



# Changes in Wetu Telu Islamic Traditions in the Community of Narmada District, West Lombok Regency from 1998 to 2022

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#### Abstract

This study examines the changes in the Wetu Telu Islamic tradition in Narmada District, West Lombok Regency from 1998 to 2022. Wetu Telu Islam is a tradition practiced by some Sasak people, combining animistic beliefs and ancestral worship with Islamic teachings. In contrast, Waktu Lima Islam follows Shari'ah more comprehensively as taught by the Qur'an and Hadith. The rapid advancement of information technology, particularly social media, has influenced religious behavior among the Wetu Telu community. This research is descriptive-qualitative, using an anthropological approach to religion and employing historical research methods, including heuristics, verification, interpretation, and historiography. The findings indicate that: first, the social structure in West Lombok features stratification affecting political, traditional, and religious dominance. Second, Wetu Telu Islam represents a syncretism of Islamic, Hindu, and animistic teachings, creating a new culture while maintaining Islamic values. Third, the Wetu Telu tradition has undergone changes due to advances in knowledge, technology, and shifts in societal perspectives.

Keywords: Change, Wetu Telu Community, Socio-religious

#### **Abstrak**

Penelitian ini mengkaji perubahan tradisi Islam Wetu Telu di Kecamatan Narmada, Kabupaten Lombok Barat dari tahun 1998 hingga 2022. Islam Wetu Telu adalah tradisi yang dilaksanakan oleh sebagian masyarakat Sasak, menggabungkan unsur animistik dan kepercayaan leluhur dengan ajaran Islam. Sementara itu, Islam Waktu Lima mengikuti ajaran syari'at secara utuh sesuai Al-Qur'an dan Hadis. Perkembangan teknologi informasi, terutama media sosial, telah mempengaruhi perilaku keagamaan masyarakat Wetu Telu. Penelitian ini bersifat deskriptif-kualitatif dengan pendekatan antropologi agama, menggunakan metode penelitian sejarah yang mencakup heuristik, verifikasi, interpretasi, dan

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historiografi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa: pertama, struktur sosial di Lombok Barat menunjukkan stratifikasi yang mempengaruhi dominasi politik, tradisi, dan keagamaan. Kedua, Islam Wetu Telu merupakan sinkretisme ajaran Islam, Hindu, dan animisme yang menciptakan kebudayaan baru sambil mempertahankan nilai-nilai keislaman. Ketiga, tradisi Wetu Telu mengalami perubahan akibat perkembangan ilmu pengetahuan, teknologi, dan perubahan pandangan masyarakat.

Kata Kunci: Perubahan, Komunitas Wetu Telu, Sosial Keagamaan

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#### 1. Introduction

Islam has significantly influenced the patterns and systems of life in Lombok since its arrival in the 17th century. Prior to this, the majority of Lombok's population practiced Hinduism, and the process of conversion from Hinduism to Islam was lengthy, resulting in the emergence of a unique community known as "Wetu Telu." This community represents a distinct Islamic sect unique to Lombok and is not found elsewhere (Sirnopati, 2021).

Wetu Telu Islam is a form of syncretism that combines Islamic teachings with elements of Hinduism and animism. This syncretism is evident in lontar manuscripts that blend Islamic recitations with Hindu and Buddhist philosophies (Sakti et al., 2024). According to Vogellaesang, Wetu Telu Islam represents an adaptation of Majapahit (Hindu and Buddhist) teachings infused with Islamic elements (Bartholomew, 2001, p. 43). This blending process also affects everyday traditions, such as dress codes and language, which are still present today (Nasri et al., 2024, p. 127). In the 17th century, the power of the Sasak in West Lombok declined due to Balinese dominance (Suhupawati, 2017). However, the relationship between the Balinese rulers and the Sasak people remained harmonious, preventing significant cultural conflicts. Sasak people who adhered to Wetu Telu Islam continued to participate in Hindu Balinese religious ceremonies, maintaining good relations between the two groups without religious and cultural conflicts (Rasmianto, 2009).

