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# The Effect of Political Repression on Collective Violence

Ashutosh Tripathi

*LL.M Student at Chanakya National Law University*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The impact of political repression on instances of collective violence in regions like Africa, Russia, and Myanmar is a complex and significant area of study that examines how repressive measures taken by governments can contribute to the emergence and escalation of collective violence within these regions<sup>1</sup>. This phenomenon underscores the intricate interplay between political, social, and economic factors that can give rise to violent responses from marginalized or dissenting groups.

In Africa, political repression can manifest through authoritarian regimes, lack of political freedoms, and human rights abuses<sup>2</sup>. These conditions often lead to frustration and discontent among the population, potentially resulting in collective violence such as protests, riots, or even insurgencies. Repression may stifle legitimate avenues for dissent, compelling aggrieved groups to resort to violent means to make their grievances heard.

In Russia, historical and contemporary instances of political repression have contributed to cycles of violence<sup>3</sup>. Suppression of political opposition, limitations on free speech, and crackdowns on civil society can create an environment of frustration and alienation. This can foster radicalization and mobilization among various segments of society, which might eventually culminate in acts of terrorism, insurgency, or other forms of collective violence.

Myanmar has experienced cycles of political repression and violence due to the military's longstanding grip on power. The marginalization of ethnic and religious minorities, such as the Rohingya, has led to conflicts and violence in various parts of the country. Political repression here often exacerbates existing ethnic tensions, leading to violent clashes between communities and the state, as well as inter-communal violence. In all these cases, political repression can create a volatile environment where nonviolent avenues for expressing dissent or seeking change are limited. Repression can foster grievances, radicalize marginalized groups, and erode trust in government institutions<sup>4</sup>. As a result, instances of collective violence, ranging from protests and demonstrations to armed conflicts and terrorism, become more likely. Understanding the link between political repression and collective violence in these regions requires analyzing a range of factors, including historical context, socio-economic disparities, ethnic and religious dynamics, and the role of external actors. This complex interplay underscores the importance of addressing political repression as part of broader efforts to promote stability, human rights, and effective governance in these regions.

In regions like Africa, Russia, and Myanmar, political repression has been known to contribute to instances of collective violence in several ways<sup>5</sup>:

- 1) *Escalation of Grievances*: Repressive measures can exacerbate existing grievances within marginalized groups, such as ethnic or religious minorities, who feel disproportionately targeted. These grievances can manifest in various forms of collective violence, including protests, riots, and even armed insurgencies.
- 2) *Erosion of Trust*: By limiting freedom of expression and suppressing opposition, repressive regimes erode public trust in the government's ability to address societal issues. This erosion of trust can lead to a breakdown in social cohesion and an increased likelihood of violent unrest.
- 3) *Creation of Power Vacuums*: In cases where political repression successfully silences moderate voices and institutions, it can create a power vacuum that extremist elements exploit. Radicalized groups may use violence as a means to challenge the oppressive regime and seize control, leading to further instability.

<sup>1</sup> Shkolnik, Michael, "Repression or Reward: Assessing the Impact of Israeli Counterinsurgency Measures on Diverse Perpetrators of Palestinian Militancy" (2021) 35(4) *Terrorism and Political Violence* 866. (published)

<sup>2</sup> Sika, Nadine, "Mobilization, Repression and Policy Concessions in Authoritarian Regimes: The Cases of Egypt and Jordan" [2023] *Political Studies* 003232172211414. (published)

<sup>3</sup> Campion, Kristy, "Defining Ecofascism: Historical Foundations and Contemporary Interpretations in the Extreme Right" (2021) 35(4) *Terrorism and Political Violence* 926.

- 4) *International Isolation*: Widespread political repression can lead to international condemnation and sanctions, isolating the government from diplomatic and economic support. This isolation can further destabilize a region and contribute to violence as the regime seeks to deflect attention from its repressive actions.
- 5) *Spread of Discontent*: Instances of political repression in one region can serve as inspiration or solidarity triggers for similar movements elsewhere. Information sharing and transnational connections can amplify the spread of discontent and collective violence.
- 6) *Cycles of Violence*: Repressive measures can result in a vicious cycle of violence, where the government responds with force to suppress dissent, leading to escalated resistance and further repression. This cycle can perpetuate itself and contribute to prolonged periods of unrest.

