



***REVIEW: Carmel Borg (ed.) L-Edukazzjoni hi
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Introduction

This is not the first text dedicated to Freire by members of the Faculty of Education at the University of Malta. Peter Mayo's *Liberating Praxis: Freire's Legacy for Radical Education and Politics* (2004) was considered by Henry Giroux, "One of the best sources on the life and work of Paulo Freire". Carmel Borg's 2013 edited selection of translations in *L-Edukazzjoni hi politika: Ġabra ta' kitbiet ta' Paulo Freire* ('Education is politics: A collection of Paulo Freire's writings') adds a text in Maltese amongst the various languages mediating Freire's thoughts. Besides an introduction and detailed biography of the Brazilian educator, the editor selects for translation a number of extracts representing a comprehensive gamut of Freirean themes, of which he also provides a summary. Amongst others, the themes include banking education, ethical formation, dreams and utopia, ideology, anger, the Church, and post-colonial dilemmas and contradictions. In this review essay, the two aspects of Freire's work Carmel Borg chose for a title - education and politics - are contextualised within conceptual frameworks of development and the role of human agency therein. The conceptual frameworks are historically grounded and consequently carry the tension of abstract dualities and dichotomies (centre-periphery; north-south; backward-advanced) in relation with more concrete observations of the complex and changing economic, political and cultural developments. Human agency carries the equally tense relations between observations of protagonists (Freire and the people with whom he shared experiences) and their concrete personal and class experiences. The two - ideal typical development models and human agency - are doubly

articulated and enriched by being posited together. This, it is suggested, is one rewarding approach to critically appreciate these readings collected by Carmel Borg.

Brazilianisation

Commenting about the international impact of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Freire reflected on oppression as a global experience. When Alain Lipietz in his *Mirages et miracles* (1985) wrote about the *brazilianisation* of the US in the 1980s, he was not exactly heaping praise on the superpower's labour market. In *The Brave New World of Work* (2000), Ulrich Beck generalised the term to the broader *West*. He referred to a workforce characterised by travelling vendors, small retailers or craftworkers, personal service providers, and those who performed in multiple fields of activity working under precarious conditions. Employers benefited from exaggerated forms of labour flexibility as they sacked employees with little trouble. Furthermore, they transferred risks on the individual worker, made to shoulder the blame for a number of criteria including certification, age, and labour market entry point.ⁱ Seasonal and yearlong jobs, terminable or renewable, were on offer for students, women outside full-time employment, and immigrants. As labour came to terms with such conditions, leaders within the political state shifted the onus onto institutions they set up for what, arguably, were attention shifters.

J. Breman (2013) not only confirmed Lipietz, Beck and others were correct in their analysis, but *brazilianisation* was not a meteoric phenomenon. It continued to spread in the former front-runner, advanced industrial manufacturing economies. Therein, one observed how growing insecurity of work conditions became normality.ⁱⁱ Earlier collective bargaining mechanisms became “millstones around [companies'] necks in the context of international competition” (Aglietta, 1998, p. 74), and where labour was weak, brushed aside. Gradually, conditions were institutionalised either directly or assumed in the policy-making instruments of the increasingly integrated economies on the European continent. Instead of national labour standards, a European monetary standard was preferred. Wages became the weak link with attempts to end the pay-and-productivity indexing of wages (ibid. p. 75). If post-war decolonisation agendas in newly independent nations of the global South had adopted the political state structure and industry-based economic model of former colonial powers, *brazilianisation* implied it was the turn of the North to exhibit

characteristic features from the former. The implication did not mean Europe became Brazil or vice versa. It meant, however, the spread and apparent permanence of oppressive conditions in advanced economies challenged historically linear discourses such as that of the backward South progressively catching up with the advanced North. Narratives of oppression fill some of the most vivid descriptions in Borg's set of translations.ⁱⁱⁱ Observing transitions, purported or real, assists in understanding the dynamic in these narratives and, in terms of Freire's work, the role attributed to education in them.

