

THE DEMOGRAPHIC IMPLICATIONS OF NOMADIC HERDSMEN AND FARMERS CLASHES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Conflicts between farmers and nomadic cattle herders have become a common feature of economic livelihood in West Africa. In recent times, Nigeria has witnessed series of violent clashes arising from the activities of the farmers and nomadic herdsman, who move about on a daily basis with their cattle in search of water and green pastures. The paper examined the demographic implications resulting from nomadic herdsman and farmers clashes in Nigeria. Relevant published texts across the country and the Malthusian theory provided the leverage for the study. It revealed that the Nigeria's population is dynamic and growing at a very rapid rate compared to land that is relatively static which constitutes the most important cause of pressure and demand for food resources. Whenever violent clashes occur, the nomadic herdsman attack and kill scores of villagers in the course of a contest for grazing fields and water, there are usually reprisal attacks. This paper discovered that this scenario has, time without number, thrown up tribal, ethnic, regional, religious and political sentiments that threaten the corporate existence of Nigeria. It is, therefore, recommended that government should ensure that those involved in the allocation of land for farming should imbibe responsibility and not allocate along cattle route or over grazing lands to avoid encroachment by nomadic herdsman. This will enhance productivity and achievement of Sustainable Development Goals 2, and 6, which emphasize the need to adequately achieve food security and sustainable management of resources for the teeming Nigeria population.

Keywords: Demographic implication, Nomadic herdsman, Farmers, Violent clashes, Nigeria

Introduction

Every farming system has a boundary which separates it from the larger system that makes up the environment. Conflicts and violent clashes between farmers and nomadic cattle herders have been a common feature of economic livelihood in West Africa (Tonah, 2006). The boundary represents the limits in the larger system. Farmers regularly compete with nomadic herders for farmland, pastures, water, trees and the use of rangeland in general (Akpaki, 2002). There have been violent clashes between

nomadic herdsmen and farmers in several parts of Nigeria for several years. The clashes are occasioned by the destruction of agricultural farms of the farmers by the cattle of the nomadic herdsmen. The upsurge and incessant resource conflicts witnessed as a result of boundary dispute in the tropics have resulted in loss of lives, properties and environmental degradation as also witnessed in some developed countries (Niemella, Young, Alard, Askasibar, Henle, Johnson, Kutila, Larsson, Matouch, Nowicki, Paiva, Portoghesi, Smulders, Stevenson, Tartes & Watt, 2005). Naturally, nomadic herdsmen by their nature are migrants who leave their traditional abode in search of greener pasture for their flocks. In most cases, their movement is caused by the absence of good and veritable land for their flock to feed on. The environmental degradation is perceived to be contributing enormously to the deterioration in ecosystem services to the environment of various communities. In the recent times, Nigeria has witnessed series of violent communal clashes arising from the activities of the nomadic herdsmen who move about on a daily basis with their cattle in search of water and green pastures. They are on the streets in most of the cities and could also be found operating in the remotest villages in various states of the country. These nomads who are essentially Fulani tribesmen were originally found in small make-shift communities scattered across the northern fringes of Nigeria and other countries in West Africa.

Nzeh, (2015) maintained that in their culture, tradition and occupation, nomadic herdsmen have not remained a migrant race who does not own lands nor have any permanent abode. To him, they cared less about land ownership because they are always on the move. This practice which has been established as a culture by the Nomads had before now been observed with the highest ethical standards whereby the herded animals were prevented from grazing on crops. The fact still remains that these nomadic herdsmen care less about land ownership because they are always on the move. The nomads used to embark on seasonal migrations from the North to the South but this movement has become an all season's affair. The reason has been that over-grazing in the far north has given way to desertification and the normal alternating wet and dry seasons have metamorphosed into some unusual weather conditions now known as climate change. Ofem and Inyang (2014) revealed that a symbiotic relationship existed before now between the nomads and the farmers in every new community they stopped over to take a rest. The residents of host communities usually farmers derived free organic manure from cow dung and protein from the beef and dairy products, while the nomads relied on the farm produce for food.