Addressing the impact of political repression on collective violence requires a comprehensive approach that involves respect for human rights, promotion of dialogue, and efforts to address underlying social, economic, and political grievances. International diplomatic pressure, sanctions, and support for civil society organizations can also play a role in mitigating the cycle of repression and violence.

## II. RESEARCH QUESTION

- 1) How does the level of political repression influence the frequency and intensity of collective violence in African countries?
- 2) To what extent does political repression contribute to the escalation of collective violence in Myanmar?
- 3) What are the common patterns and variations in the relationship between political repression and instances of collective violence in Russia?

## III. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review delves into the complex relationship between political repression and collective violence, utilizing theoretical frameworks and case studies to shed light on their interconnected dynamics.

### A. Theoretical Frameworks and Concepts

In order to comprehend the nuanced relationship between political repression and collective violence, it is essential to establish a foundation in key concepts. Political repression involves various strategies such as censorship, surveillance, imprisonment, and forced disappearances, which are wielded as tools to consolidate power and stifle dissent. On the other hand, collective violence represents a distinct form of conflict, differing from individual acts of violence or conventional warfare. Scholars have employed theoretical frameworks rooted in social movements, terrorism, gender studies, and ethnic violence to analyze how political repression acts as a catalyst for collective violence.

### B. Political Repression and its Mechanisms

A comprehensive examination of political repression reveals its multifaceted nature. From the suppression of free speech to coercive measures that discourage opposition, various mechanisms are employed to maintain political dominance. This systematic repression often results in the escalation of collective violence, as marginalized groups find themselves with limited avenues for expression. By understanding the mechanisms of political repression, we can discern how these actions contribute to the eruption of collective violence.

### C. Collective Violence

Collective violence stands apart from other forms of conflict due to its collective nature, involving groups rather than isolated individuals. The triggers for collective violence are diverse, encompassing economic disparities, ethnic tensions, and political grievances. By identifying these factors, we gain insight into the root causes that propel communities toward violent actions.

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<sup>4</sup> Shor, Ira, "Can Critical Teaching Foster Activism in This Time of Repression?" (2019) 113 *Radical Teacher* 66, (published)

<sup>5</sup> esenyő, János, "The Africa Policy of Russia" (2019) 31(1) *Terrorism and Political Violence* 132.

#### D. Case Studies: Africa, Russia, and Myanmar

Examining case studies from Africa, Russia, and Myanmar unveils the intricate connections between political repression and collective violence in diverse regions. In Africa, the legacy of colonialism and post-colonial repression intertwines with contemporary conflicts. Russia's history of authoritarianism influences its present-day landscape, offering comparative insights into the impact of repression. Myanmar's complex ethnic composition and historical dynamics highlight the entanglement of political repression and violence. Analyzing these cases elucidates the ways in which political repression exacerbates collective violence, leading to a deeper understanding of regional dynamics. Here is some Authors and Contributions:

- 1) *Sidney Tarrow*<sup>6</sup>: Tarrow's research into social movements and contentious politics provides crucial insights into how political repression can trigger collective violence. His work illuminates the conditions under which protest movements escalate into violence due to repression.
- 2) *Martha Crenshaw*<sup>7</sup>: Crenshaw's exploration of terrorism and political violence is pertinent for examining how political repression contributes to radicalization and extremist ideologies. Her work unveils the intricate relationship between repression and the emergence of violent groups.

#### IV. AIMS AND OBJECTIVE

- 1) Examine the relationship between political repression and the occurrence of collective violence in African nations, Russia, and Myanmar.
- 2) Analyze historical and contemporary cases of political repression and their potential influence on sparking or intensifying collective violence.
- 3) Identify patterns and trends in the escalation of collective violence in the context of repressive political regimes.

#### A. Hypothesis

When a government employs repressive measures to stifle dissent and suppress political opposition, it is more likely to lead to an escalation of collective violence within the society.

