

## **For Alter-Multiculturalism: Through the Eyes of an Anthropologist**

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### **A Background and the Whole Picture of this Presentation**

In this presentation, I criticize theoretically some of the basic assumptions of current popular arguments in nationalism and multiculturalism studies and then briefly explore the possibilities of alternative mode of thinking, by examining the arguments of an anthropologist Ghassan Hage. To begin with, I show a broad background of my arguments in this part. That is, a very brief history of how the multicultural way of thinking has developed from 1970s.

For a long time, from around mid-19<sup>th</sup> century until 1970s, Marxism had dominated the field of critical imagination (Hage 2015: 33). But approximately from 1970s, both in the field of critical thought and in actual politics, cultural difference came more and more to the fore of discussion. As a thought, so-called 'cultural turn' occurred through the rise of new ways of thinking, such as cultural studies or post-colonial studies. In the field of politics, cultural movements or identity politics of indigenous people and other national minorities intensified through the time, notably in Australia and Canada. Those changes in critical strands of thought and politics, interrelatedly and together with growing population of immigrants, led to the rise of multiculturalism as a new way of thinking and politics. Though often deployed in uncritical and technical forms of management and governance such as those criticized by Gordon and Newfield (1996), multiculturalism as policies and as a way of thinking became somewhat a common sense, especially in the Western nation-states. By rising anxiety of terrorism and a shrinking sense of national power, however, those states saw a resurgence of nationalism and intense backlash on multiculturalism from around the late 1990s and especially after the 9.11 in 2001. Social integration over multiculturalism and neo-nationalism over post-nationalism came to be emphasized in recent years (Joppke and Morawska 2003).

This history of rise, flourishing and fall of multiculturalism shows its vulnerability to the dominance of nationalism or social integration-ism. So today, although some researchers defend existing kind of multiculturalism (e.g. Tariq Modood) and others push civic or liberal kind of nationalism as an alternative way of communality building (e.g. Will Kymlicka or Yael Tamir), I strongly argue that we have to move on to an alternative mode of imagining and constructing communality, which is radically different both from nationalism and from multiculturalism. Owing to Ghassan Hage, I call that radical mode 'alter-multiculturalism'. Actually, all of my arguments here are deployment of his thought, so this presentation is more an introduction of his thought than my original contribution. Even so, however, I consider this work definitely important because his works are not yet examined thoroughly, compared to its viability to many of the complicated discussions over nationalism and multiculturalism today.

In the following sections, firstly I make a brief biography of Hage and show some features of his thought, which are useful for getting a whole picture of him and his position. Secondly I sum up Hage's diagnosis of today's world. Thirdly I criticize two popular dichotomies which are often deployed unreflexively and uncritically in discussions of how to deal with the crises of nation-states, Western (or civic) vs. Eastern (or ethnic) nationalism and multiculturalism vs. assimilationism, respectively through the examination of Hage's theses (mainly Hage 1996 and 2010). In the end, based on the above arguments and introducing Hage's recent book *Alter-Politics* (2015), I clarify the implication of alter-multiculturalism and explore its possibility. To sum up, the parts 2 to 4 proceed as follows; the current sociopolitical situation of nation-states is depicted, then some common and uncritical ways to deal with the situation is criticized, and finally an alternative way of thinking is explored.

### **Ghassan Hage: A Brief Introduction**

Hage was born in 1957 at Beirut, the capital city of Lebanon, as a child whose father is a Lebanese colonel. He learned at a French school in his childhood and went up to a university. But when he was nineteen in 1976, one year after the beginning of the Lebanese civil war, he moved to Australia in order to avoid the war and continue his education. There he studied social and political sciences and submitted his doctoral thesis, *The Fetishism of Identity*

(1989) which is about a relationship between class politics and communal politics of a Maronite Christian community in Lebanon, to Macquarie University in Sydney. Then he studied at Pierre Bourdieu's research center in French as a postdoctoral fellow and learned Bourdieu's sociology intensively, and now he teaches anthropology mainly at Melbourne University and intermittently at the Bourdieu's center and American University of Beirut.