Transitions

In *Education for critical consciousness* (1973), Freire reflected both on society in transition and education.^{iv} In terms of the former, he discussed contrapositions between *old* and *new* during such phases, with reactionaries confronting progressives. The *old* in Brazil was described as a closed and backward society, illiterate and elitist, economically subordinate to foreign markets as it busily exported raw materials (Borg, 2013, p. 60).^v The new was that of import-substitution industrialisation. Internally, the new industrial regime struggled to impose itself over the previously hegemonic coffee exporters of Sao Paulo and the sugar plant producers of the North-east. As with Lázaro Cárdenas of Mexico and Juan Perón of Argentina, president Vargas sustained the transition to the new import-substitution regime in Brazil through an inter-class alliance formed by the industrial elite and working class “in the name of economic modernization, agrarian reform and a certain autonomy with respect to Northern imperialism” (Sader, 2008, pp. 10-11). This transition appeared to distance Brazil from its subordinate integration based on raw material export in the capitalist world system to autonomous import substitution. However, more than a historical backwardness of the ‘old’, and therefore a matter of the ‘new’ catching up, the 1920s and 1930s transition to industry in Brazil projected contrasting images of the country's status, on one side, within the hierarchies and polarisations of the international division of labour, and on the other, with the ‘modernising’ passage from agriculture to industry.

Import-substitution industrialisation spread further in the post-war. Posed against and intent on overcoming the implications of the theoretical framework of ‘dependency’, industrialisation was closely inter-connected with modernisation and progress imaginaries.

Cultural models established by the US reaped abundant harvests. Bred within traditional societies, and associated with such models, peripheral dreams' essential but not exclusive economic agenda, led towards the emulation of societies that had already industrialised, albeit tainted by the specific nuances of social relations in the industrialising territories of Brazil.^{vi} Economically, emulation demanded technology and aid from the centre. Along with others from the Latin American peripheries, the Brazilians realised they needed more investments. In order to follow up the 'modernisation' dream of import substitution they needed technology and industrial products. These were necessarily imported as in General Motors' plants.^{vii} Besides, as an exporter of raw materials and agricultural goods, and in spite of industrialisation, the Brazilian economy continued to possess mostly low-cost labour.

Eventually, the 1964 transition following the military coup d'état changed the scenario. With the fundamentals in place, industry in Brazil entered international markets but that is where the dream connected with industrialisation (and its accompanying modernisation imaginaries) started to lose its sparkle. It became gradually clearer that the concepts of cultural and social rural 'backwardness' and industrial 'progress' had been useful ideological props to push for change.^{viii} Contingently, it had created a space and role for education. The culture-based struggle against backwardness had become a 'horizontal' push, the pride of educational campaigns and therefore active at a popular level, as an escape from centuries-old agricultural isolation. In this way, these campaigns liberated rural workers from their context and led them toward a different mode of production. Successful industrialisation however opened up contradictions. Economic social relations from the core of the import substitution industrial regime were part of the spark. Similar to what was observed in the advanced industrial nations (the centre), Samir Amin adopted Marxist terms and wrote, "The social character of the level of development of the forces of production" contradicted "the restrictive character of the relations of production."^{ix} In the 1960s, not ready to lose hard won rights, combative working class sectors entered into conflict over work-related conditions and rights. With industrial capital challenged in its core, coercion followed. In 1964, Brazilian president João Goulart was ousted from power. It was time for the military and a new industrial regime.^x

The vertical dimension of power in trade and investment in internationalised markets was more difficult to digest and hide than nationalistic import substitution. In this case, transition carried a price: foreign industrial capital from the centre was to emerge successful against national industrial capital. When the former penetrated peripheral economies, profits were drained out. Dependency, once again, became systemic. Political relations changed. As Brazil's internal struggle took another reactionary swerve, the new rulers distanced such relations from spectral democracy. This distance opened up what R. Miliband (1992) defined as the problem for democratic procedures in their relative weakness to even consider reform, "the very large and unanswered question [was] whether these procedures [made] possible a radical challenge to the existing system of power and privilege". If reform had been initiated accompanying industrialisation, when conservative forces considered such "procedures had become too dangerous to be allowed to proceed", other more coercive forces were adoperated. The new military regime supported the change to manufacturing exports and foreign investment, and its support was necessary for the change not least because it suppressed trade unions and enforced labour flexibility. It received external ideological support. Starting from 1959, the Cuban anti-capitalist threat conveniently legitimised widespread repression in Latin America: Brazil and Bolivia, both in 1964, Argentina in 1966 and 1976, Uruguay and Chile in 1973. Goulart had to go.^{xi}

