

Tribalism and State in the Era of the New Nomadism

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The revered theory of the state as the expression of a collective identity occupies a key position in modern thought, especially in the following two formulations: the state as an absolute entity and guarantor of peace and security (Hobbes) and the state as an embodiment of General Will (Rousseau). This theory reached its apogee in the thinking of Hegel, the founding father of modernist philosophy.

In the present instance it will suffice to give brief reference to Hobbes' and Rousseau's theories in order to highlight their contribution to modern philosophical concepts of the state in contrast to what we may call tribal

formulations outside the collectivist purview of the state.

Although Rousseau's social contract prioritises individual human rights and freedom, the sum of these individual wills is finally subsumed by the essentialism of the state. In contrast to Hobbes, who emphasised the artificial and voluntary nature of the social contract, Rousseau elevates it from a legal principle to a political reality. The concept of General Will posited by Rousseau in the fourth part of *Du Contrat Social* leads to an essentialist view of the state as an expression of the will of the people, who are not simply free contracting individuals but a collective harmonious whole.

Rousseau clarifies his concept as follows:

As long as the number of individuals consider themselves one body, their single Will

is directed towards the collective welfare of the group. In this case, all the mechanisms of the state are fully functioning and all its orders are clear and rational. There is no place for obscure or contradictory tendencies and the collective good is self-evident to those who have the common sense to perceive it(1).

The social contract, to the extent that it is a contract between the people and itself (and not between distinct and competing individuals), is in effect a subjective contract between an individual and himself and thus emerges not so much from a natural or mechanical utilitarianism as from the rational will.

General Will, which is not simply the sum of individual wills or the result of a mutual pact, can be defined with absolute rationality as the Common Good. Hence, it is superior to the idea of a group of individuals, no matter how united or supportive, and its elevation to the status of Law above and beyond human will.

Such considerations led Hegel to substitute the individual subjective will with the corporate collective will, which is the State.(2)

Although Hegel sharply criticised Rousseau's conception of the state, he considered that Rousseau prepared the way for German Idealism by his promotion of the idea of freedom which 'makes Will a founding principle of the state.' However, this free will, even in its collectivist guise (General Will) is abstract and non-dialectic, which means that it is tolerant of repression and violence.

Consciousness of the self as part of the Will is rooted in the subjective utilitarian tendency of rationalism. Hence, the need to deny the implicit definitions of freedom in view of the dictates of the absolute mind, or, in other words, the collective dissolution of individual wills in the General Will. There is thus no room for intermediaries between the natural will of the individual and the rational will of

the state since infinite objectivity cannot coexist with the infinite nature of the concept of freedom.(3)

Instead of basing civil polity on abstract free will, Hegel defined the state as ‘the actual reality of ethical thought’⁴ or the objective embodiment of the will, given that his definition of politics was ‘the science of the will’. Although the will is similar to freedom in that both ideas are resistant to definition, each free act requires a positive formulation and hence the state is the condition of the historical realisation of freedom or the positive embodiment of the negative.

Hegel clarifies this idea thus: ‘The state is rational in itself and for itself. This essential entity has an absolute and immutable purpose, by means of which its freedom outranks that of the individual, whose highest duty is to become a member of the state.’⁵

For Hegel the importance of the state lies in the fact that it enables the individual to realise his ethical tendencies by harmonising them with the Absolute Spirit and, in this connection, it is appropriate to mention that Hegel (especially in his earlier writings) looked back nostalgically on the Greek city state as an organic totality,⁶ and considered that man could not live outside the state since ‘the state is essence of historical development which is driven by the multiplicity of states.’⁷

Although Eric Weil - one of Hegel's foremost interpreters - has defended Hegel against accusations that his concept of the state is a recipe for autocracy and absolutism⁸ on the grounds that Hegel's absolute state is a dialectical characterisation of free will that lies at the heart of the modern liberal notion of the nation-state⁹, we cannot deny that for Hegel the state remains the means for actualising man's rational and ethical nature. In addition to

that, the state in the modern era fulfils the organic and amalgamising functions of religion. It is also clear that this approach has energised social studies and has become one of the mainstays of modern political thought, as is evident in the work of two notable sociologists (with due allowance to their differences in background and perspective): Emile Durkheim and Max Weber.