As expected by the carrier above, Hage is fluent in Arabian, English and French languages and his works are based on field research mainly in Lebanon and Australia. His research interest can be categorized as racism, nationalism, multiculturalism and so on, but it seems that there has been a coherent research question despite the broadness of the subjects in his writings. That is, to say, emotionally strong connectedness of communities and their violent disposition against the Other accompanied by the connectedness and individual's immersion into it. What is especially appealing in his works is that, for me, he's always thinking from the viewpoint of each actor even when he is talking about abstract –isms like nationalism or multiculturalism, and therefore he can depict concretely and express clearly what is experienced and felt when people engage in certain communality and identify to certain communities. To put it shortly, his works success in capturing what the very 'real' of communality, the experiential aspect of 'imagined community'.

And two important theoretical tools for doing this are the theories of psychoanalysis, especially that of Jacques Lacan, and sociology of Bourdieu. Ideas from psychoanalysis are mainly used for capturing the sense and imagination of communal actors, and Bourdieu's thought is so vital for his whole work as a researcher that he admits 'how permeated my ethnographic language was with the very Bourdieu-ian concepts' (Hage 2013: 77). In fact he has done an introductory public lecture<sup>1</sup> on Bourdieu's sociology and has written some papers and book chapters focusing on it (Hage 1994, 2011, 2013 and Bennet et al. 2013). I cannot say much in this presentation about their influence on Hage and how interestingly he deploys those theories because that is not its purpose, but I hope I can show a glimpse of that through the following application of his works.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vn9daX6Jt4g>

**‘We Torture, but Usually We Don’t. We have a big democracy.’**

Hage calls socio-political condition of today’s world ‘the globalisation of the late colonial settler condition’ (Hage 2015: 13—32). In this naming, ‘colonial settler condition’ is characterized by societies’ ‘warring’ ethos and ‘phallic democracies’, and ‘late’ implies a declining sense of power felt by Western nation-states. Hage sees the colonial settler condition being globalized in all Western societies who feel their power declining. Here I want to explain each of his original words above in turn.

Warring societies are ‘not societies that are necessarily at war, but of societies that are permanently *geared* towards war’ (Hage 2015: 18, original emphasis). War is usually considered as a transitional state and society is as a stable state, but in warring societies, state of war becomes no longer transitional but permanent. A more important feature of those societies for Hage, however, is a reversal of relation between their good practices and bad ones. According to him, ‘all societies have mechanisms for the production and reproduction of the good life, whichever way the good life is culturally defined, whether materially, emotionally or spiritually’, and at the same time, all societies have to defend that ‘good’ life by sometimes engaging in doing ‘bad’ things (e.g. suspending the rule of law in certain situations in order to defend the rule of law).

What divides societies into non-warring societies and warring ones is not whether they engaging in such bad practices or not, because all societies do so and it is simply idealistic to deny the fact, but the relation between the bad and good behaviors. In non-warring societies, bad practices are done in a dark corner (by a ‘secret service’) to protect the good life under a spotlight. In warring societies, in contrast, such suppressed and exceptional acts start coming to the surface of the societies and people begin to discuss them publicly (e.g. Is torture legitimate?). The realm of good life gets increasingly encroached on by the defensive mechanisms of it. Warring societies are the societies where war as a state of exception becomes permanent, legitimized by distancing themselves as essentially good from the contingent badness. That is to say, ‘surely we torture contingently, but that is not from our essential disposition. We are good in nature and *usually* don’t torture’<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Such situations in Guantanamo Bay detention camp and many other places around the world have been repeatedly depicted and explained by deploying the discussions of Giorgio Agamben

Such a warring ethos was what Hage had already analyzed in his doctoral thesis comparing Zionists in Israel, Christians in Lebanon and whites in South Africa during the Apartheid years. Each of them had their enemy to be destroyed (Palestinians, Muslims and blacks) and shared the warring ethos. Now, to the eyes of Hage, this ethos is globalized all over the Western democratic nation-states, with the globalization of the Islamic threat and weakening states' sense of power due to the globalization of economy and neoliberalism. Here the term 'sense of power' is borrowed from Friedrich Nietzsche and differentiated from the amount of power. Sense of power means how a subject feels her power. She can sense her power both ascending and descending depending on her subjective feeling, regardless of her objective amount of power. The point of this concept is that the attitudes of the subjects towards others differ due to their sense of power. According to Nietzsche, those actors who sense their power rising become tolerant and benevolent towards others, while in contrast, those who sense their power falling become intolerant and mean towards others. It is this sense of power that differentiates a simple 'colonial settler condition' and the '*late* colonial settler condition', where colonial actors sense their power decreasing and therefore they become more exclusive against their others.

