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AN ETHICAL ENQUIRY ON THE RISING TREND OF XENOPHOBIC ATTACKS OF NIGERIANS IN SOUTH AFRICA: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS.

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Abstract
Xenophobia as a sociological challenge has assumed a front burner in the national discourse today. Xenophobic attacks of Africans in general and Nigerians in particular in South Africa in recent times have assumed a highly worrisome dimension. As a sociological threat, it is unleashing not only gross violations of the human dignity as well as the rights of the individuals, but it is also creating profound assault in the quest for a united African nation. While it is granted that the above challenge has been there for years, it is however turning a modern trend that is truly a brutal and frightening reality from a misnomer to "normal" which is an averse to the survival and sustenance of civilized society. It is against this backdrop that this work seeks to investigate the rise in xenophobic attacks of Nigerians in South Africa as an ethical inquiry. The work involves a survey approach that relied heavily on secondary data. It draws its conclusion from content analysis technique. The study showed that xenophobia drives on the wheel of ethical aberrations of deception, injustice, pride and cynicism. The work concluded by calling for parental economic mentorship, human rights education, creation of more windows of dialogue for local and international resolution of conflict and the legal strengthening of African Union to use sanctions as instrument of deterrence.

Key Words: Xenophobia, Ethics, Social Justice, Economic Mentorship, Human Rights Education.

Introduction

The rising violent attacks on foreigners with particular reference to Nigerians in South Africa leave much to be desired. Though there have been various cases of Xenophobic attacks in South Africa over the years, the current trend is assuming a very highly dangerous dimension that must be condemned by all in strong terms. Motsa (2019) puts the above view pointedly when he states that there is blood in the streets, the blood of our nation's women and that of our brothers and sisters being desecrated by the acts of xenophobia. An act, he states, that has left the law-abiding South-Africans speechless. Continuing, he avers, that xenophobia has become a modern trend that is promoting the language of violence, disrespect, power, and oppression in such a deep rooted dimension that it has succeeded in anchoring the culture of crude brutality as a norm. It is a development that has allowed minor offence and misunderstandings among people to metamorphose into the tsunamis of abuse, violence and unwarranted destruction of lives across the country. The Creativity Check Team of BBC News corroborates the above submission when they submitted that South Africa in recent times has become a hotbed for rioters that have unleashed chaos in Johannesburg, the commercial capital, resulting in the unleashing of violent attacks on vehicles as well as the looting of shops mostly directed against those owned by foreign nationals. The South African officials have blamed the above problem to the upsurge of criminality instead of xenophobia, while government of other countries especially Nigerian has blamed the above attack as one targeted against Nigerian owned businesses and businessmen.

However xenophobia though a crime against humanity is not merely a bunch of faceless criminality but one which according to Solomon (2013) is rooted in the fear or hatred of strangers or foreigners. Apartheid South Africa laid foundation for discrimination and even in some cases violent treatments on immigrants through institutionalized racism. *The Week* (2015) noted that even after the dismantling of the above vile government giving birth to democratic government in 1994, the culture of discrimination has continued to increase. What this means is that though xenophobia is grounded in the spirit of apartheid (racism) its unending expansionism calls for issues beyond political questions.

Xenophobic attacks in South Africa according to Pillay (2017) have assumed a front burner in the contemporary global challenges. This, he notes, is predicated on the escalating upsurge of immigrants in the country. Furthermore, he posits that the rising spate of the attacks has put South Africa in the world map of contemporary discourse .Turkewitz (2019) as cited in *The New York Times* corroborates the above view when he states that South Africa is facing severe reactions following the ongoing xenophobic attacks in the country that left at least 10 people dead as well as the looting and the destruction of shops mostly owned by foreigners. Following what is described as the explosive level of xenophobia in South Africa in the recent times this work seeks to examine the ethical undertone behind increasing xenophobic attacks against Nigerians in South Africa. This work, therefore, seeks to investigate the moral aberrations that are fanning the embers of xenophobic attacks of Nigerians in South Africa and to suggest the way forward.

Theoretical Framework

Ethical theories according to Nnanyelugo and Odoemelam (2002) are to professional what compass is to navigator. Writing further they posit that ethical theories propose the appropriate reasons that are used to evaluate moral decisions. In other words they relate to the tools developed in order to identify what qualifies an action as naturally good, not only for one selves but also for others.