Wetu Telu Muslims typically reside in remote areas such as mountain slopes, dense forests, or riverbanks, aligning with their animistic and dynamic beliefs. They lead simple lives as farmers, gardeners, and a few as livestock keepers, while preserving ancestral customs (Astani et al., 2024). This community is known for its honesty, adherence, and responsibility towards family and the surrounding environment (Haris, 1978, p. 77). However, advancements in information technology, particularly the internet and social media, have influenced the Wetu Telu community with globalization and modernization ideas. Social media, now a crucial part of daily life, affects social changes and religious behaviors within the community (Budiwanti, 2000, p. 43).

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This study aims to explore the impact of social media on changes in religious traditions within

the Wetu Telu community in Narmada District, West Lombok Regency. The research focuses on the

emergence of religious traditions, mechanisms of change, and factors driving these changes. The

research will examine the changes in Wetu Telu traditions in Narmada from 1998 to 2022. Narmada

was chosen for the study because it was once a center for the Wetu Telu community and has shifted

towards modern arts and culture, although some Wetu Telu traditions are still maintained. The issues

to be studied include the social and religious conditions of Narmada's community, the background of

the emergence of Wetu Telu traditions, and the changes and developments within these traditions.

2. Method

This study employs a descriptive-qualitative approach to explore the changes in Wetu Telu Islamic

traditions in Narmada District, West Lombok Regency, focusing on the impact of social media on these

changes. This approach is chosen because it allows for a deep understanding of social and cultural

phenomena through qualitative analysis (Hashimov, 2015).

The research utilizes historical research methods, which include four main stages: heuristics,

verification, interpretation, and historiography (Pink, 2011). In the heuristics stage, data is collected

from various primary and secondary sources, including historical documents, lontar manuscripts,

interviews with community leaders, and field observations (Cissé & Rasmussen, 2022). These

documents include lontar that reflect the syncretism between Islamic teachings, Hinduism, and

animism, as well as historical records related to the development of Wetu Telu Islam (Creswell & J.

David Creswell, 2022, p. 33).

The verification stage ensures the authenticity and validity of the data sources. This process

involves source criticism to assess the credibility and relevance of the information obtained. The

researcher examines the alignment of sources with their historical and cultural context and compares

information from various sources to identify potential biases or inaccuracies (Jansen et al., 2022). In

the interpretation stage, verified data is analyzed to identify patterns and themes related to tradition

changes (Esfahani et al., 2022). The researcher employs theories from the anthropology of religion to

understand how syncretism and social interactions influence religious practices and cultural norms

within the Wetu Telu community (Pettit et al., 2022). This analysis includes examining how social

media impacts social and religious changes and how traditional values adapt to modern demands

(Nagashima et al., 2024).

The historiography stage involves compiling the research findings into a comprehensive report.

The researcher constructs a historical narrative detailing the changes in Wetu Telu traditions and the

impact of social media, considering relevant social and cultural contexts (Schwandt, 2021). This report

presents the research findings systematically and structurally, providing detailed descriptions of

tradition changes, mechanisms of change, and the factors driving these changes (Mihas, 2023).

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Throughout the research process, the researcher also conducts in-depth interviews with Wetu Telu

community members, religious leaders, and local authorities to gain direct insights into tradition

changes and the influence of social media (Davis et al., 2024). Field observations are carried out to

directly witness religious and cultural practices and to understand how information technology affects

daily life within the community (Jacobs & Perez, 2023). All collected data is processed and analyzed

to provide a comprehensive picture of the dynamics of change within the Wetu Telu community (Ritter

et al., 2023).

3. Results and Discussion

In the following section, we will delve into the results and discussion of the research on the

transformation of the Wetu Telu Islamic tradition within the Narmada community of West Lombok.

This analysis examines the dynamic changes in religious practices and social norms from 1998 to 2022,

highlighting shifts in ritual observances, community interactions, and cultural adaptations in response

to modern influences. By exploring these changes, we aim to understand the factors driving the

evolution of Wetu Telu traditions and their implications for the community's cultural and religious

identity.

A. General Description of Narmada District And Islam Wetu Telu

West Lombok is one of the six regencies under the province of West Nusa Tenggara.