It is in this situation that 'democracy is slowly gutted of its content and becomes increasingly deployed as a phallic democracy. Phallic democracy is the democracy that one has, rather than the democracy one lives' (Hage 2015: 24). In similar with phallus in the theories of psychoanalysis, democracy becomes a void signifier to show off, like 'We've got a bigger democracy! Look at how petty theirs is!' With the declining sense of power and warring ethos, the West is increasingly geared towards anti-democratic practices while believing their democratic nature, the content of which is actually thinning in the very moment they believe they have it.

### **Critique of Popular Dichotomies**

The current situation described above is said to be 'resurgent of nationalism' as Hage put it, and retreat of multiculturalism accompanying it is purported to be 'return of assimilation' by others (e.g. Brubaker 2001). But as we know, the contents of those abstract -isms can vary

(e.g. Agamben 1998), Butler 2004 for example.

significantly depending on who use those terms. So, what is meant when Hage says ‘resurgent of nationalism’, or more specifically, where is the difference between his theorizing of nationalism or multiculturalism and those of others? These are the questions I want to answer in this section, focusing on two popular dichotomies regarding nationalism and multiculturalism.

### ***Dichotomy 1: Western vs. Eastern Nationalism***

The first dichotomy I want to examine here is that of Western and Eastern nationalism. It is purported that the former is based on rationality and universalistic civic attitudes which promote a good relation with otherness, while the latter is grounded on ethnicity and particularistic exclusive attitudes which can lead to practices of extermination like ‘ethnic cleansing’ in Bosnia and so on. This purported distinction between West and East can itself be criticized as orientalism and likely to be abandoned as a legacy of the past today, but I argue that this kind of practice of distinction has been used again and again changing its forms and wordings to date. In a recent case, as a response and an alleged possible ‘solution’ to today’s crisis of multiculturalism, liberal nationalism is gaining population in both academics and politics, theoretically based on Tamir (1993) or Kymlicka (1995) and so on.

To be precise, theories labeled as ‘liberal nationalism’ differ from each other. Those of Tamir and another intellectual David Miller are basically similar but different in imagining a desirable way of state building, and that of Kymlicka is sometimes said not to be liberal nationalism. Noticing those differences, however, still I’m sure I can see them as one linear tradition of thought because they share a strong belief in universal values (‘liberalism’, whatever conceptualized specifically by them) and all have a disposition to privilege the universal over the particular. And more importantly, they share a belief that there are ideal types of nationalism that are *essentially* different from each other.

It is due to this continuing belief in alleged division between the universal and the particular or in alleged nationalisms essential difference, which are in reality undividable and closely interrelated, that I consider Hage’s article ‘The Spatial Imaginary of National Practices’ in 1996 still has actuality today. In this article, he criticizes the above dichotomy of nationalisms arguing that both of them are rooted in basically the same structure of national imaginary,

and therefore there is a ceaseless structural continuation rather than a radical difference between the two.

The concept of the national imaginary is quite important for understanding Hage's argument on nationalism and national building. The national imaginary functions as Lacanian fantasy, where individuals are fantasized by fulfillment of their goal even it can never be reached by them in fact. This was not an original idea of him because Slavoj Žižek, who is well-known for introducing Lacanian theory, had already developed the interpretation of nation as Thing (Žižek 1993). That is, nation is an object of desire always-yet-to-be-achieved and therefore always to be chased in a strongly affective way. Hage develops this kind of theorizing further. For him, practices of nation building are generally guided by the national imaginaries, which are similarly structured regardless of the variation of nations. So in a sense it can be said that he develops a general theory of national building here, yet it is based on his previous field works and a practical tool for empirical analyses as that of Bourdieu, not of a stable and definite kind like that of Talcott Parsons.

