



Multiple Marginalization and Gender-Based Violence in Post-Conflict Settings: The Experiences of IDPs in Zamboanga City

Diana Therese M. Veloso*

De La Salle University
diana.veloso@dlsu.edu.ph

Abstract: This paper examines the heightened risk for gender-based violence among racial and ethnic minorities in post-conflict settings, using the situation of internally displaced people (IDPs) in Zamboanga City as a case in point. The researcher examines the dynamics of violence from a gendered perspective and illuminates cultural trends that reinforce and shape the experience of gender-based violence. Drawing upon interviews and focus group discussions with IDPs and duty-bearers, the researcher discusses the nuances in women's and men's experiences of private and community and/or state-sponsored violence as IDPs from predominantly minority groups. The researcher exposes the numerous incidences of lawlessness and violence affecting IDPs in Zamboanga, especially during the early months following the September 2013 siege perpetrated by a faction of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), the vulnerability of women and girls to intimate partner violence, prostitution, sexual harassment, and trafficking, and the covert attempts to recruit young men into extremist groups. This paper also highlights women's continued vulnerability to domestic violence and other forms of abuse after their relocation to transitory sites or (in limited cases) permanent shelters, and the vulnerability of youth to bullying and victimization due to their ethnic identity. The researcher also highlights the link between racial, ethnic, gender, and social class inequality in the Philippines and the continued vulnerability of IDPs due to their dismal living conditions after the siege, and their neglect due to limited interventions by government authorities. This paper highlights the intersections between private and public forms of gender-based violence in the experiences of IDPs belonging to minority groups, and the local and international responses to their situation.

Key Words: gender-based violence; internally displaced people; minorities; Zamboanga Siege

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Zamboanga Siege: An Overview

On September 9, 2013, fighting broke out in Zamboanga City and continued for nearly three weeks. The Zamboanga Siege, as the standoff came to be known, was perpetrated by a faction of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), which had been at the forefront of the national separatist movement among Muslims in the Philippines in the 1970s, but signed a peace agreement with the government in 1996 and thus settled for autonomy (Abinales, 2008; Abinales & Amoroso, 2005; McKenna, 1998). Civilians and media practitioners have identified two overarching motives behind the siege. Firstly, the siege was attributed to the refusal of Zamboanga City Mayor Maria Isabelle "Beng" Climaco to allow the MNLF faction to raise its flag on its founding anniversary, on the grounds that such an act



was unconstitutional. Secondly, the siege was framed as a response to the exclusion of the MNLF in the peace process—and by implication, the negotiation of the expansion of the autonomous region for Muslims in Mindanao—between the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), another armed separatist group that broke off from the MNLF in 1978 and became the largest Islamic separatist group in the country, but subsequently signed a peace agreement with the government in 2013.

The armed conflict led to a major humanitarian crisis in Zamboanga City. About 194 civilians were taken as human shields by the MNLF; most of them subsequently escaped or were rescued. A total of 32 people (9 civilians, 5 police officers, 18 soldiers) were killed, and 238 people (57 civilians, 167 soldiers, and 14 police officers) were injured (Sinapit, 2013). The residents of affected conflict-ridden *barangays* (villages)—most of whom were low-income, informal settlers belonging to racial and ethnic minority groups—were forced to leave their homes to avoid being caught in the crossfire. As the fighting continued between the rebels and the military for the next three weeks, the homes of the residents in several coastal *barangays* that had been taken over and turned into rebel strongholds were burned to the ground or heavily damaged by the fighting; at least 10,000 houses in coastal villages in Zamboanga City were burned or destroyed. To this day, both camps point fingers at each other in terms of identifying the culprit. Some point to the rebels as the culprit, while others claimed that the military was responsible for burning civilians' homes, in which the rebels were suspected to be in hiding. Also, an estimated 118,000 people were displaced and endured substandard living conditions while residing for prolonged periods in makeshift tents and bunkhouses in the Joaquin F. Enriquez (JFE) Sports Complex, more popularly known as the Grandstand, or right outside the facility, along Cawa-Cawa Boulevard (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [OCHA], 2014). The last group of IDPs who resided at Cawa-Cawa Boulevard left in November 2014, while the last group of IDPs living in the Grandstand left in July 2015. Needless to say, the extent of gender-based violence, as well as other forms of lawlessness, became rampant during this period, especially when there were more residents at the Grandstand.

