
LEADERSHIP AND POVERTY REDUCTION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Leadership in all facets and in every strata, supposed not to exhibit odium of unpopular policies that tantamount to the creation of massive numbers of disgruntled followers. Leadership by example, to the followers, is like a reflection from a wall mirror. The wall mirror will always reflect the reality of what obtains. What manner of leadership given to the masses or followers is what reflect on their attitude or response to the leaders within a given leadership space. Every leader that aspires to remain relevant, popular and acceptable within his or her leadership space, is always abreast with the psychology of his followers, and will thus consider the welfare of his followers as Paramount. In view of that, Good leader is one who is able to conquer and acquire the territory of his followers' loyalty. A good leader can only be sustained in power by the loyalty of his followers. Leaders enjoy unflinching loyalty too from the followers when the followers feel secured, and have their basic needs met. In that regard, friendly policies like the creation of job opportunities, provision of efficient security, efficient health care services, well-funded educational system, provision of good drinking water, regular power supply and some other basic amenities, are some of the basic contemporary needs of the people of which when provided could sustain cordial leadership and follower's relationship more so in a developing Country like Nigeria. In effect, this article has taken a critical survey on the challenges facing leadership in Nigeria, more so, since independence. The research has also taken perescopial studies on the activities of the 'usurper leaders' and 'arrangee followers', an emerging political concept that has marred political development in Nigeria. This is in an attempt to unravel the consequences of that on Nigerian Socio-Economic and Political development. By considering

where the Nation is coming from, where it has gotten now and what the future portends, the research has exposed the danger of leadership imposition in Nigerian politics, and what it portend to Nation building and poverty eradication as well. Having considered various variables too, the research has made some useful prescriptions on the need to evolve a political culture that will create a lasting and sustainable good leadership, supported with good followers in Nigeria. This, it is believed, is achievable by sustaining moral levity interwoven in Political culture of the people, as such will minimize corruption and enhance Socio- Economic and Political integration in a plural society.

Keywords: Political Cabal, Election Rigging, Praise Singers, Tribal Politics and Leadership imposition

INTRODUCTION

From the context of the research, focus has been trained more on Political leadership, and leadership impact on the well-being of the masses. Meanwhile, Anthony Nwabughuogu has defined leadership as involves knowing the way, showing the way and going the way. In that respect, a leader must be one who understand what it means to lead. He or she must possess the charismatic and clear focus on what it takes to lead, and how to remain resolute in sustaining good leadership that will endear him to the people. In Nigeria, leadership in this contemporary political milieu, and challenges emanating thereof, have been traced to poor political orientation, with its genesis traced to the foundation of the Colonial role. While Colonization cannot be entirely adduced to have nurtured the seed of leadership crises in Nigeria, it cannot however, be entirely exonerated. Africa in general and Nigeria in particular, groups had evolved leadership institution that suited the moieties that constitute the union of Nigeria, prior to the coming of the Europeans. Such even received commendation from the early Europeans Colonists.

For instance, it is noted that in Northern Nigeria, the British Colonial administrators arrived they were amazed by the quality of indigenous Political institution they met to a point of integrated same into her Colonial administration, instead of outright imposition of her own system of government. On the account of the flawless indigenous political system, the British eventually adjusted its framework to suit the policy of the indirect rule system of government that was later introduced in Nigeria.

However, the Colonialists ignorance of the place of moral ethics, and the strength of the sacred nature of the indigenous political institutions, undermined their sense of judgment, when they under rated the consequences, by creating political offices, they created rooms for corrupt political institution that would later cripple the traditional political system.

This lack of the understanding spread to impact the economic life of the indigenous people, when the indigenous procedure of generating revenue was eventually affected too, by the colonial administrators. In that regard, poor understanding of the indigenous economic and political culture were the major disconnect that would breed corruption when men of dubious character were appointed leaders in the new political dispensation by the colonial government.