Over the years, there have been mounting argumentation among rural philosophers on the number of ethical theories or what one might call the relevant theoretical framework. According to Arua et al (2012) in the Western tradition, ethics can be traced to the ancient Greek philosopher Socrates, who stated that ethics relates to issues that bother on how we ought to live. They therefore submit as in all cultures, the Greeks had a set of beliefs, attitudes and values that regulated their lives.

According to Thiroux (1980) ethical standards can be classified into two main groups namely teleological and deontological theories. In 1994, Rossouw Don went further to propose four major ethical theories namely: virtue-based theories, consequence-based theories, principle-based theories, and narrative-based theories. However, Graham (2004) went further to identify what he called 8 theories of ethics namely, egoism, naturalism, virtue theory, existentialism, Kantianism, utilitarianism, contractualism and religion. According to him egoism is the theory that submits that the best life is one driven by success which is defined as "getting what I want". It has to do with having one's wish satisfied in every matter no matter what other people may feel or think. Besides he describes naturalism and virtue theory as relating to the quest to reconcile moral conduct with our nature as human beings (Graham, 2004: 177).

On the other hand Kantianism is a moral theory that upholds the view that moral motivation should form the basis for evaluating ethical action and not just the consequence of such actions. According to this theory an action should be judged by its rightness or wrongness not just from the result or consequence of such conduct but from the context of series of rules. Moreover he opines that religion ethical theory has to do with the divinity command theory which states that ethics relates to the divine rules or command meant to moderate human behavior on earth. According to Amunnadi (2016:18) divine image in man distinguishes man from brute creature and places him as not only a rational being but also as a religious being created to worship God through the subjection of self to the divine command – the Decalogue. A responsibility which in Christological philosophy is reduced to a four letter word –LOVE- love for God and love for one's fellow man. Nmah (1998:71) is in agreement with the above view when he states that religion and its inherent ethical demands is a product of man's recognition of the divine reality, his divine essence (the human spirit). The Researcher shall however adopt the divine command theory, naturalism theory and Kantianism theories as the theoretical framework for this study. The above theories share a

commonality that moral law is a universally given deriving from man's natural endowment with power of rationality as well as the fact of universal responsibility of man to both his creator and his fellow humanity. Human action from the above perspective is considered as being right in proportion of their alignment to absolute human good or reason as well as that of the divine imperative or demand.

Conceptual Clarification

(i)Ethical: The term "ethics" according to Okunna (1995:1) comes from the Greek word *ethos* which means character. It is usually associated with the term morals – a word whose Latin word *moralis* means custom or manner. Ethics and morality in the opinion of Baran (2004:478) refers to the rules of human behavior which guide human actions in a given situation or circumstances. Morality according to Wikins (2002) relates specifically to a religious or philosophical perspective or code of human behavior while ethics emanates from the power of human rationality to define boundaries of human behavior and conduct. Ethics can therefore be divinely driven or humanly based. Human ethics according to Udabah (2012) derives from the rational nature of human beings. In other words ethical rules which she refers to as ethical morality as different from divine or religious morality involves rules of conduct that are derived from human reason. Besides, she opines that ethical morality could emanate from individual or collective rationality. They are divine when they are drawn from religious or theological foundations. This work shall therefore be concerned with the theological platform of evaluating xenophobia as an aberration of human conduct.

(ii)Xenophobia: The word xenophobia comes from the ancient Greek words *xenos* meaning "strange", "foreigner" and *phobos*, meaning "fear". It is defined by *Oxford English Dictionary* as a "deep- rooted fear toward strangers or foreigners." It has to do with strong antipathy or aversion to foreigners or strangers. *The Open Education Sociology Dictionary* defines the above word as "the fear and hatred of people and goods from other countries due to societal and cultural differences." According to Guido (2003) as cited in Wikipedia online the word relates to the perception of an in-group toward an out-group which expresses itself in suspicion of the activities of others as well overt or covert action driven by passion to decimate them and secure their presumed purity. It is an attitude that is grounded in the fear of losing one's national, political, religious, racial, economic or cultural relevance or identity. The word according Guido (1993) as cited in Wikipedia online is defined as "uncritical exaltation of another culture in which the latter is given an unreal stereotyped and an exotic quality."