#### V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A thorough and comparative methodology is used in the study on the effects of political repression on instances of collective violence in places like Africa, Russia and Myanmar in order to understand the complex connection between repressive political environments and emergence of collective violence.

#### A. Historical Analysis of Repressive Law

Repressive laws have a long history and have been employed by various societies and governments to control and suppress dissent, maintain power, and enforce social norms. This historical analysis will explore the evolution of repressive laws across different time periods and regions. A repressive law is a law that is designed to suppress or control certain activities or beliefs. Repressive laws can be found in all societies, but they are often used more extensively in authoritarian or totalitarian regimes.

There are many different types of repressive laws, but some of the most common include:

- 1) Laws that restrict freedom of speech, assembly, or association
- 2) Laws that criminalize dissent or opposition to the government
- 3) Laws that discriminate against certain groups of people, such as religious minorities or ethnic groups
- 4) Laws that give the government broad powers to detain or imprison people without due process of law

Repressive laws can have a significant impact on a society. They can stifle dissent, silence opposition, and promote fear and intimidation. In some cases, they can even lead to violence and repression.

The historical analysis of repressive laws is a complex and challenging task. However, it is important to understand the history of these laws in order to combat them effectively.

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<sup>6</sup> Colmard, Thierry, "Charles Tilly, Sidney Tarrow, Politique(s) Du Conflit, de La Grève à La Révolution." [2015] Lectures (published)

<sup>7</sup> Young, Joseph K, "The Consequences of Counterterrorism. Edited by Martha Crenshaw. (Russell Sage Foundation, 2010.)" (2012) 74(2) The Journal of Politics E13, (published)

Here are some examples of repressive laws from different historical periods:

- 1) The British Raj in India passed a number of repressive laws in the 19th and early 20th centuries, including the Indian Penal Code, which criminalized sedition and other forms of political dissent.
- 2) The Jim Crow laws in the United States were a series of repressive laws that enforced racial segregation in the South from the late 19th century to the mid-20th century.
- 3) The apartheid laws in South Africa were a system of institutionalized racial segregation that was enforced from 1948 to 1994.
- 4) The Chinese government has passed a number of repressive laws in recent years, including the National Security Law, which criminalizes subversion, secession, terrorism, and collusion with foreign forces.

These are just a few examples of the many repressive laws that have been enacted throughout history. The study of these laws can help us to understand the dynamics of repression and to develop strategies for combating it.

In addition to the laws mentioned above, there are many other examples of repressive laws that have been used to suppress dissent and control populations. These laws have been used by governments around the world, and they have had a devastating impact on the lives of millions of people.

The study of repressive laws is an important part of understanding the history of human rights and the struggle for freedom<sup>8</sup>. By understanding how these laws have been used in the past, we can better protect ourselves from their use in the future.

- a) *The Purpose of Repressive Laws:* Repressive laws are often enacted by governments to suppress dissent, silence opposition, and maintain control over the population. They can also be used to discriminate against certain groups of people, such as religious minorities or ethnic groups.
- b) *The Impact of Repressive Laws:* Repressive laws can have a significant impact on a society. They can stifle dissent, silence opposition, and promote fear and intimidation. In some cases, they can even lead to violence and repression.
- c) *The Challenges of Studying Repressive Laws:* The study of repressive laws can be a challenging task. This is because repressive laws are often designed to be vague and open to interpretation. This can make it difficult to determine whether or not a particular law is being used in a repressive way.
- d) *The Importance of Studying Repressive Laws:* Despite the challenges, it is important to study repressive laws. This is because understanding how these laws have been used in the past can help us to better protect ourselves from their use in the future.

Here are some specific examples of how repressive laws have been used in the past:

The British Raj in India passed a number of repressive laws in the 19th and early 20th centuries, including the Indian Penal Code, which criminalized sedition and other forms of political dissent. These laws were used to suppress the Indian independence movement and to maintain British rule in India.

- The Jim Crow laws in the United States were a series of repressive laws that enforced racial segregation in the South from the late 19th century to the mid-20th century. These laws prohibited African Americans from using the same public facilities as white people, and they also denied them the right to vote and hold public office.
- The apartheid laws in South Africa were a system of institutionalized racial segregation that was enforced from 1948 to 1994. These laws classified people according to their race, and they gave white people superior rights to black people.
- The Chinese government has passed a number of repressive laws in recent years, including the National Security Law, which criminalizes subversion, secession, terrorism, and collusion with foreign forces. This law has been used to silence dissent and to crack down on the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong.