Durkheim's theoretical and applied writings view the state as a network of determinants of social solidarity and approach the problem from two angles: descriptive, which objectively studies the mechanisms that determine the social fabric of society together with their internal logic and functioning,(10) and criterial, based on the premise that sociology has a political role of promoting social solidarity and strengthening collective identity in the manner of civil ethics.(11)

From this perspective Durkheim distinguishes between two types of solidarity, according to the nature of human society: mechanical solidarity, which describes simple primitive societies, and organic solidarity, which characterises complex modern societies.

In traditional restricted societies, social solidarity is based on strong communal feelings, beliefs and values, based primarily on religion. In such collective societies, there is no place for the individual and the law is strict and repressive allowing for no dissent or deviation from social norms. On the other hand, the chief feature of modern societies is individualism, which is a product of the Industrial Age and its attendant division of labour. Such societies are complex and multifarious and prioritise the freedom and independence of the individual. Hence, personal consciousness expands to the detriment of communal consciousness. In these societies the prevailing law is restitutive; the individual who has violated social norms is

not banished but encouraged to repair the imbalance that he has created in the social order. In this case social solidarity is based on mutual and complementary demands resulting from the division of labour. However, this type of society can suffer from an excess of individualism, resulting in the loosening of social bonds.

For Durkheim, the state is perceived as superior to the individual and, as such, ultimately responsible for redressing the imbalances in society by virtue of its role as promoter of social harmony and solidarity and upholder of communal values.

Hence Durkheim identifies the state with the communal political order, defining it as ‘the group of social bodies which are concerned with discussing and acting in the name of society’, and when political communities reach a certain stage of complexity, they can no

longer undertake any collective action without the intervention of the state.

In primitive societies without the apparatus of a state, social solidarity is based on obscure instincts and the influence of emotions, whereas the modern state gives this primitive solidarity a strong social underpinning. Hence the state becomes 'an instrument of social justice since it is based on collective reason rather than individual emotion.' In addition, the state alone is able to give individuals liberty and guarantee their rights, on the basis of the principles of equality and objectivity upon which it is founded.(12)

Although Max Weber's approach is based on a different premise - that of social hierarchies rather than social solidarity - he shares with Durkheim the view of modern rationalism as a determinant of the nature of industrial societies and their political legitimacy. From this perspective Weber distinguishes three basic

types of hierarchy: charismatic (obedience to a particular leader), traditional (obedience to one to whom power has devolved through social custom) and rational (obedience to an abstract non-personal entity).

The last type of legitimacy is that which distinguishes modern societies, the most visible of which is a bureaucratic administration based upon specialisation of employment and technical competence, in which the individual is loyal to the state, as supreme arbiter and ‘monopoliser of legitimate violence’, in Weber's memorable phrase.

Weber made a link between the evolution of modern rationalism and the phenomenon of ‘removing religion from the world’, by which he meant the rupture with the religious view of the universe and religion as a factor in politics, which opened the way for dealing with social relations on the basis of mutual human interest and individual conventions of freedom.(13)

At this point, we must make reference to theories critical of the centralist role of the state in the work of anthropological sociologists such as the American Marshall Sahlins and the Frenchman Pierre Clastres, working in the English anthropological 'schismatic' tradition. Both these writers seek to rediscover the social/political structures of non-Western pre-modern societies in which centralising forms of the state are unknown, with the aim of elucidating the checks and balances to the vertical power paradigm rather than treating them as primitive societies from the perspective of western models.

In his book *Stone Age Economics* (1972), Sahlins asserts that societies termed 'primitive' in traditional ethnographical studies are by no means poor or indigent. On the contrary, they are wealthy with targeted needs and their economic situation is not so much a result of historical backwardness as a

cultural choice with its own internal logic. Hence, they cannot be interpreted by means of the historical developmental model in vogue in anthropological research, which in turn is strongly influenced by the prevalent utilitarian approach of contemporary economic studies.(14)

Building on this new approach, Pierre Clastres claimed, in his celebrated work *Society against State* (1974), that the absence of the state in such societies is not a sign of inadequacy or historical backwardness but rather a question of a differing social organisation, which does not require a central authority in order to discharge its affairs or regulate its internal mechanisms. According to Clastres, we are dealing with an integrated political system, in which the ruler is subordinate to the group and in which the economic infrastructure has no political role. In such societies, social relationships are based on equality within the framework of a mutually supportive tribal structure.(15)

The schismatic school of anthropologists is represented by Evans-Pritchard, who developed his model for studying the Nuer people of southern Sudan, and Ernest Gellner, who applied the same model to the Berber tribes of the Atlas region of Morocco.