The disarticulation of industry from democracy showed that the former could do without the latter. The coercive presence of the army in the 1960s wiped out even formal attempts at democratisation. It opened up a revision of the forward-looking, unilinear dateline in which economic and political relations moved forward in progress. Accompanying ideologies changed. Ideological relations in the 1930s had required a political representation agents including trade unionists, in what Sader defined as "democratic-national blocs, in a context of nationalistic ideologies and identities" (2008, p. 6). Arguably, the nationalist legend of Vargas was an anticipation of, and contextualisable in, Samir Amin's reference to post-1945 'pseudo-independent' theories and generally confused concepts that one could call 'seminationalist'. In its heydays, this ideological project was strengthened by its defiance of centre-periphery arrangements attributed to and built on raw material exports from the periphery and, even more so, manufacturing goods imports from the centre. Conversely, the post-1964 internationalisation of Brazilian

industry, was ideologically supported by a convenient ‘no ideology’ neo-liberalism with its sights focused on markets (Borg, 2013, p. 171). If Cuba supplied the military excuse, South Korea would supply the export manufacturing prop. Whilst it was difficult to sustain the backwardness-to-‘catching up’ theory in terms of progress in social relations, brushed aside as a westernised model, dependency theory also ended up under fire. The boom in South-east Asia appeared to break the North-South divide.^{xiii} It was projected as a successful case in which Brazil was similarly participating.

Dependency theory was never merely academic and/or innocent. One controversial aspect of the theory remained where to search for the conditioning factors leading to dependency. Understood in terms of relations, the dependent economy was underdeveloped rather than backward. An underdeveloped economy can be beneficial to a developed one. Samir Amin (1997) argued how this rendered ‘development’ and ‘underdevelopment’ complex ideas because one was not simply the descriptive opposite of the other. Development contained, as a functional constitutive element, underdevelopment. Amongst others, this dispelled the belief, that ‘internal’ factors rendered a territory underdeveloped. The latter belief was a core aspect of ‘backwardness’ represented by the ideological vision of catching up. Within this vision, popular during the 1950s and 1960s, once internal factors were to blame for developmental differences, the request was for cultural and institutional modernising reform, modelled on the developed world (Trigilia, 2002). The coercive role of the army laid this to rest although it benefited capital just the same.

Freire’s education is politics

The 1964 events in Brazil affected Freire. Democracy was one of the main themes in the literacy campaign he co-ordinated, part of the Recife Project for Adult Education. The Brazilian educator had to escape abroad. If historical narrative could justify Borg’s title, ‘Education is politics’, this event might suffice. Just as the dictatorial regime clamped down on democratic life in the political state, it also looked down upon education agendas that considered part of their curriculum, the democracy of landless and homeless people, those without school, food, work and control over their fate. At the time, four million Brazilian children did not have a school and sixteen million youths over fourteen years old

were illiterate (ibid. p. 73). Freire argued that unless people were educated in order to participate democratically, transitions like those discussed above would be imposed. As an educator, he sought to develop the potential contribution of education to liberate the hold on those suffering deprivation, transforming passive submission to active confrontation (ibid. p. 130). Besides democracy, the literacy agenda of Freire's Recife Project included discussions about nationalism, profit, political developments in Brazil, development, illiteracy, legitimacy of rule, participation by the people, and distribution of wealth. It was not merely an exercise in spreading information; themes were problematized. Fundamentally, this assisted in freeing "culture" from being an exclusive space but especially building up an attitude overcoming passivity, in other words working on agency.