These are just a few examples of how repressive laws have been used in the past.

## VI. HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF REPRESSIVE MEASURES

This chapter delves into the historical context of political repression in Africa, Russia, and Myanmar. It examines key events, policies, and state apparatuses that have contributed to the suppression of dissent and the curbing of political freedoms.

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<sup>8</sup> Terrorism and human rights: Indian experience with repressive laws by G. Haragopala, Economic and political weekly, vol 44, no 28

By understanding the evolution of repression, the chapter sets the stage for assessing its impact on collective violence.

Analyzing repressive measures in different countries, such as Africa, Myanmar, and Russia, involves understanding the historical context, legal frameworks, and tactics employed by governments to suppress dissent and maintain control. Here's a historical analysis of repressive measures in these regions:

#### A. Africa

Many African countries inherited repressive laws and institutions from their colonial past. Colonial powers often used authoritarian tactics to exploit resources and control local populations. Several African nations faced political repression after gaining independence. Some leaders, including Mobutu Sese Seko in Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo), employed authoritarian measures to consolidate power. One-Party State, In the post-independence era, some countries adopted one-party systems, where the ruling party exercised tight control over politics, media, and civil society. For example, Ethiopia under the Derg regime and Tanzania under Julius Nyerere. Military Rule: - Military coups and juntas in Africa often resulted in repressive regimes. Egypt's Hosni Mubarak, for instance, ruled under a state of emergency for nearly 30 years. Civil Conflicts: - Armed conflicts in countries like Sudan and South Sudan have led to severe human rights abuses, including displacement, violence against civilians, and restrictions on humanitarian aid. Contemporary Repression - Several African nations, including Zimbabwe and Eritrea, continue to face allegations of political repression, censorship, and human rights violations.

#### B. Myanmar (Burma)

Myanmar was a British colony until 1948, during which time colonial authorities employed repressive measures to control the local population. After independence, Myanmar experienced prolonged military rule characterized by authoritarian measures, including censorship, arbitrary detention, and suppression of ethnic minorities. The 1988 pro-democracy uprising led to a violent crackdown by the military junta. Thousands were killed, and the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) took control. In 2011, Myanmar began transitioning to civilian rule. However, elements of repression, particularly against ethnic minorities, persisted. The Rohingya crisis, starting in 2017, involved a brutal military crackdown on the Rohingya Muslim minority, resulting in widespread displacement and allegations of ethnic cleansing<sup>9</sup>.

#### C. Russia

Imperial Russia, The Historical Russian rulers, including the Romanovs, used repression to maintain control over a vast empire. After that the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin witnessed extreme repression, including mass purges, forced labor camps (Gulags), and censorship of dissenting voices.

Post-Soviet Russia saw periods of relative liberalization, but under Vladimir Putin's leadership, the government increased control over media, restricted political opposition, and passed laws to limit civil society activities. Opposition figures like Alexei Navalny have faced legal harassment, imprisonment, and alleged poisoning, highlighting the government's intolerance of political opposition. Suppression of Minorities, And the repression has also been directed at ethnic and religious minorities, such as the LGBT community and Jehovah's Witnesses.

In each of these regions, historical and contemporary repressive measures have been used to maintain political control, suppress dissent, and curtail civil liberties. Understanding these measures is crucial for addressing human rights concerns and promoting democracy and social justice.

### VII. INSTANCES OF COLLECTIVE VIOLENCE

Focusing on case studies from Africa, Russia, and Myanmar<sup>10</sup>, this chapter provides in-depth analyses of specific instances of collective violence. It examines factors such as ethnic tensions, economic disparities, and political grievances that have triggered violent outbreaks. The chapter also explores how state repression may have acted as a catalyst for these events.