In Nigeria, most herdsmen do not own land but graze their livestock in host communities (Awogbade, 1987). While a few have adopted the more sedentary type of animal husbandry, the increasing crises between farmers and nomadic herdsmen presupposes that grazing is a major means of animal rearing in Nigeria. The sedentary type of animal husbandry also proves to be more expensive, difficult to manage and inefficient for the rapid growing market of an ever increasing Nigerian population. However, over the years, the presence of the nomads and their cattle has provoked violent clashes in several communities across the country. Apart from the language and

cultural barriers which usually spots out the nomads as strangers, the audacity with which they shepherd their flocks to graze on available vegetation on their route has often attracted protests from the host communities. This scenario has given rise to an unhealthy rivalry between farmers and herdsmen leading to violence, loss of lives and property. In some cases, a good number of community residents, mostly farmers are wiped out and those fortunate to escape have become refugees in other places. Between the year 2000 till date, there have been reported cases of conflicts and confrontation between the nomads and the indigenes of the areas they migrated to with their flocks. The media is also awash with reported cases of clashes between the nomads from the North and the inhabitants of Plateau, Benue, Nassarawa, Kogi, Kastina, Kaduna, Kwara, Edo, Delta, Enugu, Abia, Taraba, Ebonyi, Ondo, Oyo, Osun and many other states. Whenever these clashes occur, the nomadic herdsmen attack and kill scores of villagers in the course of a contest for grazing fields and water, there are usually reprisal attacks. This scenario has, time without number, thrown up tribal, ethnic, regional, religious and political sentiments that threaten the corporate existence of Nigeria.

Some farmers practicing mixed farming revealed that their animals have in one way or another affected other farmers, likewise sedentary pastoralists were in one way or the other affected by farmers (Nformi, Mary-Juliet, Engwali, & Nji, 2014). This shows that the issue of farmer-nomadic herdsmen conflict is more or less shared problem. Therefore, this may not warrant isolation of farmers or pastoralists into ethnic or regional groupings for the sake of levying blames on any as the case may be. Nigeria is experiencing a historic demographic expansion and a spectacular change in food habits. With a population growth nearing 2.8% per year, according to NPC 2006, the country's own domestic production is far from being able to meet demand. Nigeria is however expected to have a population of over 398 million which is more than the population of Pakistan and Brazil in 2050 (PRB, 2016). Nigeria is, therefore, forced to import more than 25% of the beef consumed, and is therefore a major outlet for Sahel livestock, via direct sales or the moving of herds for commercial purposes. At the federal level, livestock operations contribute only about 5% of GDP, whereas agriculture as a whole contributes 35% of GDP as reported by CBN (2013). Following the foregoing discussion, one can see why it is difficult for both the nomads and host communities to co-exist without problems. This is because, as the nomadic herdsmen are busy trying to protect their herds and make livelihood from their sales, the residents of host communities need to protect their farms which these animals upon migration use as grazing land.

In recent times, the issue of violent clashes and instability between farmers and nomadic herdsmen across the regions in Nigeria has become a major focus to the Nigerian Government, International and National or indigenous development organizations. This to a large extent, if not nipped in the bud, may affect the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 2 which aims at ending hunger, achieving food security and improving nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture by 2030. The clashes, instead of abating have been on the increase exponentially to the

dismay of helpless Nigerians. However, in spite of the spate of violent clashes between nomadic herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria, adequate social research attention has not been given to the demographic implications of these clashes considering the tremendous population increase. It is against this background that this study attempts to examine the demographic implications of nomadic herdsmen and farmers clashes in Nigeria.

Methodology

The paper adopted a descriptive analytical method and relied essentially on researches conducted across the country with emphasis on the reported cases of violent clashes between farmers and nomadic herdsmen. Relevant published texts such as articles, books and reports provided the leverage for the study. The materials were assessed with a view to bringing to the fore the demographic implications of incessant violent clashes between nomadic herdsmen and farmers on resources sustainability and its effects on the economic development in Nigeria.