In the ebbs and flows of South American economic and political developments, Freire worked at education's transformative potential, in this way highlighting its political and cultural nature. His crusade against illiteracy opened up the possibility (hope) of transformation by counteracting the reproductive effects of conservative processes of formal education or economically and culturally determined non-schooling. At the same time, his cultural project faced limits. Even when successful, a widespread literacy campaign did not guarantee political change. It guaranteed an increase in voters as it unblocked, where this was the case, constitutionally imposed impediments on the illiterate. In so doing, it affected political party strategies targeting parliamentary arenas. A literacy campaign also benefited, as commented above, specific transitional forms of modernisation accompanying industrial interests over the old landowning elite. Political representatives of industrial interests tolerated, even supported, Freire in his emancipatory mission because it was useful for their ideological catching up and civilising, socio-economic project that ultimately required the urbanisation of rural labour. However, once Freirean-like counter-hegemonic strategies became successful and too dangerous, and/or another economic agenda calling for transition to a more competitive internationalised economy was on the books, another phase of the struggle followed. As already referred above, in Brazil in 1964, this phase corresponded with what Gramsci considered the military moment.^{xiii} The Project was closed down. It was only later, when the military lost the support of economic growth, and coercive force was toned down, the Sao Paulo municipality provided Freire with another opportunity to realise his ideas (ibid. p. 132).^{xiv}

The above-mentioned limits or weaknesses subsuming Freire's work need to be reconsidered within a broader scope. Adult (and obligatory) education projects address factors taken to be essential and not merely peripheral to capital. Alone, the latter is not enough to achieve developmental projects. Political leadership has a role to perform. Taking a look back on the 1930s, in order to achieve 'progress', including economic, political and social well-being, it was necessary to form a hegemonic elite. The success of the Catholic agenda sealed in the Constitution of 1934 was indicative of one hegemonic force. However, Vargas was intent on establishing relations with industrial productive forces. Consequently, it was not an outright catholicisation but one within a modernising Brazil. The compromise in formal education led to a dualistic school structure; on one side, secondary schooling "entrusted to shape the future leaders of Brazil" (Capanema, 1942, in Dore, 2010, p. 128) and, on the other, technical schools training "the 'less privileged classes' of the industrial workforce (...) producing an army of workers for the good of the Nation" (Capanema, 1937, in *ibid.*). In 1961, the *Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional, 4024/61* extended the private sector further and the state assisted with public subsidies. The conservative current of the Catholic Church supported the move. However, John XXIII's papacy from 1958 to 1963 stimulated alternative social movements promoting liberation. Adult literacy was the goal as the Movement for Basic Education consisting of the National Conference of Brazilian Bishops and the Federal Ministry of Education and Culture joined forces. This also propped Freire's work. These two regional education projects were both suppressed in 1964.

Freire's pedagogy

Focusing on the pedagogic content of his educational campaigning, Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* developed themes he was to return to on a regular basis. Amongst these there was the theme addressed by Marx pointing out the need to consider the education of the educator (Borg, 2013, p. 107). In turn, this was related to the phenomenon, still observable in classrooms, of the banking concept of education whereby passive students described as empty vessels received "deposits" from teachers they duly returned at the end of the course. Pedagogically, whilst banking education mythicized reality, assisting to preserve culture and knowledge, Freire proposed to demythicize it through transformative problem solving. He discussed this in the above-mentioned

Education for critical consciousness wherein the solution was that rather than teach, the educator assisted learning and, in the process, learned with the learners (Borg, 2013, p. 79). In this way, educators opened up the possibility of a fundamental learning experience, *conscientizacao*. In the 1997 *Mentoring the mentor: A critical dialogue with Paulo Freire* (ibid. pp. 163-184), the Brazilian educator argued education was not exclusively a technical practice. Juxtaposing thought and action, solely for analytic purposes, the tension between the two emerges.

Freire had already elaborated the concept of *conscientizacao* in the earlier *The politics of education: Culture, power, and liberation* (1985) whereby literacy and critical awareness were inseparable. The concept was the synthesis of a dialectical relation between the limits of moral claims founded exclusively on concrete experience, and the troubled awareness that ideals did not change reality. This rendered transformative action a complex phenomenon. Freire acknowledged *conscientizacao* might appear idealised, but believed the previously-mentioned dialectical relation promised transformation. He adopted it to discuss oppression in relations. An initial step was to recognise the oppressor has the power to dehumanise the oppressed. The relation could be softened such as for example by means of false generosity. When this kind of generosity was challenged, it was unmasked and the oppressor turned out to be worse than previously thought. However, the oppressed might reach a point where they rebelled against dehumanising distortions. At the same, there was a further twist in the relation oppressor-oppressed. One reward of *conscientizacao* was discovering the oppressor inside the oppressed (Borg, 2013, pp. 127-8), the related paralysing effects of fear (ibid. pp. 147-8), and the incoherency that followed from it (ibid. p.156 et seq.), such as when those formerly oppressed, oppressed others. In this case, social, political and economic transitions turned sour as the oppressed adhered to the power-play game and the oppressor-oppressed contradiction was impressed on them (i.e., as individuals not a class).