Lombok Island consists of three regencies and one municipality: East Lombok Regency,

Central Lombok Regency, West Lombok Regency, and Mataram Municipality. The island

covers an area of approximately 4,787 km<sup>2</sup>. It is bordered by Bali Island to the west and

Sumbawa Island to the east. The boundary with Bali Island is close to the Lombok Strait, and

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with Sumbawa Island by the Sumbawa Strait. To the north, it is bordered by the Java Sea, and to the south by the Indonesian Ocean. Narmada is one of the fifteen sub-districts in West

Lombok Regency with the following territorial borders: to the north, it borders Lingsar Sub-

district; to the south, it borders Kediri and Labuapi Sub-districts; to the east, it borders Central Lombok Regency; and to the west, it borders Mataram Municipality and Gunung Sari Sub-

district (Nusantara, 1992, p. 57).

The area of Narmada Sub-district is 107.62 km². Land use includes agricultural land,

which consists of 3,804 hectares, dry land 3,600 hectares, rice fields 2,268 hectares, and yards

667 hectares. Narmada Sub-district has a tropical climate with 129 rainy days in 2020 and total

rainfall of 155.12 mm. The highest rainfall occurred in November at 281 mm. The population

of Narmada Sub-district is 102,628, consisting of 51,400 males and 51,228 females, with a

density of 954 people/km<sup>2</sup>. The research for this thesis was conducted in Dasan Tereng Village

with a population of 5,465, including 2,748 males and 2,717 females in 2020. Narmada Sub-

district is known for its diverse community, which has lived in relatively peaceful conditions.

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The community of Narmada Sub-district practices four religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity (Protestantism), and Islam. Islam is the predominant religion in the Narmada community (Baal, 1976, p. 75).

## B. Social Conditions and Religion of Wetu Telu

To understand the social relations of the community broadly, one cannot ignore the issues of social relations and interpersonal relationships among the Sasak people. The Sasak community is widely recognized for its social stratification, which differentiates individuals based on their social status, and this has become the norm governing social relationships among Sasak people (Haris, 1978, p. 65). Social stratification can broadly be determined by age, wealth, education level, and occupation. Older individuals in a village, for example, will receive respect from younger individuals, just as wealthy individuals will receive respect from poorer ones. Similarly, highly educated people will be respected by those with less education (Zuhdi, 2012).

According to the concepts of social stratification or differences in social status, scholars, especially Tuan Guru, in rural areas of Lombok, including Narmada, are highly respected by the community. Compared to other local elites, such as wealthy farmers, Tuan Guru, especially those leading Islamic boarding schools, hold a more esteemed position. This has made them leaders in the community (Ngurah & dkk, 1985, p. 67). Their leadership extends beyond religious matters to political realms. Their success in this leadership role makes them highly influential figures who can easily mobilize social actions. Thus, Tuan Guru has long been a powerful elite (Muliadi et al., 2024; Nasri, 2024a, 2024b; Nasri et al., 2023).

The relationship between Tuan Guru and the community is bound by religious emotions that increase their influence over the community. The charisma accompanying Tuan Guru's actions also provides a strong emotional connection (Atsani et al., 2023). Since Tuan Guru has been a helper to the people in solving their problems, which are not limited to spiritual issues but also encompass broader aspects of life, the community regards Tuan Guru as their leader and representative in their social system (Rasyidi & Nasri, 2023). His success in playing this important role positions him not only as a mediator of Islamic law and doctrine but also as a sacred force itself. Tuan Guru in Lombok holds substantial influence in society and plays a crucial role in driving social and even political actions, especially in Lombok. His significant position and role are not limited to lower society but extend to intellectuals and politicians. The central role of Tuan Guru is demonstrated by the high respect and influence he has compared to professional politicians (Athhar, 2005).