Theoretical Application

The Malthusian Theory on Population

The Malthusian theory predicts that world population would soon exceed the resource base and lead to serious environmental destruction, widespread hunger and violent conflicts. The essential argument presented in his work titled “an essay on the principle of population” Thomas Malthus (1803) maintained that population growth can and will outstrip the food supply. To him, human populations grow exponentially (i.e., doubling with each circle) while food production grows at an arithmetic rate (i.e., by the repeated addition of a uniform increment in each uniform interval of time). Thus, while food output was likely to increase in a series of twenty-five years intervals in the arithmetic progression and so on, population was capable of increasing in the geometric progression and so forth. This scenario of arithmetic food growth with simultaneous geometric human population growth predicted a future when humans would have no resources to survive on. He maintained that problems arising from marriage were likely to be less serious than those caused by a continuation of rapid population increase. The positive checks to population growth are any causes that contributed to the shortening of human lifespan. He included in this category poor living and working conditions which might give rise to low resistance to disease itself, war, and famine. This invariably may result to all unwholesome occupations, severe labour, and exposure to the seasons, extreme poverty, bad nursing of children, great towns, excesses of allkinds, the whole train of common diseases, wars (violent clashes), plagues, and famines.

Like Thomas Malthus, the neo-Malthusian position argued that resource scarcities can cause violent intra-state conflict under unfavourable conditions (Homer-Dixon, 1999 & Kaplan, 1994). He used three hypotheses to link environmental changes with violent conflict. First, he suggested that decreasing supplies of physically controllable environmental resources, such as clean water and good agricultural land,

would provoke conflicts. The second hypothesis stated that large population movements caused by environmental stress would induce "group-identity" conflicts, especially ethnic clashes. The third hypothesis suggested that severe environmental scarcity would simultaneously increase economic deprivation and disrupt key social institutions, which in turn would cause "deprivation" conflicts such as civil strife and insurgency (Homer-Dickson, 1994).

The theory serves as a good explanation for the study of nomadic herdsmen and farmers' clashes in Nigeria. Malthusian theory emphasizes poor living and working conditions of a teeming population which might give rise to low resistance to disease itself, war, and famine. This invariably may result to all unwholesome occupations, severe labour, and exposure to the seasons, extreme poverty, excesses of all kinds of common diseases, wars (violent clashes), plagues, and famines.

Causes and Consequences of Nomadic Herdsmen and Farmers Clashes in Nigeria

The rainy season has been identified as the intense period of clashes between nomadic herdsmen and farmers over arable land. Some researchers have related the causes of conflict to the global climate change and the contending desertification and aridity that has reduced arable and grazing lands, forcing pastoralists to move southwards in search of pasture for their livestock (Okoli, Enyinnia, Elijah & Okoli, 2014; Odoh & Chigozie, 2012; Abbass, 2012). These clashes result from the invasion of the arable land by the cattle during this peak season of crop production (Adekunle & Adisa 2010; Abass 2012). While John (2014) studied the predicaments of the pastoralists and farmers and the true stories behind their conflicts and how these can be resolved, his results show the existence of one-sided reporting by the media, research articles and interested parties. To him, the majority of those reports tend to highlight and report cases in which the pastoralist faulted farmers and tended to ignore the other side of the stories or even their losses. This appears to aggravate the situation and adds to the speculation and allegations of the pastoralists. Nformi et al. (2014) revealed that farmers' encroachment on cattle routes is the real cause of clashes between them and nomads.

Some scholars have identified different factors which include climate changes, the migration further south, the growth of agro-pastoralism, the expansion of farming on pastures, the invasion of farmlands by cattle, assault on non-Fulani women by herders, blockage of stock routes and water points, fresh water scarcity, burning of rangelands, cattle theft, inadequate animal health care and disease control, overgrazing on fallow lands, defecation on streams and roads by cattle, extensive sedentarisation, ineffective coping strategies, ethnic stereotyping, and the breakdown of conflict intervention mechanisms as the root causes of such violence in rural areas (Folami 2009; Ofuoku & Isife 2009; Adekunle & Adisa 2010; Blench 2010; Odoh & Chigozie 2012; Solagberu 2012; Audu 2013, 2014; Bello 2013; McGregor 2014). Corroborating the above reports, Abass (2012) contends that the major source of tensions between pastoralists and farmers is basically economic, with land related issues accounting for the majority of the conflicts. This can then be situated within the broader context of the political economy of land struggle, traceable to a burgeoning demography in which

there is fierce competition for fixed space to meet the demands of the growing population (Olabode & Ajibade 2010; Solagberu 2012).