As Hage's theorizing in the article is so amazingly wide-ranging and abundant that I don't have enough space here to detail it, for my purpose I focus only on his differentiation of two types of nation building; motherland building and fatherland building. They respectively correspond to the motherland and the fatherland, the qualitatively different spaces in the national imaginary. The motherland indicates a space where national subjects can feel at home. An important point to note here is that *who* feels at home in the motherland. According to Hage, as it is generally the case in patriarchy, those who do so are children, consumers of mothering, not mothers themselves. What we can clarify from this fact is that there are always a power relations between marginalized providers of services by which the homeliness is created and dominant consumers of it who feel at home in motherland, which shows a two-faceted reality of the motherland. The fatherland is an imaginary space where the symbolical will of national body is located. Briefly saying, the fatherland is a space where national subjects claim sovereignty over the nation. A notable specificity of it is that the father of the fatherland is not imagined as a physical or bodily being there as is the case of the mother in the motherland, but as a symbolical being.

Corresponding to the subjects with different natures in the motherland and the fatherland, the others in them are also with different qualities. The other in the motherland is the physical

other with the bodily otherness, while that in the fatherland is the non-bodily other with the will. The former other is with the smell, bodily habitudes and so on, not with the political will. In contrast, the latter is with the will, will to counter or resistance the nation. As I shall discuss it again later, this differentiation of otherness is one of the essential and particular theorizations coherent in the works of Hage to date, which is of a great importance. The point of the differentiation, the distinction of the otherness of the body and that of the will (to use the term appeared in Hage 2004), is that the reaction and the way of dealing with the otherness is different depending on the types of it. That is, the logic of domestication operates in response to the bodily otherness, while that of extermination arises responding to the willful otherness. This is because the exclusion of the willful other is a matter of life and death for the nation. The government of the motherland is a matter of good life (feeling good at home), but it becomes possible *only after* the sovereignty of the fatherland, or national life is secured from the other political wills yearning for their own sovereignty.

As nationalists or nation builders extract a large amount of power and meaningfulness of their life from the imaginary nation and fear most the symbolic death of the nation as a united willful body, they engage in the practices of extermination very effectively. For them the other stands at the very point between them and their imaginary perfection, fully motherly motherland or fully fatherly fatherland. Here, as I have explained above, this imaginary finality functions as Lacanian Thing for nation builders or nationalists. The other is an obstacle always-yet-to-be-overcome at any cost for their perfection, and the way of overcoming is different due to the nature of the other. On one hand, in the motherland imaginary the other is with body but no will, so it's like an animal at home to be domesticated. On the other hand, in the fatherland imaginary the other is with will but no body, so it's like a dangerous imaginary beast which cannot be domesticated but must be exterminated. As the latter other has no body in the national imaginary, this extermination does not have to be physical but can be symbolical; symbolical killing of the other's political will.

What we have to notice here is that the motherland building of domesticating the other with no will and the fatherland building of exterminating the willful other, are not the essentially different nationalisms, but are linked closely and make up two-faceted logic coherent in *any* nationalism. They are always contextually determined practices, say; the mode of domestication is emphasized in this nation at that time and that of extermination in that nation



this time. For example;

Among a large section of the Lebanese Maronites, the Muslim is constructed as both a bodily otherness, as dirty and smelly, etc, and as a traitor [with a willful otherness] whose allegiances are with other Arab Muslims rather than with Lebanon. During the Lebanese civil war, it was by far the fatherland discourse of allegiance that became dominant. (Hage 1996: 483, supplementation is mine)

And this is no specific phenomenon in ‘Eastern’ nationalism as Hage argues taking an example of the problematizing of Muslim veil in France;

Islamic women have always worn scarves in the West. It is only recently, after the resurgence of an ‘Islamic transnational will’ that reaches beyond the nation-states where it has originated (as in the case of the writer Salman Rushdie) that the scarf began to represent such a deeply rejected otherness. (Hage 1996: 483—4)

This is where he rejects the idea of different types of nationalisms, so called ‘Western’ and ‘Eastern’. For him, this alleged essential difference between nationalism with valorization of otherness and that with ethnic extermination of it, is in fact just a contextually determined shift of emphasis in the same nationalism structured by the national imaginary.