For Evans-Pritchard, schismatic societies were characterised by a fission/fusion dichotomy that prevented the emergence of a state. In such societies solidarity among small groups and perennial clashes within the larger social grouping impeded the emergence of a centralising authority.(16)

Gellner, in his important study entitled *Saints of the Atlas*, hypothesised that the Berber tribes of the Atlas region were subject to the same schismatic tendencies, with holy men filling the void left by the absence of a coercive state.(17)

One of the chief criticisms directed towards the schismatic approach is its limited and rigid view of tribal structures, which does not take account of the wider hegemonic political relationships.(18) However, in spite of these criticisms, it can be said that the schismatic school played an important role in re-interpreting social and political structures and providing a strong counterbalance to the rationalism of modern political philosophy. The theories of the schismatic school contributed to a re-appraisal of tribalism and nomadism, in opposition to the view of the state as guarantor of stability, associated with historical and ideological systematic approaches.

We will now consider some of these recent philosophical and sociological trends in an alternative paradigm that can be labelled ‘The New Nomadism’ approach. This term can be traced back to the contemporary French

philosopher Gilles Deleuze in his celebrated work *Against Oedipus*, in which he expounded the concept of nomadic thought in contrast to the representative coercive thought of the modern state, which proscribes and excludes difference and idiosyncrasy and promotes homogeneous identities.(19)

Deleuze observes that history is always written by sedentary urbanites in the name of the establishment, but what is needed today is a historiography from the perspective of the excluded nomads or, in other words, what he calls ‘Nomadology’, in contrast to the prevailing systemic uni-dimensional view of history.(20) Deleuze comments that

... history has never understood the nomad and writers have never understood the external. Throughout history the state has shaped writers’ thinking. Logos, philosophy, ownership, the priority of the idea, the inner meaning of the concept, the republic of souls,

the primacy of reason, the legitimacy of man and the self. The secret desire of the state to become the blueprint for the world and to sedentarise man.(21)

On this basis, Deleuze rejects the prevailing anthropological distinction between complex state-governed societies and simple schismatic societies based on genealogical lineage. He considers that the modern state is no less schismatic in the divisions that it imposes on society. Thus, instead of talking about a centralist/schismatic dichotomy, one must distinguish between two types of schism: the primitive and flexible, and the modern and repressive.(22)

For Deleuze, society is a fluid mass of successive waves of humanity, constantly subject to control and codification according to strategies and balances of power but these

repressive structures are unable to block the lines of disengagement and the avenues of escape presented by roving nomadism.

Deleuze's ideas were developed in the 1970s in the context of his criticism of psychoanalysis and the capitalist system, on the basis of his theory of power and desire derived from Nietzsche. However, his views on nomadism have been taken up in sociological and philosophical studies in the context of renewed speculation about the state in the era of globalisation and its unprecedented challenges to the identity and structure of the nation state.

We will here mention three examples of this trend: the sociologist Michel Maffisoli's theory of 'The New Tribalism'; the Italian philosopher Tony Negri's 'Empire' (with Michael Hardt); and the French political and economic thinker Jacques Berque's thesis of 'Man as a Nomad'.

In his recently published work *Iconologies*,(23) Maffisoli contends that globalisation - contrary to accepted opinion - has not led to universal standardisation and the eroding of cultural differences. On the contrary, it has had the opposite effect and destroyed the very foundations of modernism by encouraging a reversion to pre-modern identities, recreated by means of new technology. Maffilosi terms this trend 'dynamic radicalisation', by which he means fashioning the past in post-modernist forms, as can be seen in all areas of society, ranging from politics to art and fashion.

It is clear that Western society today is in the grip of a strong nostalgia for past cultural forms and allegiances, which was the subject of study in the same author's previous book, *The Time of the Tribes*(24) . The renewal of tribalism in this context spells the end of the

major structures of modernism, whether political, economic or ideological.