Haman (2002) revealed that the nomadic herdsmen or grazers suffer from material damages when the crop farmers inflict physical injuries on the cattle by using cutlasses, spears or guns or by poisoning the cattle. In a related development, Ngoufo (1992) observed that open confrontation results in rural insecurity and out migration. To him, in the event of a conflict, properties and lives are destroyed leading to misery and hardship. The socio-economic consequences of agro-pastoral conflicts at the social level, lead to misunderstanding between the crop farmers and nomadic farmers or grazers, create some mistrust, tension and open confrontations between the opposing groups. A good example could be drawn from the 2016 invasion of Uzo Uwani community in Enugu State by herdsmen who slaughtered over 40 persons and destroyed properties. Reports showed that economic activities in Ukpabi, Nimbo were shut down even as officials of the West African Examination Council (WAEC) involved in the conduct of examinations in Ukpabi Secondary School abandoned their duty post. The traditional ruler, Ukpabi, Nimbo, Igwe John Akor, in his report regretted that his subjects had in the past two years, been under constant siege unleashed by the herdsmen who raped, maimed, killed inhabitants and destroyed farmland and livestock (Ebonugwo, 2016).

It has been established from communities' reports around the country including Edo and Delta States that besides the destruction of crops by the cattle, the herdsmen have been found to be involved in crimes like murder, rape and stealing which has resulted in clashes between them and the host communities. It is reported that Ologbo community in the Ikpoba Okha Local Government Area of Edo State protested what they called the barbaric and inhuman behaviours of the herdsmen who they accused of destroying their crops and threatening the peace of the community (Hameed, 2014). The attacks by Fulani herdsmen have in recent years taken many dimensions with the use of new and sophisticated types of weapons and communication devices such as AK 47 rifles. In consequence, the sedentary agrarian communities have resorted to self defence through local vigilante groups (Abass 2012; Mcgregor 2014). This has further aggravated violence, with destruction of lives and properties (Fasona & Omojola, 2005). Conflicts resulting from cattle grazing actually accounted for 35% of all reported crises between 1991 and 2005 in Nigeria (Adekunle & Adisa 2010). Another study revealed ethnic conflict and integration as problems of inter-ethnic relation facing the grazers and their host crop farmers (Pelican, 2000). Stories of the nefarious activities of these herdsmen reverberate across the country and they have constituted themselves into a great threat to national food security by their brazen and deliberate destruction of crop resulting in avoidable crises and bloodletting. Crops farmers across the country are increasingly becoming apprehensive over the negative attitude of the nomadic herdsmen who unleash their herds on crops, destroying them to points of no redemption. As a result, farmers of cassava, rice, maize, guinea corn and groundnuts now incur extra cost to put hedges around their farms to fend off the marauding cattle

whose owners have grown most insensitive to the plights of the average farmer (Hameed, 2014).

Recent Nomadic Herdsmen and Farmers Clashes in Nigeria as Compiled by Some National Dailies' News Headlines

The attacks of nomadic herdsmen are on the increase. While many have divergent opinions on the causes of clashes between them and farmers, it has been reported that the Fulanis under the Cattle Breeders Association claim that they are being attacked by gangs from farming communities who steal their cattle and they are just defending themselves. According to the 2015 Global Terrorism Index, these Fulani militants are the fourth deadliest militant group in the world with a record killing of about 1229 people in 2014. Recently, the country recorded series of clashes between herdsmen and farmers resulting to loss of lives and properties. Some of the clashes in Nigeria as compiled by online and national dailies' news headlines are as follows:

- **February 2016:** A clash between herdsmen and farmers in Benue State, 40 more people were killed, about 2,000 displaced and not less than 100 were seriously injured (Duru, 2016).
- **March 2016:** About 500 people were killed by rampaging herdsmen following a siege on Agatu Local Government Area of Benue State. The communities affected include Aila, Akwu, Adagbo, Okokolo, Ugboju, Odugbeho, Obagaji and Egba (Premium Times, March 12, 2016).
- **April 2016:** Fulani herdsmen attacked two villages and killed 15 people in Gashaka Local Government Area of Taraba State (April 13, 2016, Punch).
- **April 2016:** Fulani armed men attacked farmers in some communities in Lagelu Local Council Area at night, killed a guard and carted away valuables worth millions of Naira (April 26, 2016, Thisday).
- **April 2016:** Fulani herdsmen attacked seven villages and killed about 40 persons in Nimbo in Uzo-Uwani Local Government Area of Enugu State (April 26, 2016, Vanguard).
- **June 2016:** A 46 year old renowned farmer was shot by gunmen suspected to be Fulani herdsmen in Ossissa community in Ndokwa East Local Government Area of Delta State (June 18, 2016, Punch). Also, about 59 persons were reported to have been killed following recent attacks on Benue communities such as Ugondo, Turan and Gabo Nenzen in the Logo Local Government Area of the state by suspected herdsmen (June 20, 2016, Punch).
- **August 2016:** Herdsmen reportedly numbering over 50, armed with machetes disrupted the peace of Ndiagu community of Attakwu, Akegbe-Ugwu in Nkanu-West Local Government Area of Enugu State. A Catholic Seminarian Lazarus Nwafor & severely injured four members of the Ogbodo Nwarum family (September 4, 2016, The Sun).
- **October 2016:** Armed Fulani herdsmen opened fire on villagers who attempted to stop their cattle from grazing their farmlands in Umuekune village of Irete

community in Owerri West Local Government Area of Imo State. Several people were wounded in the ensuing stampede with two of the injured on danger list (June 5, 2016, New Telegraph).

- **January 2017:** A fresh crisis between Fulani herdsmen and Idoma farmers at Okpokwu Local Government in Benue State. Left not less than five people dead and several others injured (January 24, 2017, Nigeria Newspapers). Also, Fulani herdsmen attacked Rafin Gona and Gbagyi villages in Bosso Local Government Area of Niger State. At least 6,000 persons displaced and nine people killed including a police Inspector and an Assistant Superintendent Officer of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (January 16, 2017, Daily Nigeria News).

The Demographic Implications of Nomadic Herdsmen and Farmers Violent Clashes

Every man needs food for his sustenance and so do animals. This is why nations across the globe strive to invest in food production through expansive cropping and animal husbandry to achieve food sufficiency for its citizens and for export particularly in areas where they have surplus and comparative advantage. There is no doubt that the variety of food crops cultivable in Nigeria has been what has made the country less dependent on importation of most of its staple food items except rice which local production has not been able to match with local demands due to the high consumption rate of the staple food by local consumers. Some researchers have linked the issue of food crisis to the theory of eco-violence, where environmental factors and exploitation of scarce resources lead to conflict and violence. This may explain the dwindling grazing resources (land, pasture etc.) and poor management of existing grazing reserves as culpable (Okoli & Atelhe, 2014; Adisa, 2012). The nomadic herdsmen crisis remains a major issue in Nigeria. So far, thousands have been killed and many more have been expelled from their homes.

The world's population is growing at a very rapid rate and will lead to a growth in the demand for food. This would constitute the single most important cause of pressure on food resources. Therefore, for Nigeria to transform as one of the 20 leading economies in the world by 2020, considering the present population of over 170 million and estimated population of about 397 million at the current rate of growth in 2050, an agricultural revolution should be the catalyst to its industrialization. It is no longer news that the Nigerian population is dynamic and ever increasing compared to land that is relatively static. Nigeria's population, currently the seventh largest in the world, is growing rapidly. The population growth rate of Nigeria per year is 3.2% (National Population Commission, 2012). Therefore, more and more people will continue to compete over land. Over the last generation, most of the increment in food supply has been obtained by an expansion in irrigation farming (Duda, 2012). The level of intolerance among the nomadic herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria has deteriorated to unimaginable level of arms struggle resulting in countless deaths among villagers with the attendant reduction in the population of the peasant farmers. Hence, it is important

to note that these violent clashes have direct impact on the lives and livelihoods of those involved and lead to the displacement of economic productive population of the community. In most cases, these incessant violent clashes lead to reduction in output and income of crop farmers as a result of the destruction of crops by cattle. Most farmers have been forced to flee their farms for fear of being killed by well-armed herdsmen and loss of part or the whole of their crops which translated into low income on the part of the farmers who take farming as a major occupation. This tends to negatively affect their savings, credit repayment ability, as well the food security and economic welfare of urban dwellers that depend on these farmers for food supply. Hence, discourages the farmers and stifles rural/agricultural development.