Politically it is defined by Wimmer (1997) as an element of political struggle relating to who has the right to be cared for by the state and society. Furthermore he notes that the term has to do with the fight for the collective goods of the modern state such that a section of the polity feels that their rights to benefit from the government are being thwarted by other people's right. Xenophobia from the foregoing refers to discriminative attitude targeted against an individual, people or race that is driven by fear of being dominated by same or shedding of one's economic, social, cultural, ethnic, racial, religious or political control.

The Precipitating Factors of the Rising Trend of Xenophobic attacks in South Africa

According to *This Week* (2015) the issue of xenophobia in South Africa dates back to pre-1994 when immigrants from foreign nations faced various forms of discriminations and even violence arising from the institutionalized racism of the time that was driven by apartheid government. However, Neocomos (2010) notes that contrary to expectation xenophobic culture continued to be on the increase even after the apartheid regime was replaced by democratic government. It is against this backdrop that between 2000 and March 2008 at least 67 people died in what were identified as xenophobic attacks. Moreover he noted that in May 2008 a series of violent attacks propelled by xenophobia left about 62 people dead in South African. Equally contributing on the carnage associated with the above violence of 2008 he stated that the violence which took place in Johannesburg left an estimated tens of thousands immigrants displaced with property, business and homes running into millions of dollars looted. Furthermore Landau (2011) asserts that the above attacks were predicated on xenophobic motivations. Besides Los Angeles Times (2015)

stated that a series of violent attacks driven by xenophobic reactions against immigrants in 2015 led to prompt evacuations of some foreign nationals from South Africa by their host country.

Moreover BBC News (September 2019) have reported that there is fresh resurgence of xenophobic attacks in South Africa on Nigerians and other foreign nationals. The development it notes has led to reprisals attacks in Nigerian cities on South African – owned companies for the killing of Nigerians in South Africa .Besides it stated that the Nigerian government has equally expressed her aversion to the ugly development by announcing that it is boycotting the World Economic Forum on Africa currently taking place in South Africa as a protest against the violent attacks on her people.

Economic Factor : The report by BBC News (September 5, 2019) states that the recent violent xenophobic attacks began in the coastal KwaZulu- Natal province following massive protests by South African lorry drivers over the taking over of their jobs by foreigners. Besides it notes that the attacks erupted following a media report which stated that unemployment has risen to 28% in the country, an increase which it posited was the highest since labour survey was introduced 11 years ago. What this means is that the above violence directed against other Africans in the name of xenophobia is driven by economic forces or interests. Pillay (2017)corroborates the above view when he avers that the fear of economic domination by foreigners play a major role in the fostering of xenophobia. This was equally the view of Kleinschmidt (1995:175) when he opines that the major evil of xenophobia is in the entrenchment of economic subjugation to sustain minority or majority interest. Economic deprivation or frustration is therefore a significant factor fostering the above ugly development.

Political Factor : Moreover Pillay (2017) submitted that the official statement by the South African Minister in charge of small businesses added fuel to the crisis when he stated that the South African rioters were right as other Africans coming into their country were taking over their jobs. Xenophobia from the above context draws strength from political forces that seek to protect overt or covert interest. According to him it is likened to racism as it is promoted by institutionalized structures, policy or measures that protect the interest of an "in-group" against the "out- group". It is an ideology that strives to exclude, reject and in most cases rubbish strangers or foreigners as evil on the ground of their lacking national identity. The above view was corroborated by Frierabend and Nesvold as cited in Fawole(1994:13) when he argued that systematic frustration can serve as a breeding ground for the above crisis when the political system turns a blind eye in securing or guaranteeing the attainment of social goals, aspiration and harmony of the people. According to them when it is obvious that the government appears reluctant to provide redress for aggrieved members of the society the spirit of xenophobia is emboldened. Further they assert that government exacerbates the above crisis when they foster economic policies that engender strife and discontent among her citizenry. By implication when political class provides tacit support for perpetrators of violence by refusing to hold them accountable they promote an atmosphere of discrimination and hatred among the polity. In other words by government omission or commission they create an environment that serves as a breeding ground for the violation of the fundamental rights of foreigners. This was put pointedly by Ademola (2017) when he submits that the failure of South African authorities to arrest, diligently prosecute and convict xenophobists over the years has continued to accord audacity to those engaged in the illicit act.