### ***Dichotomy 2: Multiculturalism vs. Assimilationism***

The second dichotomy I treat here is that of multiculturalism and assimilationism, which seems more prevalent and unquestioned than the first dichotomy today. As I have touched in the beginning of this piece, there had been a great deal of backlash on multiculturalism from around the turn of the century. So many academic articles have been written that it is difficult to count them precisely. There is, however, the logic of ‘policy determinism’ as Hage puts it. His view of the current academic and political situation<sup>3</sup> is right on the point and worth quoting in length;

...those on the right of the political spectrum make statements such as ‘the policy of

<sup>3</sup> Both are often intersected and intellectuals tend to discuss too politically on this issue, and this fact itself is problematic in terms of the autonomy of academic world.

assimilation gave us the cohesive and well-integrated society and policy of multiculturalism gave us the fragmented society of ethnic communities’, those on the left reply ‘the policy of assimilation gave us racism while the policy of multiculturalism gave us the ethnically plural and cosmopolitan society’. While many are willing to argue with the particular details of these statements, it is surprising how very few venture into a critique of their overall logic and the way they fetishize cultural policy and give it such unrealistic powers shaping society. (Hage 2010: 236)

The concept which plays a key role in his argument here is ‘the ungovernable’; ‘that which is produced from within and yet cannot be defined, encompassed and regulated by an existing governmentality’ (Hage 2010: 236). A new form of governmentality emerges to deal with the ungovernable when existing one cannot do so, not opposite. So, the order of the things is not that multicultural policy ‘created’ ethnic communities as policy determinists put it, but multicultural governmentality came about because of the increasing ethnic communities which assimilationist one could not govern. And more importantly, in contrast with a common portrait of multiculturalism ‘as an alternative and a transcendence of monocultural assimilation’, the fact obscured by such a portrait is that assimilation was ‘never buried by multiculturalism—it continued to co-exist with it’ (Hage 2010: 247). Hage shows this very important fact by an empirical case study of Cronulla events.

Cronulla is where there is one of the most popular beaches in Sydney. In December 2005, there was a huge mobilization of white, mainly male Australians who went down to the Cronulla beach and conducted violent attacks on those deemed to be from Middle Eastern areas, in order to ‘reclaim’ the beach from those Muslim-looking guys. They thought themselves to be so dominant in Australia that they could imagine their eligibility to enforce the law, the specific ‘Australian’ way of life, by their own, which in their eyes was the work to be done that the state failed to do. One of the points of this dramatic event where Hage pays attention to is that ‘not all the crowd saw this specific way of life that needs to be protected as a “monocultural” one, some spoken to by various reporters saw themselves defending a “multicultural” way of life that they believed the Muslims were ruining’ (Hage 2010: 247). It was not only assimilationism but also multiculturalism that oriented the violent attackers. This fact challenges straightforward the very assumption held by defenders of

multiculturalism that the riots were driven by monocultural assimilationist ethos and the event happened because of the lack of multicultural tolerance.

Then, what did the Cronulla attack actually mean for us? Hage answers; it implied a crisis of both of the two modes of governmentality, assimilationism and multiculturalism, not only either of them. Here he comes to connect them together as ‘multicultural-assimilationist apparatus’, clarifying the fact mentioned above that those two modes of governmentality are not to be differentiated in isolation and they have continued to co-exist interrelatedly. As he has theorized repeatedly (e.g. Hage 1994, 1998), tolerance of multiculturalism is not a negation of the actual power of those tolerate but a call not to use their power against the tolerated, so the former possess and preserve the power and whether it is used against the latter or not is always at their will. This power structure is always at the core of multicultural-assimilationist apparatus, where those in position of tolerating can always shift their strategy from multicultural politics of tolerance to assimilationist politics of killing of the political will of people. So, multicultural-assimilationist apparatus *always* contains both the killing of willful other and tolerance or benevolent political love to the domesticated other deprived of the will. Hage calls this two-faceted nature of the apparatus as ‘political necrophilia’, which indicates that it loves its other benevolently *only after* killing the political will (to resistance) of them.

### **What Is Alter-Multiculturalism? : Borrowing from *Alter-Politics***

I have offered some critical viewpoints in the section above on the two prevalent dichotomies regarding nationalism and multiculturalism, by introducing the relating arguments of Hage. So then, the next question is that, what kind of possibilities we can imagine and find that can go beyond such stuck modes of co-existing in the current situation? In this concluding section, I cannot go further to give my own answer to the question with empirical evidence yet, but I would like to explore a direction where the answer shall go. That direction is what I call ‘alter-multiculturalism’, borrowing the concept ‘alter’ from *Alter-Politics* (2015), the latest book written by Hage.