This paper presents the preliminary research findings on trends in gender-based violence among people displaced by the Zamboanga siege, including those who once lived in the Grandstand or along Cawa-Cawa Boulevard and those who have since relocated to transitory sites or other temporary shelters or in very limited cases, permanent housing. While gender-based violence cuts across different social backgrounds, one's race and ethnicity, religion, social class, and age, among other interconnected social locating factors, inform the norms and behaviors that circumscribe people's lives, as well as the specific forms of victimization and violence that they experience. The experiences of IDPs in Zamboanga City, who come from predominantly racial and ethnic minority communities, have received little attention in research and public debates on gender-based violence and the specific experiences of racial and ethnic minority groups in the Philippines. This paper intends to raise awareness about their situation.

1.2 Research Questions

This paper seeks to answer the following questions:

- 1) How has the risk of gender-based violence increased among internally displaced people (IDPs) in Zamboanga City in the aftermath of the 2013 siege?
- 2) How do IDPs frame gender-based violence?
- 3) What are the specific forms of gender-based violence and security risks affecting IDPs in Zamboanga City?
 - a) How does gender interact with other social locating factors, particularly race, ethnicity, and social class, in influencing IDPs' experiences of gender-based violence and other human rights issues?

1.2.1 Definition of Terms

To contextualize the subsequent discussion, it is necessary to define certain terms that will be used throughout this paper. Gender is defined as the social and cultural construction of behaviors, roles, identities, and statuses associated with masculinity and femininity (Lorber, 2005; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Meanwhile, violence is understood to mean physical, written, or verbal actions that inflict, threaten, or cause injury that may be physical, psychological, material, or social in nature (Jackman, 2002; World Health Organization [WHO], 2006; WHO, 2010).



Gender-based violence (GBV) pertains to harmful act/s directed against individuals or groups on the basis of their gender (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR], 2014). Social locating factors refer to social positions, such as race, ethnicity, social class, and gender, that influence people's opportunities and challenges (Hill Collins, 1990; hooks, 2000). The interconnections between these social locating factors is known as intersectionality (Disch, 2009). This paper examines how intersectionality in terms of the social locating factors of IDPs informs the nuances in their specific experiences of and vulnerability to gender-based violence.

2. METHODOLOGY

The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with 33 women IDPs who were survivors of gender-based violence. Of this, 10 women were living at the Grandstand at the time of the interviews. Meanwhile, 19 women were residing at government-funded transitory sites and three women in faith-based temporary shelters. Only one woman was living in a permanent residence, specifically government-funded housing (for informal settlers displaced by a fire in 2006), at the time of the research.

The researcher also conducted focus group discussions (FGDs) with IDPs residing at the Grandstand and at government-funded transitory sites. Separate FGDs were conducted with mothers and fathers and male and female youth, be it at the Grandstand or at the transitory sites. A total of 120 parents (including 40 parents who were then living at the Grandstand and 80 parents at four g transitory sites) and 104 youth (including 29 youth at the Grandstand and 75 youth at four transitory sites), participated in the FGDs.

In addition, the researcher engaged in field observation and informal interviews with duty-bearers (e.g. facilitators at Women Friendly Space [WFS] and Peacekeepers/Camp Managers) at the Grandstand and various transitory sites and other temporary shelters in Zamboanga City.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

All the participants in interviews with survivors of gender-based violence are female. Their racial and ethnic profile indicates that they come from predominantly racial and ethnic minority communities (see Table 1—Racial and ethnic background of survivors of gender-based violence). The majority (21) of these women belong to Muslim or Islamized ethnolinguistic tribes, such as the Tausug (12 women); Sama-Badjao¹ (8 women); and Sama-Bangingi (1 woman) were Muslims, belonging to the Tausug, Sama-Badjao, and Sama-Bangingi. Eight women claimed to be of mixed racial or ethnolinguistic descent; of this, six women traced their roots to both Muslim (e.g. Sama-Badjao, Sama-Bangingi, and Tausug) and Christian (e.g. Ilocano, Bisaya) ethnolinguistic groups or Chinese ancestry, while one woman identified with two Muslim or Islamized ethnolinguistic tribes (e.g. Sama-Badjao and Tausug), and one woman identified with two Christian ethnolinguistic groups (e.g. Chavacano and Bisaya). The remainder identified as Christians of Visayan descent (3 women) and Waray descent (1 woman); that said, the latter also claimed to be *balik-Islam* (convert or "revert" to Islam, in Muslim parlance). In any case, all the women IDPs who were survivors of gender-based violence belong to racial or ethnolinguistic minority groups.