In Narmada District, social stratification is organized into several tiers. At the highest level are the Tuan Guru, who are religious leaders and highly respected for their roles in the community. Below the Tuan Guru are the Uztads and teachers, who hold significant positions

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in education and religious instruction (Afandi, 2018). The next tier consists of farmers, who are engaged in agricultural activities and play a crucial role in the local economy (Alim et al., 2024; Nasri & Adiba, 2023). At the lowest level are agricultural laborers, who work in the farming sector but hold a lower social status compared to the other groups (Nasihin et al., 2024).

In terms of religion, the Sasak community practicing Islam Wetu Telu strongly adheres to their ancestral customs. The practice of Islam among the Sasak community, part of the Wetu Telu community, is unique. Religion and tradition blend into one religious practice. This is because early Islamic missionaries spread Islam gradually (Nasri, 2019, p. 120). As a result, over time, the Wetu Telu Islamic community has decreased as Islamic preachers began to correct religious practices. However, in Narmada, the traditional rituals of Wetu Telu Islam are still maintained. Even though the community has preserved the teachings of Wetu Telu Islam, changes have occurred due to the passage of time, such as in clothing styles and other aspects (Sudiartawan & Sutama, 2022).

Islam Wetu Telu in Narmada has a different understanding of religious practices compared to the Five-Time Islam. One distinctive feature of Wetu Telu Islamic practice is the involvement of ancestral spirits in making requests, the role of Kiai in religious rituals, and the delegation of duties like prayer and fasting to Kiai, among other practices (Anom Kumbara & Sutrisno, 2024). This contrasts with the religious rituals of Five-Time Islam adherents. Nonetheless, these practices serve as customary norms guiding the Wetu Telu Islamic community in conducting religious rituals and daily religious behaviors.

## C. History of the Arrival of Islam in Lombok

The initial arrival of Islam in Lombok Island was marked by the spread of Islam in the archipelago and the fall of the Majapahit Kingdom. Islam entered Lombok through Muslim traders who conducted trade and preached Islam. Islam first entered Lombok through Sunan Prapen around the 16th century AD, following the collapse of the Majapahit Kingdom. Sunan Prapen was the 4th king of the Giri Kedaton dynasty. He was the son of Sunan Dalem, the successor of Sunan Giri II. Sunan Prapen was born in 1432 Saka or 1510 AD. At the age of 46, he became the 4th King of Giri in 1556 AD. During Sunan Prapen's reign, he focused on expanding his domain through spiritual and trade approaches. Prince Prapen sailed to Lombok and landed in Salut, then continued to Labuhan Lombok, a trading port. After disembarking, Prince Prapen's forces landed, and the Lombok king willingly embraced Islam, but the people resisted, leading to a war won by the Muslims (Salam, 1992, p. 123).

The Lombok Chronicle explains that Sunan Ratu Giri instructed the Javanese kings, especially those from East Java and Palembang, to spread Islam to Northern Indonesia. The chronicle also mentions Sunan Prapen as the one who brought Islam to Lombok. Sunan Prapen preached Islam during the reign of Sunan Dalem, who ruled from 1548-1606 AD (Nasri,

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2024a). From the Lombok Chronicle, it is estimated that Islam entered Lombok in the 16th century AD. This means that Islam had already entered Lombok, and there were Muslims residing there (Depdikbud, 1975, p. 67).

Raden Gedarit, a Wetu Telu Islamic leader, explains that the history of Islam Wetu Telu is related to the arrival of Sunan Prapen from Java around 1600 AD. Through the Bayan area, in Northern Lombok, now part of North Lombok Regency, Sunan Prapen preached using scholarly methods and considering the situation of the Lombok community at that time, as the community still held animistic beliefs with influences from Hinduism and Buddhism. Thus, the preachers introduced Islamic teachings gently, emphasizing monotheism without disrupting local customs (Zidni et al., 2021). This method allowed the Da'is to introduce Islam by explaining the origin of human creation so that the community would recognize themselves and, subsequently, their God. This aligns with the Sufism teachings in the archipelago, such as "Man arofa nafsahu faqod Robbahu" (whoever knows themselves will surely know their God), which emphasizes the relationship between humans and their God. This Sufism teaching was applied by Sunan Prapen in preaching Islam in Lombok (Mansyur, 2019).