Instances of collective violence can take various forms, from protests and demonstrations to armed conflicts and mass atrocities. Here are examples of collective violence in Africa, Russia, and Myanmar:

<sup>9</sup> MYANMAR IN TRANSITION: Ethnic Conflicts, External Interests and Political Changes Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (2014)

<sup>10</sup> The Geography of repression in Africa by Darin Christensen, 2018 vol. 62(7), 1517-1543, journal of conflict resolution.

#### A. Africa

- 1) *Rwandan Genocide (1994)*: The Rwandan Genocide<sup>11</sup> involved a mass slaughter of the Tutsi ethnic minority by the majority Hutu population. Over the course of approximately 100 days, an estimated 800,000 people were killed in a wave of violence, making it one of the most brutal genocides in history.
- 2) *Darfur Conflict (Sudan, ongoing)*: The Darfur conflict in Sudan began in the early 2000s when rebel groups from marginalized communities in Darfur took up arms against the Sudanese government. The conflict resulted in widespread violence, displacement, and allegations of genocide, with hundreds of thousands of people killed.
- 3) *Boko Haram Insurgency (Nigeria and neighboring countries, ongoing)*: The extremist group Boko Haram has been responsible for a series of violent attacks, suicide bombings, and kidnappings in Nigeria and neighboring countries. Thousands of people have been killed, and millions have been displaced.

#### B. Russia

- 1) *Chechen Wars (1994-2009)*: The two Chechen Wars were brutal conflicts between Russian federal forces and Chechen separatist rebels. These wars resulted in significant civilian casualties, displacement, and allegations of human rights abuses by both sides<sup>12</sup>.
- 2) *Annexation of Crimea (2014)*: Russia's annexation of Crimea from Ukraine led to protests, violence, and the ongoing conflict in Eastern Ukraine. The annexation itself was characterized by a controversial referendum and a swift military takeover.
- 3) *North Caucasus Insurgency (ongoing)*: The North Caucasus region of Russia has experienced ongoing insurgent violence, including bombings and attacks by various Islamist extremist groups, particularly in Chechnya and Dagestan.

#### C. Myanmar (Burma)

- 1) *Rohingya Crisis*<sup>13</sup> (ongoing): Myanmar's military crackdown on the Rohingya Muslim minority in Rakhine State has resulted in widespread violence, displacement, and allegations of ethnic cleansing. Thousands have been killed, and hundreds of thousands have fled to neighboring Bangladesh.
- 2) *Kachin Conflict (ongoing)*: The Kachin conflict in Myanmar's northern Kachin State has persisted for decades. It involves clashes between the Myanmar military and the Kachin Independence Army, leading to displacement and civilian casualties.
- 3) *Protests and Crackdown (2021)*: Following the military coup in Myanmar in February 2021, the country experienced widespread protests against the coup and military rule. The military's response has included violent crackdowns on protesters, resulting in deaths and injuries.

Collective violence in these regions reflects complex historical, political, and social dynamics. It often involves multiple parties, including government forces, rebel groups, and marginalized communities, and can have far-reaching humanitarian consequences, including loss of life, displacement, and the violation of human rights. Efforts to address and prevent collective violence require a comprehensive understanding of the underlying causes and careful consideration of political and diplomatic solutions.

### VIII. CONSEQUENCES AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

The final chapter synthesizes the findings from the previous chapters and discusses the consequences of political repression on the regions studied.

It assesses the long-term effects on political stability, social cohesion, and human rights. Additionally, the chapter explores potential pathways for mitigating violence through policy changes, international cooperation, and civil society engagement.

Political repression can have significant and far-reaching consequences for a society's political, social, and economic development. These consequences can impact the future stability and well-being of a nation. Resolving political repression requires a multifaceted approach that addresses the root causes and promotes a transition to more open and democratic governance. Here are the consequences of political repression and strategies to resolve it:

<sup>11</sup> Explaining the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Jun., 1999, Vol. 37, No. 2<sup>12</sup> Russia's Asymmetric Wars in Chechnya since 1994, Martin Malek, *Connections*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (Fall 2009), pp. 81-98

<sup>13</sup> Rohingya Crisis and Western Myanmar's Evolving Threat Landscape, by Iftekharul Bashar, *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, Vol. 11, No. 6 (June 2019), pp. 14-18