Identity Crisis: Political forces that strive to preserve national identity resorts to the easy ploy of discrimination as a tool for perpetuating national interest. The International New York Times (April 25, 2016) posits that Europe is currently at the center stage of racism and identity crisis. Equally Cross & Keith (1993:108) states that equally United States is currently being overrun by identity crisis in a level similar to what it used to be many years ago a situation that is creating global tensions across the developing and the developed nations.

Illicit Drug Trade: According to Human Sciences Research Council (cited in Adaebisi & Agugu(2017) Nigerians who are usually victims of xenophobic attacks are those who are illegal immigrant who engage in criminal activities such as trading in illicit drugs. The above is corroborated by BBC News (5 September, 2019) when it posits that some foreigners who engage in the selling of drugs to young people have come under severe xenophobic attacks in South Africa. The idea behind such action is predicated on the fact that hard drugs not only endanger the overall sound personality development of the vulnerable youths it also

foster their involvement in all kinds of criminality and illicit behavior. Xenophobia from this context derives from the passion of South African citizens to protect their young generation from damaging influence of hard drugs and gangeristic lifestyle associated with it.

Chime (2014) is in agreement to the above view when he posits that though South Africa in appreciation to Nigerian government role in fostering the dismantling of apartheid in the nation opened her borders to Nigerian's professionals, the country soon become overwhelmed by Nigerian organized crime groups especially those referred to as "drug lords". Thus xenophobic attacks on Nigerians and foreigners became a child of circumstance necessitated by increasing crime waves fostered by Nigerians and some citizens of other countries.

Ostentatious' Life Style: Moreover Fawole (2017) equally opined that the ostentatious display of illegally acquired wealth by Nigerians in South Africa also contributes to fueling of hate towards them. According to him this negative display of emotion is aggravated by the silent complaints of South African young men of the preference of their young girls to these wealthy foreigners in marriage.

Ethical Implications of South Africans xenophobic attacks on Nigerians

This section will attempt to examine the ethical aberration promoting xenophobia in South Africa.

Anger: Jesus taught his disciples to guard against anger for when it matures it gives birth to all kinds of violent behavior including murder. According to him uncontrolled anger is as deadly and evil as murder. Mathew gospel made it explicit when it states as follows: "you have heard that it was said by those of old, 'you shall not murder and whoever murders will be in danger of punishment' but I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother will be in danger of punishment (Mathew 7:21-22). Anger according to Wikipedia online refers to rage or fury that is characterized by increasing stage of hostile response to an object adjudged to be unleashing injury or injustice. It is also referred to an expression that is exhibited when a person faces a threat there to pride, position, ability to deceive others, self-deceptive beliefs, or socioeconomic status. The dominant image due every human person is mostly derived by the biblical expression of the man and woman as being created to reflect the image and the likeness of God. It is a state that secures every individual inviolable human right such as right to life, equality before the law, security, freedom from slavery and servitude, freedom from torture, unlawful deprivation of liberty, discrimination and other acts which impinge on human dignity. Juvane (May 19, 2015) puts it pointedly when she states that Articles 1 to 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights clearly states that everyone irrespective of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, social, property or birth and other status is entitled to all the rights of freedom such as right to life, liberty and security. Unfortunately when Nigerians as well as other nationals are killed in very dastardly and cruel way in addition to destroying and plundering their means of livelihood of others in the name xenophobic attacks such treatment no doubt amounts to a decimation of an individual's inherent dignity. It is a decimation of fellow humanity driven by the spirit of unrestrained anger.