For the struggle against oppression to achieve a constructive resolve, it needed to become critical by searching for the causes of oppression without forgetting the need for action that was transformative. Successfully combined, theory and action inter-related and became praxis. When one acted on the world, one had to act reflectively, without

separating the thinker from the doer. It involved action but not activism, reflection but not verbalism. Nature was transformed, after all, not through work but through work and reflection. Similarly, it was human beings that brought change, not changed circumstances. This confirmed the strategic importance of education, including that proposed by Marx of educators (Borg, 2013, p. 53, fn. 9) especially when one considers that praxis increased the tension with cultural context. One of the themes in Freire and Macedo's dialogue from *Literacy: Reading the world and the world* (1987), was the cultural character of education. If, as Borg's title proposed, education was political, in their reference to formation of subjects in formal schooling, Freire and Macedo agreed it was also cultural (Borg, 2013, pp. 114-5). In this context, Freire's understanding of culture rejected sex, race and social class determinism. Although they did affect people, their impact could be transcended as teachers strove to add meaning to liberty in terms of a passion for life and justice. For the same reason, Freire rejected the mechanistic and authoritarian vision of socialist realism because it did not conceive liberty (ibid. p. 161). At the same time, for Freire, the formation of the subject did not mean jumping to another '-ism', individualism. This is where hope, tempered by critical observation, comes to terms with economic, political and ideologico-cultural relations. These and other related themes are discussed throughout the pages of Borg's edited translations. They are not merely abstract discussions but firmly founded in observed or experienced social, political and economic contexts.

Conclusion

Similar to the Italian Don Milani, another educator critically admired by Borg, Freire worked in times of transition. In both the Brazilian periphery and the Tuscan semi-periphery, Freire and Milani intervened in the world, never intending to be impartial. Sensitive to the unequal distribution of power, and how it affected social justice in different social relations, they were in Samir Amin's terms, "intelligentsia proper" as against "operatives, serving the established ideological apparatus" (1997, p. 142). The former focused on critical thinking leading to a better understanding of the mechanisms of change, and therefore able to influence such change in ways that freed society from capitalist alienation and its tragic consequences. They had no impact except to the extent that what they proposed was critical and competent. In this way, their proposals had to be capable of inspiring liberating action within a sustained programme linking theory to

practice, tackling the challenges faced by the workers in the Brazilian latifundia on the margins of an industrialising economy or those on the margins of industrial districts in the Italian periphery of Tuscany. In the pages of this work, Freire emerges as a critical thinker, competent and capable of assisting and inspiring the subordinate to liberating action within a sustained programme addressing challenges they faced without pre-emptively bowing down defeated.

Endnotes

ⁱ Beck's underhand association of labour market flexibility and education (or training) led to his wry description of skills and knowledge, promoted by human resource discourse as progress on other unskilled sectors, 'Cheer up, your skills and knowledge are obsolete, and no one can say what you must learn in order to be needed in the future' (2000, p. 3).

ⁱⁱ Besides easier dismissal, Breman included high unemployment and related benefit restrictions, privatisation and public-sector cutbacks, hollowed out trade union movements and growth of non-unionised service/retail sectors, increased part-time and short-term contracts of work, factory relocation or robotisation, and the reverberations of a global workforce absorbing more relatively lower-paid Chinese workers, joined by other reserve armies, etc. Deterioration of the standard of living forced family members into income-seeking activity to sustain a lifestyle previously guaranteed by one wage.

ⁱⁱⁱ See especially Borg, 2013, pp. 140-144.

^{iv} Education is discussed further down.

^v Whether it was closed or not is open to debate. Notwithstanding a different mode of production from industrial capitalism that was to emerge, Brazilian landowners similarly exploited the international labour market importing a workforce. This emerges from Bernardi (2005, pp. 80-1) and his account of the journalist Ferruccio Macola, director at the time of the *Gazzetta di Venezia* and founder of *Secolo XIX*, who followed one shipload of emigrants from the Veneto going to Brazil. They emigrated because of the scarcity of capital, the extremely low pay and poor food, the "pellagra" and so on. The subdued but hardworking character meant that the Brazilian landowners' demand for Veneti was greater than for others. This renders complex, even subverts, the general approach of dependency theory's polarised model.