From the outset, modernism has suffered from a paradox, which is rarely perceived. Modernism seeks standardisation and unity by eliminating difference and divergence through the state, which is the highest expression of the political system, as well as the protector of the individual against the group. Although modernism increases the means of social contact, it empties them of any real meaning, while post-modernism opens up opportunities for individual communication by means of the new technologies - a phenomenon which Maffilosi terms the 'New Tribalism'.

The main modernist structures with the power to unify and standardise, such as the nuclear family and the nationalist state, have collapsed and no longer have power over the fragmenting social system. This, in turn,

explains the crises that the contemporary world is experiencing such as terrorism, aversion to politics and elections, and the revival of fundamentalist movements and isolationist tendencies.

After the era of established modernism comes the post-modernist age of new nomadism. This nomadism takes many forms - professional, sexual, ideological, religious and recreational - and is expected to spread into other areas of society.

Just as the structures of modernism have changed, so have contemporary values. No longer does life revolve around the work/future/rationality axis but is increasingly concerned with aesthetic values, which prioritise the body, the imagination and recreation. These changes underlie Maffilosi's claim that 'The post-modernist era is closer to the Middle Ages than it is to the modern age, which can be seen as a deviation in human

history which has now reverted to nomadic values and forms of narrow tribal solidarity.’
(25)

Rather than adopting the prevailing concept of the nation state (which emerged in Europe in the 18th century), Maffilosi draws on Michel Foucault's critique of the modern state as an autocracy, terming it a ‘soft autocracy’, based on the principle of comprehensive surveillance and coercion. Even if this new model of the state has succeeded in monopolising legitimate violence, the result has been the return of outlawed forms of violence through the back door under the guise of specious legitimacy. The more the state is based on rationality, the more marginalised are non-rational forms of cultural expression, which results in their return in the form of religious manifestations outside traditional social norms. (26)

On the other hand, Negri, from a neo-Marxist perspective, considers the phase beyond the nation state, which he describes as a form of new tribalism, in which the community is in a state of dynamic fragmentation.

The phase beyond the nation state is termed by Negri 'the empire', by which he does not mean - as is commonly thought - American leadership of the international community through the dynamic of globalisation but 'a decentralised non-regional system, gradually absorbing the world space within its open constantly-expanding boundaries - an empire which engenders hybrid identities, flexible hierarchies and multiple exchanges by controlling its leadership networks.' (27)

The 'empire' is a new form of politico-regional space, replacing the nation state, which has become incapable of operating cultural and economic exchanges. This is because of the change in the methods of

production that have switched from dealing with material wealth to dealing with natural and vital human desires within the framework of what Negri terms (after Foucault) 'the vital force'. This force depends on the changes in the nature of work which has become non-material and decentralised in such fields as information technology and production of linguistic and visual networks, which in turn engenders new forms of economic activity such as knowledge-based, interactive and cybernetic.

In contrast to the optimism of some contemporary perspectives, Negri views the vital force as creating new forms of exploitation and repression, which cannot be opposed by the logic of the class struggle in the traditional Marxist dialectic. This is because the empire has no centre and no exterior and is not in a fixed position or constituted as a homogeneous block. Rather it is a fusional and fissional dynamic, which highlights differences and contradictions

(whether national, economic, political or social) and creates the means to eliminate the regional links that impede its spread.

The empire has no borders but its internal divisions are flexible and constantly changing and it has the potential to constantly invent new forms of identity and varieties of knowledge and social relations(28). Because the empire has no centre, there is no way that any nation state can overcome it since external opposition is meaningless. Consequently, social conflict does not take place between different classes or opposing forces, but in the empire itself within the axis of its vital force. Negri assigns the waging of this struggle to the people (an expression borrowed from Spinoza), which is a multifarious grouping of forces, feelings and individualities, forming into networks to counter forms of exploitation and repression within the empire or, in other words, 'the living alternative which grows in the bowels of the empire.'(29) According to Negri, the potential revolution is not an

externally engineered coup d'etat but a daily grinding resistance to an unclear and obscure adversary - a situation far removed from the traditional Marxist dialectic.