Budiwanti, in her book, explains that the mystical Islam brought by Sunan Prapen is a combination of Hinduism, Sufi Islam, and Pantheism. This mystical Islam was accepted by the animistic-pantheistic Lombok community, and over time, this teaching became known as Wetu Telu Islam. This made Sunan Prapen famous as the bearer of Wetu Telu Islam (Budiwanti, 2000, p. 53). In another version of the Lombok Chronicle, it is mentioned that initially, Prince Prapen's arrival was rejected by the Lombok king who prepared to resist. However, after Prince Prapen explained his mission to perform a holy task peacefully, he was received well. But incitements from the Lombok people led the king to break his promise and prepare forces to fight Prince Prapen (Baal, 1976, p. 77). In the ensuing war, the Lombok king and his people were pressured and fled to the forest, where they were captured by Jaya Lengkara and brought before Prince Prapen. He was then pardoned by Prince Prapen who released him from the palace and appointed him to a certain place as a caretaker. With a suitable approach, the people finally accepted Islam. Sunan Prapen then converted the Lombok people and performed Islamic rites, such as circumcision and prayers.

#### D. Wetu Telu Islamic Beliefs

The Sasak Wetu Telu community believes in the existence of three main elements in their religious practices: the belief in God (Tuhan), the belief in the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W), and the belief in their ancestors. This belief is reflected in their daily religious practices. The Wetu Telu Islamic community adheres to the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) combined with traditional customs (Nusantara, 1992, p. 87).

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The Wetu Telu Islamic community does not adhere strictly to the teachings of Islam, focusing instead on combining local customs with religious practices. The beliefs and practices

of the Wetu Telu community include:

1. Distinctive Beliefs: The Sasak Wetu Telu community believes in the existence of

spiritual beings and ancestral spirits who are still venerated and play a role in their

religious practices.

2. Religious Rituals: Rituals such as prayers and offerings are performed in a way that

integrates local customs with Islamic teachings.

3. Role of Ancestors: Ancestral spirits are revered and play a significant role in the

community's religious and social life.

4. Integration with Local Culture: Wetu Telu Islam integrates local customs with

Islamic teachings, creating a unique form of practice that differs from mainstream

Islam (Asnawi, 2005).

E. Changes in Wetu Telu Islamic Traditions

Tradition is inherently characterized by change. Soedjatmoko identifies three factors

driving these changes: advancements in science and technology, demographic factors, and

ecological and environmental influences. William F. Ogburn expands on this by noting that

social change also affects immaterial aspects, emphasizing the significant impact of cultural

elements (Wacana, 1985, p. 120). Ogburn further explains that cultures influence each other,

leading to changes in some cultural elements while others remain static. This aligns with the

diffusion theory, which suggests that a culture can trigger changes in others, contributing to

cultural evolution.

In Narmada, West Lombok, the Wetu Telu Islamic tradition has experienced changes

both in its practice and physical characteristics. Traditionally, Wetu Telu Islam involved

ancestor spirits in supplications to God, a dominant role of Kiais in religious rituals, and

adherence to customary norms in religious practices. For instance, zakat fitrah, both for the

living and deceased, was historically given only to Kiais. However, this practice has evolved;

now zakat is given directly to those in need, reflecting a shift towards more rational practices

and broader understanding among the community (Basarudin, 2019).

The local community has embraced mainstream Islamic practices, such as performing

the five daily prayers and fasting during Ramadan. The belief in auspicious days and ancestral

spirits has diminished, with zakat now directed towards those in genuine need rather than Kiais.

Additionally, changes in attire and language reflect globalization's impact, with traditional

clothing evolving to incorporate more modern elements (Adonis, 1989, p. 54).

Despite these changes, the core religious rituals remain intact. The community's

adaptation to modernity while retaining essential rituals demonstrates their flexibility and

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willingness to engage with contemporary developments while preserving their identity. The evolution in traditions like Gendang Balek, replaced by street orchestras, signifies a broader acceptance of change while maintaining core religious practices. This adaptation aligns with Weber's theory of social change, which highlights the impact of shifting values and rationality in societal transformation.