1 During fieldwork, the researcher found that the Sama-Badjao respondents identified as "Islam" (referring to the religion they practiced), but not "Muslim" because of the differential meanings and groups (e.g. the Tausug, Sama-Bangingi) they associated with Muslim identity and culture. To reflect their views accurately, the researcher has opted to use the term "Islamized tribes."

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Racial or Ethnolinguistic Group	Number
<i>Muslim or Islamized ethnolinguistic group</i>	21
Sama-Badjao	8
Sama Bangingi	1
Tausug	12
<i>Christian* ethnolinguistic group</i>	4
Visayan	3
Waray (but <i>balik-Islam</i> [convert or “revert” to Islam])	1
<i>More than one racial or ethnolinguistic group</i>	6
Chavacano/Zamboangueno and Visayan	1
Chinese and Sama-Bangingi	1
Ilocano and Sama-Badjao	1
Sama-Badjao and Tausug	2
Tausug and Visayan	1
Total	33

Table 1. Racial and ethnic background of survivors of gender-based violence

In terms of age, the women’s ages ranged from 18 to 48 years old; the median age was 29 years old. All but one of the respondents were mothers and/or mothers-to-be; indeed, three were pregnant at the time of the interviews). The women had anywhere between 1 child to 10 children; the average number of children was 3. The lone single woman without a child disclosed that she was the breadwinner of her family.

The women IDPs who were survivors of gender-based violence had limited educational attainment (see Table 2—Educational attainment of survivors of gender-based violence). The majority (9 women) completed some years of elementary school. This was followed closely by women who completed some years of high school (8 women) and some years of college or vocational training, specifically in midwifery (5 women). A smaller proportion of the women finished elementary school (3 women), high school (4 women), and a vocational course in midwifery (2 women). Also, a small proportion (2 women) were unable to study. These women, as well as one respondent who had a Grade 3 education, disclosed that they were illiterate (total of 3 illiterate respondents). It can be inferred that their limited education impacts their socio-economic class status by limiting their employment or livelihood prospects and opportunities, and by extension, the resources available to their children (if any) and their families. Their displacement further compounds their poverty and material hardship.

Educational Attainment	Number
None	2
Some elementary school	9
Elementary school graduate	3
Some high school	8
High school graduate	4
Some college/ vocational training (midwifery)	5
Graduate of vocational course (midwifery)	2
Total	33
<i>Illiterate respondents</i>	3
No education completed	2
Grade 3 education	1

Table 2. Educational attainment of survivors of gender-based violence



The social background of the FGD participants reflects similar trends. The parents and youth who participated in the FGDs likewise belonged predominantly to Muslim or Islamized tribes, particularly the Tausug and Sama-Badjao, and came from low-income or working-class communities. For the few parent-respondents who belonged to Christianized ethnolinguistic groups, they were either married to Muslims or had converted (reverted) to Islam themselves. In terms of educational level, the educational attainment of the respondents was limited and some participants (e.g. middle-aged or older women of Sama-Badjao and Tausug descent and middle-aged men and male youth of Sama-Badjao descent) admitted that they were illiterate.

It can be inferred that these trends in the racial, ethnic, educational, and social class background of the respondents affects their vulnerability to gender-based violence, particularly as IDPs in (post) conflict settings and informs their awareness and understanding of any resources and support systems that they could access.