In this book he differentiates two ideal modes of critical thought, that is, anti- and alter-modes. While anti denotes “a desire to oppose existing oppression, domination and

exploitation', alter means 'an equal desire to create something better' (Hage 2015: 84). Hage prioritize the alter moment of critique to that of anti in the book, 'not because the "alter" moment is more important than the "anti".' It is because 'a concern for and an emotional investment in an alter-politics has been less prevalent' (Hage 2015: 1), as is the case in Marxism tradition in which anti-capitalism has been more emphasized than utopian socialism. In general, alter denotes a space outside that of counter relation between the dominant and its anti, a space of colonialism and anti-colonialism, nationalism and anti-nationalism, capitalism and anti-capitalism and so on. Alter modes of thought and existence go beyond and are free from such spaces occupied by pro- and anti- moments. To be more concretely, I shall show the implication of the concept below by taking the case of multiculturalism.

In order to do so, let us go back again to the discussions of Hage I have introduced above. As readers may notice, his lines of argument are very similar and there is a coherent logic he uses, regardless of the objects of analysis. In the case of the first dichotomy, he rejects it by showing another typology of nationalist practices in opposition to the Eastern and Western nationalism, and then argued the insistent nature of nationalism between the purported modes of it. In rejecting the second dichotomy, he clarified the continuing ethos maintained in both of assimilationism and multiculturalism as 'multicultural-assimilationist apparatus' by focusing on the ruling and governmental nature of them. In the both cases, the important point of his argument is that he shows the inherent continuity existing in the logic of national governance of the otherness, insistently observable whatever the apparent mode or emphasis of national practices or policy changes. The feature of the logic is that it accepts and enjoys its otherness *only after* it has killed the political will of the other, that is, the act of 'political necrophilia' as Hage puts it. In other words, domestication of the other always comes after symbolic extermination of it.

People don't say 'we really appreciate and enjoy your culture' to their national others when they are in the warring state and are related as 'we or our enemy' with them. This is why Hage depicts today's global condition as warring societies; the moment of extermination is emphasized over that of domestication in recent years, particularly after the 9.11 setting Muslim as the 'enemy'. Which moment of relating with the other becomes emphasized is determined by the context as we see in the argument on the first dichotomy, and the context is now the 'the globalisation of the late colonial settler condition', according to Hage.

Alter mode of thinking goes outside the existing space of thought dominated by such an either/or, we/others logic. In Cronulla event, the Muslim-looking other emerged as ‘the ungovernable’ for the ‘multicultural-assimilationist apparatus’. It can be said that such emergence of ungovernability is one possibility of going beyond the either extermination or domestication logic of governance of the other, but in the event the possibility went to a bad direction as a riot. As Hage extracts it from an interview with a Lebanese youth who was attacked in the event, this riot just created a mentality of communal violence, which was formed in ‘we or them’ language disclosing any possibility of encounter with the other as an individual or a human (Hage 2010: ). We have to explore other good possibilities of communal relationality which is of course far away from such a moment of violence, yet also radically different from multiculturalism, say; alter-multiculturalism.

The problem of multiculturalism as a national technique of relating with the other, which is made clear by the arguments of Hage and actual events such as the Cronulla, is that it cannot relate effectively with the willful other. We cannot live with the other with their own will who is claiming their own sovereignty, by enhancing current mode of multiculturalism as those on the left claim, nor by deepening assimilation of migrants or national minority as those on the right insist. In order to do so we must radically rethink some of our common sense, such as the way of thinking sovereignty of nation-states that has been constructed from the time of the emergence of Westphalia. As Hage hints it in the essay “Hoping with the Beast” (2007), today we must explore the way of coexisting with the ‘beast’ that has its own will and looks dangerous to our eyes, not with the ‘animal’ that has already been domesticated after being deprived of the fearful will and arms of it. We must explore the possibilities of domesticating the fear to the willful otherness, not the otherness itself. And importantly, these possibilities are already around us to be found, not just lying in the future. Although Hage shows some hints of them in *Alter-Politics*, we don’t have enough empirical findings of the hidden possibilities to go beyond the current impasse of the multicultural politics. It is the task I will have to take on in the future research to find them in empirical realities.

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