregation between classes accompanied the expansion of industrial cities. The pioneers of urban sociology<sup>4</sup> in the first half of the twentieth century showed how competition between classes for the best usable locations drove the industrial city’s expansion. The result was a highly segregated city where different activities and classes occupied distinct areas. The “concentric” city described by the American sociologist Earnest Burgess is an exemplary illustration (Figure 1). Neo-classical economics spread this approach by explaining segregation as the result of an arbitrage between housing size and the cost of travel (GRHS 2003: 20).

[Fig1 A-011a\\_Modele\\_zones\\_urbaines.pdf](#)

### **Classic Mechanisms and Forms of Segregation**

Nonetheless, mechanisms for adapting to market constraints alone have not accounted for segregation (GRHS 2003: 21). Another explanatory factor is the unequal distribution of territorial amenities, such as views, air quality and services. In general, poor people are

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<sup>4</sup> The American “Chicago School” of sociologists: Burgess, MacKenzie, Wirth, and so one.

relegated to particularly disadvantageous areas, while investment focuses on sites that offer the best characteristics. Exclusionary zoning mechanisms linked to regulations and urban policies also play a role. Urban segregation can also be the result of willed processes or institutionalized discrimination, as with apartheid or the Jewish ghettos. “Zoned urbanism,” aimed at separating various everyday activities spatially, developed in the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century and then spread to Europe. It too was a powerful tool for separating the rich from the poor.

However, there are many other global models for cities besides concentric circles. Some examples include the colonial city surrounded by walls, the “hollowed” city of Eastern Europe where raised buildings surrounded a lower city centre, or the “polycentric” automobile city of Southeast Asia. Each presents specific forms of segregation.

### **Moving Toward a New Form of Segregation?**

A relatively original and common model of segregation has recently appeared internationally (GRHS, 2001, 2003, 2007; SWC, 2006/7). It usually takes the form of a fortified citadel and ties into the evolution of classic forms of segregation: zoning tends to disappear, and the spatial distance separating rich and poor dwindles. The gentrification process, characterized by the return of some higher-class people to poor areas in the city centre, illustrates this new mix. The large increase in gated communities<sup>5</sup> could thus be “an indication that poor people and rich people are being brought closer to one another spatially” (GRHS 2003: 20). Spatial enclosures have the effect of keeping nearby people at a distance. This phenomenon is not uniform everywhere. Even though they appear almost everywhere in the world, gated communities are far more developed in the United States and Latin America than in Europe. One explanation for this is Europe’s tradition of strong public planning; by contrast, Latin American cities are characterized by neo-liberal policies that allow private investors much more leeway (SWC 2006/7: 149-150). The contemporary city increasingly appears as a mosaic of different cities -cobbled together – each made up of distinct networks of places, and frequented by specific populations who may co-exist without ever crossing paths. Thus, we see the luxury city, the gentrified city, the suburban city, the tenement city, and the

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<sup>5</sup> As of 2000, 32 million people lived in 150,000 gated communities in the United States. In Guadalajara, Mexico, gated communities take up 10% of the land for 2% of the population (SWC 2006/07).

abandoned city (GRHS 2001: 34). The model of “archipelagos of fear” described in this article seeks to comprehend this fragmentation. The main problem is not the existence of spatial segregation, but rather the gradual abandonment of spaces where milieus and classes can mingle. With this abandonment, a public space that symbolizes and facilitates a right to the city for each of its inhabitants also disappears.

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