Mercy Corps 2013 and 2016, a global humanitarian organisation funded by the British Department for International Development (BDID), on the causes and effects of perennial clashes between herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria, revealed that the incessant attacks have drastic effects on food security and caused a loss of \$14 billion in three years. Apart from thwarting the country's economic development to an enormous extent, other economic impacts of these clashes include impeding trade practices, reducing in crop yield, displacement of farmers, loss of lives and properties, loss of products in storage and destruction of public and private buildings. It become glaring that if nothing is done to arrest this ugly situation, the achievement of food security and sustainable development becomes a mirage.

The herdsmen and farmers clashes disrupt and threaten the sustainability of pastoral farming and crop production in West Africa (Moritz, 2010). These clashes reinforce circles of extreme poverty and hunger, and destroy social status, food security and affect mostly the most marginalised groups that include women and children of a teeming population like Nigeria. In the host communities, nomadic herdsmen relocate as a result of conflict and host farmers, especially women and children, who remain behind, stop going to the distant farms for fear of attack by the nomads in the bush. Such displaced farmers have become a source of liability to other farmers whom they have to beg for food for themselves and their families. This has created a vicious cycle of poverty in such communities and affected the education of children leading to obstacles in their development and mass displacement.

A lot of killing by the nomads and reprisal killing of nomads by the host communities take place during the conflicts. Herds of cattle belonging to the nomads are also killed. Also some of the victims (young and old) are badly injured or maimed. This has reduced some women farmers to the status of widows. All these have drastically reduced agricultural labour force in such areas which pose huge challenges for the constant growing Nigerian population. During these clashes, there are reported cases of proliferation of small arms and ammunitions since the host farming communities and the herdsmen saw each other as archenemies. This is inimical to the spirit of integration of Nigerian tribes or ethnic groups and peaceful co-existence. There is no doubt that the displacement of some of these economic productive people from their various host farming communities by the nomadic herdsmen would impede the efforts of the international best practices which obviously correspond with the

achievement of Sustainable Development Goals 2, and 6, which emphasize the need to adequately achieve food security and sustainable management of resources for the teaming Nigeria population.

Conclusion

This paper has situated and analysed the demographic implications resulting from various violent clashes between nomadic herdsmen and farmers in Nigeria and observed that their relationship in the previous years have been cordial and symbiotic. This possibly led to mutual respect and cross cultural relationships among the nomadic herdsmen and the crop farmers. Surprisingly, in recent years this somewhat mutual and complementary relationship between the nomadic herdsmen and their host communities is shrinking and being replaced by conflicts and open hostilities. Many farmers have been forced to flee their farms for fear of being killed by well-armed herdsmen and loss of part or the whole of their crops which translate into low income on the part of the farmers who take farming as a major occupation. Also, the failure of the government in mediating such conflicts and setting up judicial commissions cannot be underestimated because it pushes communities to take the law into their own hands. There is no doubt that conflicts between the two parties if constructively resolved by the government could ensure peaceful coexistence and interdependence. This is with respect to a more direct impact on food security by conflicts between the farmers and nomadic herdsmen.

Recommendations

It becomes imperative from the findings of this study that in a bid to forestall frequent cases of conflicts between farmers and herdsmen, state governments should designate some areas as grazing fields for the nomadic herdsmen and warn that any crime involving a Fulani herdsman would attract severe penalties including the banishment of the culprit from the state. However, there is the need to establish grazing routes and reserves across the 36 states. Communities in conflict and those on the verge of conflict may be given this opportunity to come to a negotiation table where government representatives and NGOs may participate and mediate such meetings. More so, considering the growth rate of the country's population, a symbiotic relationship between farmers and nomadic herdsmen should be enhanced through processes of exchange.

Government should ensure that those involved in the allocation of land for farming should imbibe responsibility and not allocate along cattle route or over grazing lands to avoid encroachment by nomadic herdsmen. Support for agricultural development through incentives will facilitate availability of food for the teaming Nigeria population. More so, considering the frantic interest of the present government towards making agriculture an alternative source of revenue following the crash in oil price, it becomes imperative for people in different aspects of agriculture and other trades alike to simultaneously and mutually articulate their trades for enhanced productivity and achievement of Sustainable Development.

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