History is filled with records of men and women who treated innocent individuals with great indignation such as Pharaoh of Egypt who decreed the casting of new born Jewish male children into the river; King Herod who ordered the massacre of male children in Bethlehem who were two years and under and Jezebel the queen who conspired and took over the landed property of Naboth by first stoning him to death.(Exodus 1:22, Math2:16 and 1Kings21:7-16).Those heinous acts promoted by spirits of unrestrained fury. Anger though common to all mankind becomes deadly when it is employed as a tool of wrong, offence, denial or delay. The culture of dehumanizing any human must be condemned by all because of the popular axiom which states that an injury to one is an injury to all. Yet in the midst of the prevailing situation Nigerian and indeed all foreign nationals in South Africa should be discouraged from deploying unbridled anger as a tool of interpersonal, intergroup, interregional or international resolution of conflict to avoid recycling of the age of cannibalism in 21st century which is an ill wind that blows no one any good.

Injustice: According to Nzomiwu (1999) the word injustice is captured clearly by the Igbo word *Nmegbu* which is the opposite word for justice. The word he notes relates to the English word oppression and literally means to deprive one of life or cut some one off. It is an act that attempt at depriving one to share in fullness

of life by treating same as an outsider. Furthermore he posits that the closest equivalent of injustice within the Igbo and indeed African cosmology are cheat, cruelty, persecution and oppression. Injustice in this context is that attitudinal disposition that denies, distorts or destroys mans fullness of life. Xenophobia as a current global threat is one that seeks to minimize or decimate the fullness of life of foreign nationals in South Africa. The latter by promoting the culture of injustice no doubt according to Illogu as cited by Nzomiwu not only deprives an individual of life but also deprives the community and by extension the nation of its dynamism. By implication justice not only promotes wholesome individuals it also fosters great and vibrant nations. The plundering and massacre of fellow Africans by South Africans in the name of xenophobic attacks no doubt is an ill-wind that blows no one any good. The popular axiom which states that he that comes to equity must come with clean hands underscores that South Africans can't expect justice from other nations when they deny others justice. The above submission is corroborated by Enebe (1999:6off) when he posits that conflicts, aggressions, alliances and shift of power positions in both developing and developed nations are no longer confined to issues of local interest. According to him the modern trend in global relations is to foster the development of representative and responsible government which he notes is the basis for evolving an environment that would be driven by peace which would invariably secure sustainable development. In other words he avers that the need to promote justice, peace and development in the world transcends national boundaries, creed, colour or ideology. What this means is that justice must not be left to individual, local, national or regional interpretation if the collective interest of every individual in the global community is to be secured. Justice for one must be justice for all and injustice on one must be injustice for all. This truth is made very pointed in the Christological Teachings when Christ states that whatsoever you do to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters you were doing it to me (Mathew 25:40).

Deception: Moral science demands that those charged with public trust should uphold the truth in their discharge of their responsibility. Xenophobia thrives because people in positions of political leadership cover reality thereby promoting a deceptive environment in the broad daylight where the truth can be raped by individuals who are treated as sacred cows. When leaders who are supposed to hold their citizens who take laws into their hands accountable aid and abet them through their language of silence they invariably provide the fuel that sustains a violent prone nation. This is the underlying fact that made apartheid to thrive for decades in South Africa because the white minority who held sway politically for years choose to keep a blind eye on the truth that apartheid was evil. By deception they pretend that all is well thereby replicating the action of Emperor Nero who went feasting while Rome was burning.

Xenophobia as an instrument of deception drives on the wheel of two ambiguities. According to Daniel & Herbig (1999) they are ambiguity – increasing and ambiguity- decreasing. Deception as an instrument of increasing ambiguity according to them thrives by confusing its target. When foreigners are blamed for the unfortunate incidence of xenophobic attacks unleashed on them it is a ploy to confuse the global community. Furthermore they state that deception as a tool of decreasing ambiguity relates to the use of falsehood to make evil attractive. This is the case when the political leadership in South Africa not only blames the victim of violent and discriminative attacks but also defend her citizens who take laws into their hands to destroy lives and plunder the property and business premises of foreigners by describing their actions as patriotic and nationalistic. Deception is condemned severally in the Holy Book as contained in the following references: It is wickedness (Psalm36:3), It is opposed to God's nature (Psalm 101:7), It is used as a cover-up for hatred (Proverbs26:26), It will attract divine punishment (Zephaniah 1:9) and it is an evil that proceeds from the heart and corrupt the whole humanity (Mark7:22, Romans1:29). From the foregoing Nigerians who have continued to bear the brunt of xenophobic attacks in recent times must condemn in strong terms this ugly trend. Besides, the global community must equally rise up with one voice to condemn the hypocrisy and deception called xenophobia for according to an Igbo adage *Adighi ekpuchi eziokwu nihi na eziokwu ga aputariri ihe* (Truth cannot be covered forever as it will eventually come to lime light).