The thesis of 'New Nomadism', which was put forward by the well-known French thinker Jacques Attali in his book *Man as Nomad*,⁽³⁰⁾ is based on the premise that man has always been a roamer since he appeared on earth millions of years ago and has now returned to his nomadic roots by virtue of globalisation, which has created new forms of nomadism. Hence, the period of sedentariness and city dwelling was no more than a temporary deviation in the history of mankind. Attali observes that it is nomadic man who created the critical components of civilisation - from the discovery of fire to languages, myths, agriculture, animal husbandry and navigation, and finally to the invention of the wheel, democracy, music and the arts, while sedentary man contributed castles, taxes and the state.

The nomads - contrary to common belief - were not wild and boorish destroyers of cities and civilisations but rather the creative and inventive power behind the foundation of empires - from China to Rome and from Egypt to today's American empire. In fact the lesson of history is that nations have declined and fallen when they closed their doors to strangers and nomads.

Attali believes that at a time when we are witnessing the disappearance of the original nomadic peoples because of globalisation, this same phenomenon is engendering new forms of nomadism on the strength of actual and supposed communication and transportation technologies. So, who are these new nomads? Attali answers by dividing humanity into three categories:

- Lower nomads, who are descendants of the original nomads and enforced nomads such as the homeless, migrant workers,

political refugees, itinerant workers and representatives of commercial agencies.

- Settled inhabitants, such as farmers, merchants, civil servants and functionaries, engineers, doctors, factory workers, technicians, employees, pensioners and children.

- Voluntary nomads, ie. those who voluntarily choose a roving lifestyle and who can in turn be divided into: higher nomads, such as professionals, inventors, researchers and film directors, and recreational nomads, such as tourists, athletes and sports fans.

The economic effects of globalisation have widened the gap between lower nomads and the settled inhabitants on the one hand, and between voluntary nomads on the other. Lower nomads, who until recently formed more than half the world's population, accumulate in the shanty towns in the cities of the south, distinguished by their varying religious and cultural affiliations. They either

seek to rectify their personal needs by legal or illegal employment or they rebel against the market and the empire on the basis of collective religious or social ideologies.

Voluntary nomads are the upper class, pure and simple; the lords of globalisation. They have no domicile and no permanent place of work. They are not bothered by narrow political considerations even though some of them favour a kind of universal democracy. Unbounded by any borders, they have no links with social organisations of any kind and their values are based on recreation and individual self-fulfilment.

The situation of the settled inhabitants, who are mostly employees of the state or workers in the traditional economic sectors, has become precarious. They strive in vain to reach the level of voluntary nomads but constantly fear that they will sink to the level

of lower nomads, clinging to social and national identities that threaten to disappear.

The nation state no longer has control over its resources and, little by little, tends to yield its sovereign interests to the market, in the areas of education, healthcare and security. With the exception of the American empire, which is able to set its own rules, nations will soon be transformed into oases, seeking to attract trade from passing caravans. They will be populated by settled inhabitants, in an increasingly precarious position because of their immobility, and by the lower nomads whose situation is desperate. In order to counter the destructive tendencies of the nation state, some countries - as is the case with certain European states - will seek to contain the new nomads in a single space (as, for example, in the Schengen Agreement, which aims to confine migrants to continental Asia). Meanwhile, the United States strives to expand its economic space while preserving its

national sovereignty in order to create the world's sole superpower.

However, Attali draws attention to a danger that threatens the American empire, which does not come from the competing settled empires of Europe, India or China, who are unable to dominate the world economy, but from rebellious forces at its heart and at its margins. These are not organised bands of people rising up against the American hegemony, but forces unleashed by new nomadism in competition with the American world empire. These forces are the market, religion and democracy, each of which represents a challenge to empires and nation states alike.

With regard to the market, it has actually separated from Europe and the countries of the south, and will gradually become independent of the orbit of America, which is still entrusted with its operation. Capitalism is international

by nature and will seek to become a universal power with interests, laws and requirements, distinct from those of the American empire. Higher nomads, who control the market, will strive to create a non-territorial borderless empire, which will impose its laws on all nations, including the United States. Similarly, nomadic companies will not acknowledge any territorial affiliation and no national organisations will remain except the World Trade Organization, which regulates the markets.