## F. The Significance of Wetu Telu Traditions for the Narmada Community

Understanding and preserving social traditions are crucial for the Narmada community practicing Islam Wetu Telu. The erosion of ancestral values can lead to moral decay and societal regression. Preserving positive social traditions through family, community, and educational institutions is essential for maintaining cultural identity (Judd, 1980, p. 67). Despite visible changes, the community remains committed to their religious practices, reflecting an adaptive approach to modernity without losing core traditions. Clifford Geertz describes culture as a system of inherited conceptions expressed symbolically. Societies are dynamic, and modernity often challenges traditional values. However, communities that understand and value their heritage, like the Wetu Telu community, manage to retain their cultural identity despite modern pressures. This preservation is vital for maintaining cultural and moral continuity (Zaki, 2015).

Islam Wetu Telu, despite being considered less evolved compared to Wetu Lima, maintains its cultural and religious practices. The community's efforts to preserve its traditions amidst modernization and external pressures highlight their commitment to their heritage. This process also underscores the importance of understanding and studying primitive cultures to grasp broader religious and cultural concepts.

#### G. The Process of Transmission and Preservation of Wetu Telu Traditions

Preservation involves maintaining cultural heritage through continuous, directed, and integrated efforts. This can be achieved through direct cultural experiences or disseminating cultural knowledge. For Wetu Telu traditions, preservation efforts include:

- 1. Community Dissemination: Initially, Wetu Telu faced opposition from the government, leading to covert practice. With increased religious freedom under President Gus Dur, the community openly promoted their traditions. Efforts to gain governmental recognition include drafting regional regulations for legal acknowledgment. Community education emphasizes adherence to principles like "Patut patuh Patju" and uses sociocultural approaches to align Islamic and local cultural elements.
- 2. Family and Community Pathways: Traditionally, family and community play a crucial role in transmitting values. Families, especially parents, impart traditions to children, fulfilling their responsibility to instill cultural values from an early age. According to Indonesian regulations, families are vital for religious and cultural education.

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3. Tradition Pathways: Rowlans argues that tradition and modernity often conflict. However,

some traditions, like Wetu Telu, manage to preserve essential aspects amidst modernity.

Maintaining tradition is crucial for cultural identity, serving as a policy for continuity,

legitimization of worldviews, collective identity, and resistance to modernization (Ecklund,

1981, p. 129).

These strategies ensure that Wetu Telu traditions remain integral to the community,

adapting to contemporary changes while preserving core cultural and religious practices.

4. Conclusion

Based on the analysis and discussion presented in the previous chapters, three key points can

be highlighted: Firstly, West Lombok, one of the six regencies under the Nusa Tenggara Barat

Province, is primarily agrarian, with most of Narmada's population engaged in agriculture. Social

stratification in Lombok Barat reflects the societal positions of individuals. The highest social strata

in the Sasak community is represented by Tuan Guru, who is not only a religious symbol but also a

political leader and someone who actualizes traditional values.

Secondly, the arrival of Islam on Lombok in the 17th century brought significant changes to

the local societal patterns and systems. This led to the gradual decline of the pre-existing Hindu

religion, replaced by Islam through a lengthy process. This transition gave rise to the Wetu Telu

Islamic community, a unique blend of Islam with Hindu, animistic, and dynamistic beliefs. The

syncretic nature of Wetu Telu Islam is evident in several lontar manuscripts found in Lombok, which

begin with the phrase Bismillah and are followed by Hindu and Buddhist philosophical elements.

Thirdly, the Wetu Telu Islamic tradition has undergone significant changes in Lombok,

affecting both its understanding and practices. These changes are attributed to advancements in

science and technology, demographic shifts, and ecological and environmental factors. Unlike

before, the Narmada community has embraced mainstream Islamic practices. They now perform the

five daily prayers, fast during Ramadan, and direct zakat fitrah to the needy (mustahiq) rather than

to Kiais or village leaders. Traditional attire has evolved, and traditional practices such as Gendang

Balek in weddings have been replaced by street orchestras, marking a shift towards modern

influences.

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