Cynicism: Another ethical aberration fostering xenophobia in South Africa is that of cynicism. According to Arene (1990) cynic ethic invest some people with the proverbial ostrich head buried in the sand. Like

apartheid behavior xenophobia thrives on the faulty foundation of running others down while sweeping under the carpets its evil nature. By unleashing criticisms and casting aspersion on foreigners those fostering discrimination, and all kinds of violent attacks on foreigners surrounds themselves with 'a holier than thou attitude' as ploy to justify the venting of their beastly passion. Unfortunately Arene posits that such people by their non-chalant and derisive attitude constitute clog in the wheel of national development as they find it difficult to participate in the reformation process that move society forward. What this means is that in spite of the inherent socio-political, economic, cultural, technological disparities and challenges which serves as precursor of all kinds of conflicts among nations and people blame game only compounds it by its aversion to sound morality and good judgment. Put simply, those engaged in the above evil act subscribe to the fallacious argument, others are at default, while they themselves are blameless. In dealing with this unhealthy mentality Christ warned that those who have a penchant for blaming and condemning others must first start from themselves as stated *inter alia:*

And why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not consider the beam that is in your own eye? Or how would say to your brother, let me remove the speck from your eye and behold a beam is in your eye? You hypocrite first remove the beam from your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. (Mathew 7:3-5).

Conclusion

Xenophobia has become a contemporary global challenge threatening the sustainability of democratic government in South Africa. This is made more imperative by the fact that the country has for decades been overrun by apartheid government that made the lives of the black South Africans a hell on earth. Against this backdrop post -apartheid South Africans should have been expected to be an international vanguard of peace, justice and brotherhood having passed through unimaginable oppression for years under wicked and unjust government driven by hate, discrimination, prejudice and injustice. Unfortunately today the increasing rate of xenophobic attacks on Nigerians and other Africans in South Africa leaves much to be desired more so when history has it recorded in gold that Nigerian in particular played an exceptional role in the dismantling of apartheid regime in the country leading to the enthronement of democratic rule. This work however indentified some factors that have continued to fuel the embers of violent conflicts against foreigners in South Africa such as political, economic, identity crisis and illicit drug trade. Furthermore the study discovered that the ethical aberrations driving xenophobic attacks in South Africa include anger, deception, injustice and cynicism. It then proceeded to make the following recommendations as the way forward.

Recommendations

i) Reduction of Graduate Unemployment and Bad Governance: Nigerian government should reduce increasing level of poverty in Nigeria as well as brain drain of young Nigerians graduates migrating to South Africa because of high unemployment rate and lack of social security scheme. This is because the unemployed youths usually fall vulnerable to drug merchants who engage them as sources of cheap labour as they are often desperate to survive by all means. Poverty and unemployment should be reduced in the country by making political office a part time job which should attracts only stipends for sitting allowances as against the present state whereby 90% of the national wealth are used to service salaries and monetary remunerations of political office holders thereby impoverishing the majority of the citizenry.

ii) l-Parental Economic Mentorship: Nigerian parents should provide as well as promote economic mentorship of their children such that before graduation from universities they have enabled them to develop optional sources of economic survival since government paid employment are increasingly becoming out of reach for most Nigerians. This no doubt will help to reduce illegal migrations of our young generation to nations where they are more often than not treated as objects of dehumanizing treatments such as xenophobia.

iii) Promotion of different levels of Dialogue: South Africa and indeed African nations should create adequate windows for dialogue and conflict resolution at interpersonal, intergroup, international levels to

serve as centers for peace making and peace building as well as agent of checkmating the use of self-help in conflict management.

iv) Strengthening of African Union Legal Powers: African Union should be granted adequate legal powers to sanction individuals as well as groups or nations that undermine the fundamental rights of law-abiding nationals of the union.

v) Promotion of Human Right Education: African Nations should promote human right education with view of developing citizens who not only know their rights but are also adequately educated on the need to value and protect the rights of others.

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