^{vi} History has shown that imposing patterns of logical historical development may sanitise the study of economic development, this and similar approaches have to face the general difficulty of dressing up world history in a straightjacket outfit which may fit some but will not fit most.

^{vii} The Fordlandia rubber plantation project of Henry Ford was a crude attempt to bring industry to the Brazilian forest. The so-called debt crisis starting in Poland in 1980 and Mexico in 1982, but eventually also curbing the so-called industrial miracle of Brazil, pointed at the failure of developmentalism and import-

substitution industrialization, in the words of Wallerstein, “now perceived as corrupt protectionism. State-building was deconstructed as feeding a bloated bureaucracy. Financial aid was now analyzed as money poured down a sink, if not a gutter. And parastatal structures, far from being virtuous efforts at pulling oneself up by one’s own bootstraps, were exposed as deadening barriers to fruitful entrepreneurial achievement. It was decided that loans to states in distress, to be beneficial, needed to be hedged by requirements that these states cut wasteful state expenditures on such deferrable items as schools and health. It was further proclaimed that state enterprises were almost by definition inefficient and should be privatized as rapidly as possible, since private enterprises were again almost by definition responsive to the “market” and therefore maximally efficient” (I. Wallerstein, 2004, *After Developmentalism and globalization, what?* Keynote address at conference, ‘Development challenges for the 21st century’, in Cornell University, October 1, 2004. Retrieved March 08, 2014 from www.iwallerstein.com/wp-content/uploads/docs/CORNELL.pdf

^{viii} Trigilia wrote, “It would be more correct to talk about ‘underdevelopment’ rather than backwardness, precisely to underline how the difficulties of the peripheries result from the exploitation by the core regions, and are therefore triggered by the integration in the international market rather than by isolation” (2002, p. 157). At the same time, one can argue cultural boosts such as ‘the future’ and ‘progress’ point to an eclectic conjunction of backwardness to the underdevelopment discourse. Thus backward elements internal to the peripheries, were useful to justify economic development projects and new cycles of acculturation.

^{ix} Amin, 1978, p. 4.

^x On April 1st and 2nd, 1964, the streets of Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo remained deserted. Organised military power and repression overcame resistance. “There is no reason why a docker or a railway worker (the two unions which put up the most resistance in Rio) should risk death on his own in the street, unarmed, and above all without leadership, without any definite objective, while his political representatives have disappeared into the countryside or are negotiating with the government”, wrote Debray (1965), as “democratic parties, trade unions, the combativity of the masses and their hope” were pulverised.

^{xi} Two inter-related interpretations of such a power-centred narrative point toward strategic class politics. The first refers to what Gramsci would call the military moment in class struggle, in the above cases carried out by forces deployed by the dominant, anti-reform class; the second refers to economic base concerns when dominant interests at the international scale intervened across national frontiers by subsuming national spaces and resources within for exploitative action. As for Goulart’s removal, Miliband (1992) enlisted other constitutional democratic reformers who suffered the same fate including Mossadegh in Iran in 1953, Arbenz in Guatemala in 1954, Bosch in the Dominican Republic in 1965, Papandreou in Greece in 1967, and Allende in Chile in 1973. However, it is pointed out, these cases do not imply homogeneous relations across Latin America, Africa and Asia in the north-south divide.

^{xii} South Korea, along with Taiwan, was a faithful American ally. It developed under Japanese ‘economic’ influence. By the 1970s, Japanese companies controlled a substantial part of its trade. Japan had offered a free-ride to American politico-military strategies eventually exchanged for a Japanese economic free-ride in

the Asian Pacific Rim region. This suggestion is supported by the consideration that American markets were opened for Japanese goods against powerful internal protectionist lobby-groups.

^{xiii} See, Gramsci (1975), *Quaderni*, vol. III, p. 1583.

^{xiv} As Minister of Education in the Municipality of São Paulo, Freire set up his Escolha Nova project in 1989, “the product of a highly developed government-sponsored literacy method” (Sader, 2008, p. 20).

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