3.2 The Gendered Continuum of Violence among IDPs

The situation of IDPs in Zamboanga City confirms that gender-based violence exists on a continuum from personal violence to community-based and/or state-sponsored violence during war and conflict. Racial and ethnic minorities, especially those from low-income or working class communities and those displaced by armed conflict, are especially vulnerable to gender-based violence and have limited support systems and safety nets to rely on. True to form, there were numerous incidences of both private and public acts of violence experienced by IDPs during their displacement and prolonged stay at evacuation centers, compounded by their limited resources and their experience of neglect at the hands of the authorities. The respondents' narratives illustrated common themes in IDPs' experiences of gender-based violence. At the same time, intersectionality in terms of the links between their gender and other social locating factors, such as their race, ethnicity, social class, and age, was apparent in their experience of gender-based violence.

Private Violence. In terms of violence in the private sphere, domestic violence or intimate partner violence was very common among the women IDPs who identified as survivors of gender-based violence. At least 22 out of 33 women survivors of gender-based violence disclosed their experiences of abuse by their current and/or former husbands. Also, seven women experienced various forms of abuse carried out by both their current and former husbands, including physical abuse, marital rape, drug use, infidelity, and desertion. For many of these women, their current or estranged spouses became (more) violent after the siege.

Other forms of private violence were apparent in the accounts of IDPs who identified as survivors of gender-based violence. For instance, one woman experienced physical and verbal abuse at the hands of her drug-addicted brother, while another woman lost her husband to *rido* (clan war). In addition, five women experienced violence carried out by multiple perpetrators in their immediate and/or extended family. One woman claimed that both her husband and her son, both addicted to drugs, hit her. Another woman claimed that her husband and his cousin both abused her. Another claimed that her husband and her mother-in-law abused her. One woman claimed that the perpetrators were her mother, her husband, her uncle, and her cousins. For two women, the perpetrators were their in-laws in general.

Family structures reflect gender expectations in specific cultures, which are shaped by social forces, such as sexism, racism, poverty, and homophobia (Disch, 2009; Radford & Stanko, 1996). Violence is thus a means to maintain power and oppression—a dynamic that cultures reinforce and some respondents internalize accordingly. For example, a mother in her late 30s, of Sama-Badjao and Ilocano descent, contrasted the “Christian” and “Badjao” women’s expected response to marital rape: “*Sa inyong mga Christian, pwede kayong tumanggi. Sa aming mga Badjao, hindi pwede* (for you Christians, you can say no. For us Badjao, we can’t.” In a similar vein, a half-Visayan, half-Tausug mother, also in her late 30s, downplayed her experience of abuse at the hands of her second husband, who used drugs: “Many times *na akong sinaktan ng asawa ko. Kahit bago pa mag-giyera. Magsisinungaling ako kung sabihin kong isa o dalawang beses lang. Pero ‘yung...sampal na dala ng pagmamahal. Hindi ‘yung malakas ba* (My husband has hit me many times. Even before the siege. I’d be lying if I said it was just once or twice. But it’s the kind of slapping that’s done out of love. Not too strong, you know.”



Indeed, the women's accounts of survivors of private violence reflect the entrenchment of norms in Muslim culture, extending to the practices of the Tausug, the Sama-Badjao, and Sama-Bangingi communities, and Philippine culture in general. These norms altogether reinforce female submissiveness and male dominance, deference to one's parents and other authority figures, the status that comes with being married, especially to prominent individuals or clans, and the stigma of a "broken family" or of rebelling against family members, thus leading to the respondents' vulnerability to domestic violence or other forms of family violence.

Community Violence. The community is also a site for numerous forms of violence, such as those in public and/or shared spaces, including those in conflict zones (Aulette & Wittner, 2011; Giles & Hyndman, eds., 2004; Johnson, 2009). The experiences of IDPs reflected this trend. The IDPs who participated in FGDs confirmed the prevalence of both child and adult prostitution—in exchange for basic needs, such as canned goods, coffee, or food packs—and marital rape right after the siege. Outside the Grandstand, where the majority of Sama-Badjao IDPs resided due to their marginalization by Tausug IDPs, children were extremely vulnerable to "hit-and-run" incidents, involving motorists who tended to look down on Muslims, particularly the Badjao. Multiple forms of gendered violence also persisted at the Grandstand. For instance, women and girls experienced voyeurism, sexual harassment, and rape in public toilets, catcalling, physical abuse by fellow IDPs, who also happened to be female (e.g. in lining up for provisions such as water and food packs), prostitution and other daily forms of degradation, such as taking a bath in full view of neighbors. Young girls, if they were single, were also vulnerable to forced marriage after acts of voyeurism, on the pretext of saving face, dubbed a norm in Muslim culture "to restore dignity."