Resolving political repression is a complex and multifaceted challenge that requires a comprehensive approach involving various stakeholders, including governments, civil society, international organizations, and the international community. Here are detailed strategies to address and resolve political repression:

- 1) *Dialogue and Negotiation*: Engage in structured dialogues and negotiations between the government and opposition groups to address underlying grievances and reach political agreements. These discussions should be inclusive and involve a wide range of stakeholders.
- 2) *Legal Reforms*: Revise or repeal repressive laws, regulations, and constitutional provisions that enable political repression. Ensure that the legal framework upholds international human rights standards, including the right to free expression, assembly, and association.
- 3) *Transitional Justice*: Establish mechanisms for truth and reconciliation processes to address past human rights abuses and provide a platform for victims to share their experiences. Pursue accountability for those responsible for serious violations through independent and impartial judicial processes.
- 4) *Civil Society Empowerment*: Support and protect civil society organizations, human rights defenders, and journalists. These actors play a critical role in promoting open discourse, monitoring government actions, and advocating for human rights.
- 5) *International Diplomacy*: Engage international actors, such as regional organizations and the United Nations, to mediate conflicts and apply diplomatic pressure on repressive governments. Diplomatic efforts should focus on promoting dialogue, reconciliation, and respect for human rights.
- 6) *Elections and Democratic Governance*: Ensure the holding of free and fair elections that reflect the will of the people. Establish democratic institutions, including independent electoral commissions, an impartial judiciary, and transparent governance structures that respect the rule of law.
- 7) *Security Sector Reform*: Reform security forces to ensure they uphold human rights, act impartially, and serve the interests of the nation rather than those of a ruling elite. Training and oversight mechanisms can help in this process.
- 8) *Education and Awareness*: Promote civic education and media literacy to empower citizens to engage in informed political discourse. An informed and engaged citizenry is essential for upholding democratic values and human rights.
- 9) *Economic Development*: Implement policies that promote economic growth and development, as poverty and economic disparities can be sources of political discontent. Addressing socio-economic grievances can contribute to political stability.
- 10) *International Solidarity*: Encourage international cooperation and support for countries undergoing transitions from repression to democracy. International actors can provide technical assistance, financial aid, and capacity-building to strengthen democratic institutions.
- 11) *Sanctions and Incentives*: Consider targeted sanctions, such as asset freezes and travel bans, against individuals responsible for human rights abuses. Conversely, offer incentives, such as the normalization of diplomatic relations or economic assistance, in exchange for concrete reforms.
- 12) *Grassroots Mobilization*: Encourage grassroots mobilization and nonviolent resistance movements. These movements can help raise awareness, build momentum for change, and put pressure on repressive regimes through peaceful means.
- 13) *International Monitoring*: Facilitate international monitoring of human rights and political developments in repressive countries. Independent organizations and diplomatic missions can play a crucial role in documenting violations and holding governments accountable.

It's important to note that resolving political repression is a complex and often long-term process. It requires commitment from both domestic and international actors and a recognition of the underlying social and political dynamics at play. The transition to more open and democratic governance may face challenges and setbacks, but sustained efforts toward reform and accountability can pave the way for a more just and stable future.

## IX. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the intricate relationship between political repression and instances of collective violence in regions like Africa, Russia, and Myanmar is a complex and multi-faceted issue. It is evident that political repression can play a significant role in fueling or exacerbating collective violence. Repressive measures such as censorship, arbitrary arrests, and crackdowns on dissent can foster grievances and a sense of injustice among marginalized populations, potentially pushing them towards violent forms of protest or resistance. Moreover, the suppression of legitimate avenues for political expression often leaves communities with limited options, driving them to resort to violent means as a last resort to make their voices heard. However, it is important to note that while political repression can be a contributing factor, it is rarely the sole cause of collective violence.





Socioeconomic disparities, historical tensions, ethnic and religious divisions, and other underlying factors also play crucial roles. To address this issue, a comprehensive approach is necessary, focusing on promoting inclusive governance, human rights, and addressing structural inequalities. Only through a combination of efforts can the cycle of political repression and collective violence be effectively broken, fostering greater stability, peace, and equitable development in these regions.

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