To counter this dire threat some countries will seek to isolate themselves from the tyranny of the market, which will be termed the empire of evil, and new totalitarian ideologies will emerge to close their borders and reject the elites. New utopias will spring up, calling for a return to simplicity and austerity, while religion will provide the fundamental restitutive power. Attali believes that Islam alone would be able to resist since the group solidarity of its believers and

comprehensive nature of its organisation are powerful enough to challenge Western cultural values, in particular the market and democracy. Islam would therefore be in a position to attract vast numbers of city dwellers and lower nomads by giving them what the market cannot viz. tangible forms of solidarity and kinship to restore their dignity and hope, and lead them out of doubt and isolation.

The third force is democracy, which presents a challenge to the American empire, economic nomadism and autocracies based on religion. The market itself engenders a demand for democracy, which ultimately leads to a call for a universal democratic empire without borders, embodying the concept of world citizenship. Many, including lower nomads, who wish to make their voice heard outside national and religious boundaries and benefit from their numerical superiority, would heed this call. City dwellers would favour regional democratic alliances (on the model of the

European Union) to stand against the hegemony of the market. Some voluntary nomads would also favour this course of action because they desire to construct borderless supra-national corporations, gradually imposing the right of human intervention and laying down a comprehensive framework for the exercise of democracy.

The above three forces, with sometimes overlapping and sometimes conflicting aims, are united in opposing the American empire and, according to Attali's prediction, will eventually overcome it.(31)

The nomadism paradigm has been applied in strategic studies in order to refute the modern-day myth of the global village, in which boundaries have been erased and regions conjoined by the action of transcontinental globalisation, with the result that nation states can no longer control movements of populations, goods and ideas.

What if the opposite were the case? What if new and more effective and far-reaching boundaries had come into existence? What about the solid border wall built by the United States on its boundary with Mexico? What of the barrier built by Israel to separate it from areas of occupied Palestinian land? What of the defensive wall constructed by the Americans in Baghdad to protect their offices and those of the Iraqi government? To these we can add the walls of the exclusion zones in Western cities populated by political refugees, illegal migrants and the socially marginalised. Even the fall of the Berlin Wall did not lead to the erasure of borders that divided the heart of Europe - as is commonly supposed - since it created a whole host of new boundaries and borders.

In the past fifteen years, tens of thousands of kilometres of new political frontiers have been created in Europe and Asia, including 2800

kms in the former Yugoslavia as a result of the Balkan wars. However, these traditional borders are no longer the only form of boundaries between nations and states, although they may be more binding than new post-modern frontiers. Traditional borders performed the dual role of acting as a dividing line at the same time as a point of contact, while modern boundaries, built on the ruins of the old concept of place, constitute a break from the traditional channels of communication.(32)

In his book *So Near So Far*, the well-known philosopher Etienne Balibar(33) shows how the breaking up of European nation states, as a result of inter-continental penetration, has undermined the traditional mechanisms that separate the national entities formed in the modern era through the organic links between people, state and nation. As a result, there has been an explosion of new types of borders implicit in the centralised structure of the state. Thus, while continental Europe has become

united economically and politically, it has become fragmented with new cultural, religious and linguistic borders. The linguistic atlases, which were compiled in the 19th century on a historical linguistic basis, are no longer valid since new linguistic paradigms have arisen, even in such traditionally centralised countries as France, where there are now more than ten languages in addition to the national language. Undoubtedly, the worst case in Europe today is Belgium, where the indicators of schism are evident in the linguistic conflict between the Flemish and Walloon languages.

In addition to these highly visible borders, there are also cultural boundaries, which have become the subject of global interest and strategic concern. On the basis of such considerations, Turkey was excluded from European Union membership even though she had fulfilled nearly all of the conditions for accession, including secular political choice.

There are also surveillance boundaries that have come to fulfil the functions of territorial borders. New surveillance technologies are more effective and more deadly than traditional borders and perform the same function in a more indirect way. Michel Foucault investigated the surveillance and retributive systems of the modern state, commenting that techniques of physical coercion had been replaced by control techniques that direct people's lives and guide their desires and their ideas - a system that has reached its apogee in the present era. There are also new borders resulting from the break-up of the traditional family unit, which is no longer based on the traditional division of the sexes but takes on other intersecting forms within and between the genders.

Therefore, it is not the case that globalisation has erased borders and united the world and made 'the earth flat', in the words of Thomas

Friedman.(34) On the contrary, the cycle of sedentary city dwelling has come to an end and man has returned to his preferred nomadism, with its wider space and its new boundaries.

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