Meanwhile, men were vulnerable to being recruited into extremist groups under false pretenses, such as being sent to Sulu to claim relief goods supposedly sent from Brunei. Moreover, male teenagers were vulnerable to bullying, organ trafficking, and sexual harassment by gay men. Multiple marginalization also made some IDPs vulnerable to gender-based violence. For instance, Peacekeepers, WFS facilitators, and residents alike cited the gang rape of a speech-impaired gay man in his early 20s in a public toilet at the Grandstand; while the duty-bearers framed the incident as an act of violence compounded by the young man's vulnerability on account of his disability and sexual orientation, some Tausug teenage girls laughed while recounting the incident—particularly how he was sodomized with a bottle. In addition, some gay Tausug teenagers, who recognized their marginalization on account of their sexual orientation, tended to be dismissive of the plight of the survivor of gang rape and laughed off the victim's inability to identify the perpetrator: "He pointed to all the good-looking guys at the Grandstand. That was it."

Even after their relocation to transitory sites, IDPs remained vulnerable to gender-based violence at the community level. For women and girls, the risk of sexual harassment and rape persisted in transitory sites or at the outskirts of these communities. Teenage girls also faced the risk of bullying in school and by outsiders after a controversial report surfaced about high school-age girls consenting to "*Tira bente* (sex for 20 pesos)" at a transitory site for IDPs. Meanwhile, men encountered the risk of bullying (*kursunada*) by outsiders, involvement in street fights, and victimization via petty crime. Female and male youth also reported their experiences of victimization by rival ethnic groups. As they continue to live in transitory sites, youth remain vulnerable to racially-motivated bullying and, in the case of young men, victimization via street or petty crime. For example, the Sama-Badjao constantly reported being bullied by Tausug schoolmates, who challenged them to fights outside school despite—and perhaps because of—the emphasis of Sama-Badjao culture on pacifism, non-confrontation, and non-violence. Some Badjao teenage girls, during the FGD, disclosed their experiences of racialized bullying by Tausug students in school—and internalized this: "*Sinasabi nila mababa kami kasi* Badjao. Totoo naman (They say we're low-ranking because we're Badjao. It's true anyway.)" The other FGDs revealed how young male Sama-Badjao IDPs were likewise vulnerable to muggings and *kursunada* perpetrated by Tausug residents at the outskirts of transitory sites.

State-Sponsored Violence. The state is culpable of sponsoring and condoning gendered violence both within and outside its borders, during periods of civilian unrest and armed conflict (Enloe, 2000; Human Rights Watch, 2007; UNIFEM, 2007). The experiences of IDPs reflect this trend. For instance, one woman survivor of gender-based violence also disclosed that she lost her first husband during the armed conflict between the MNLF and the Marcos administration in the 1970s. Also, three women were used as human shields by the MNLF during the siege. Two of these women, who happen to be sisters, disclosed that they and/or their children got shot. One woman lost her son. The other claimed that the bullet nicked her; her son was treated, but her daughter still has a bullet that is



lodged in her body. None of the women received assistance from the government, as they opted to rent a room instead of evacuating to the Grandstand, and subsequently moved to a faith-based temporary housing community.

Intersectionality in Experiences of Gender-Based Violence. The narratives of IDPs show the links between racial, ethnic, gender, and social class inequality in the Philippines and how these intersecting inequalities shape their vulnerability to gender-based violence. The central role of poverty and material hardship in minority communities, compounded by displacement, was evident in the accounts of gender-based violence among IDPs. Poverty, for instance, was a cause of fights leading to domestic violence, which intensified after the siege, in many cases, and was often cited as a barrier to leaving abusive husbands. Racial and ethnic discrimination also influenced how people chose to respond or remain passive in the face of gender-based violence. Intersectionality was apparent in IDPs' experiences of gender-based violence: impact of multiple oppressions due to their gender (as women/men), race/ethnicity (as Muslims, of Tausug and Sama-Badjao descent), social class (low-income or working class and mostly informal settlers), and age (young, middle-aged, or older). Their status as displaced people only compounded their vulnerability and reinforced their limited resources and support systems in the face of gender-based violence.

At the same time, a form of collective violence against IDPs lies in their dismal living conditions that reinforce their vulnerability to victimization, their struggles for dignity and subsistence to this day, the absence of normalization in their lives more than three years after the siege, and neglect in the provision of decent housing and other basic needs due to limited interventions by government authorities (*InterAksyon*, 2016).

3.3 Discussion

The literature illustrates that gender-based violence exists on a continuum from personal violence between intimate partners, acquaintances, and strangers to community-based and/or state-sponsored violence during war and conflict (Aulette & Wittner, 2011; Kelly, 1988, cited in Radford & Stanko, 1996; Lorber, 2005; United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), 2003). Gendered violence encompasses, but is not limited to: 1) physical, sexual, and psychological violence within the family, including battering, marital rape, sexual abuse of children in the household, harmful traditional practices, and violence related to exploitation; 2) physical, sexual, and psychological violence in the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, intimidation at work, in educational institutions and so forth, trafficking in women, and forced prostitution; and 3) physical, sexual, and psychological violence perpetuated or condoned by the state, wherever it occurs (UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, cited in UNIFEM, 2003).

Private and public acts of violence are interconnected. For instance, the violence confronting women in conflict zones is an extension of the violence in their daily lives (Caiazza, 2004; Marshall, 2006; UNIFEM, 2003; UNIFEM, 2007a; UNIFEM, 2007b; UNIFEM, 2007c; Wali, Gould, & Fitzgerald, 1999). Gender-based violence is intertwined with the culture of violence used to maintain systems of oppression in different societies (Disch, ed., 2011; Kelly, 1996; Steinem, 2004). Gender privilege is ingrained in the operations of society, such that the organization of society and its institutions reflects and perpetuates "power over" another. Sexual violence serves as a tool for male dominance and female subordination (J. Radford & Stanko, 1996; Kelly, 1996; Rothenberg, ed., 2006; Sheffield, 2004; UNIFEM, 2003; WHO, 2006).

At the same time, gender hierarchies intersect with other markers of difference, such as race and ethnicity, social class, sexuality, age, dis/ability, religion, and nationality (Davis, 1983; Davis, 1984; hooks, 2000; Lerner, 1986; Radford & Stanko, 1996; Rothenberg, ed., 2006). People's position in the matrix of domination and privilege affects their experiences of violence and victimization and the responses of the police, the state, professionals, and the voluntary sector (Barbee & Little, 1993; Collins, 2000; Disch, ed., 2011; Green, 1999; Hester, Kelly, & Radford, eds., 1996; Richie, 1996; UNIFEM, 2003). Aside from gender dynamics that underscore female subordination, male dominance, and the pressure to maintain a "complete" family against all odds, other social locating factors of IDPs, such as their social class, compounded by their displacement, their racial and ethnic identity as people from Muslim



or Islamized ethnolinguistic groups, predominantly of Tausug, Sama-Badjao, and Sama-Bangingi descent at that, and their status as a minority group in a predominantly Christian developing nation, shape the specific forms of gender-based violence that they experience. Cultural norms, such as passivity and fatalism in times of crisis, the internalized belief in gender and racial/ethnic inequality, shape the responses of IDPs to gender-based violence.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Gender-based violence exists on a continuum from private to public violence at the community and state levels. The violence that people confront in their private lives is a reflection of the pervasiveness of violence in society in general, be it in the community or at the state level. The experiences of IDPs in Zamboanga City reflect this trend, given their multiple experiences of violence in both the private and public spheres. At the same time, the interconnections between gender and other social locating factors, such as race and ethnicity, social class, age, and the like, shape the experience of gender-based violence. Indeed, for IDPs, intersectionality, or their multiple, intersecting social locating factors, shapes their specific experiences of gender-based violence after the siege and in the transitory sites or other temporary housing areas in which they reside. Cultural norms influence how people frame their experiences of gender-based violence and how they respond accordingly. These dynamics would be helpful to explore in further research.

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