Meanwhile, the euphoria the British exhibited on finding a better-defined political administration found in the Northern Nigeria beclouded their sense of judgment to appreciate the fact or noticing the aberration of understanding the disparity in the indigenous politics of most southern Nigerian groups. By imposing the policy of indirect rule to segmentary societies of the Southern Nigeria, the seed of autocratic Politics was planted in the Nigeria. This also heralded the chapter of political rancor that would undermine the indigenous political system afterward. The collision that emerged between the politically more centralized North, and the segmentary south prior to Nigerian independence has continued to hunt post-independence Nigeria as ethnic and religious politics have continued to play out.

The colonial policy of divide and rule which became inherent during the colonial rule has succeeded in planting the seed of political discord among the groups whose Political loyalty has remained ethnic in colour. The consequence of that, is the present difficulty of Nigeria to produce a true National leader years after independence. Political Leadership in Nigeria has continued to emerge by hook and crook because regional and ethnic interest has been placed above National interest. The danger posed by this attitude since independence, is that leaders have emerged without clear focus on National development. This lack of focus on germane national policy thrust is responsible for increasing rate of poverty in Nigeria.

This paper which is on ‘Leadership and Poverty reduction’ is therefore a research work that has examined how the imposition of strange political system in Nigeria, has affected not only the quality of political leadership but the one with clear ideology on how to revamp her economy and reposition the Nation for greatness.

PRE-COLONIAL CLASSES OF LEADERSHIP IDEOLOGY IN NIGERIA.

In Pre-Colonial era, environment played a very important role in leadership election or selection, likewise the tradition and culture of the people. Okon Uya in his submission about the Political Structure of Pre-Colonial Nigeria stated thus ‘each Nigeria group had to elaborate its own Political/Social Institutions that could enable it cope with its social, geographical and political environment. Apart from hereditary nature of leadership position in Pre-Colonial Nigeria, Pre-Colonial Nigeria also placed premium on morally induced status. In otherworld, status be it Economic or Social was remarkable virtue for the conferment of leadership Position. Leaders, who emerged through such, must have performed or accomplished remarkable feat to justify the elevation. Such is however, notable mostly in the segmentary societies. During the Pre-Colonial era to the Africa, precisely “from the eight century AD Onwards, there flourished in the Western and Central Sudan a succession of States and Empires, the last of which only came to an end with the colonial occupation of Nigeria”³ These states mostly have leaders whose enthronements were determined through Military Conquest or by peoples traditional procedure for selection. Leadership during those days were therefore handled by men of war, who strived by booties or men with versatile knowledge of their peoples culture and tradition. In Other instance, some leaders in those years emerged from Military prowess. Leaders whose exploit had contributed to sustain relative political stability to the point of prompting years of peaceful transition of power from father to son leadership .Again in those days, in order to enhance the leadership structure, political offices were created because there was in existence specific offices culturally reserved for specific people.

Pre-Colonial leaders in Nigeria were therefore men who through the knowledge of people’s culture, and the tradition have risen to even bequeath honour of leadership on inheritance to some people, as king makers. Such men have equally placed high integrity upon the

distinguished citizens who could be appointed into leadership position. For instance, apart from the titled men who gained recognition through personal achievements, the political leaders have extended leadership status on prominent individuals for their contributions to the general welfare of their people. The preoccupation and focus of such leaders being honoured were on how to sustain and defend the path of honour already attained. Traditional leadership institution in Pre-Colonial Nigeria was such that it was a taboo for the leadership to exploit the commoners since they have earned the symbol of honour through trust and dedication to the welfare of the people, which must be maintained at all time. People looked up to them as mentors whose live styles should be worthy of emulation.

In that respect, the Political ideology of Pre-Colonial Nigeria was such that, the leaders were aware of peoples need and expectation. As a result, the leaders were usually prepared for the offices and assignments naturally and meritoriously allocated to them. The impact of this on poverty reduction was conspicuous. Firstly, the followers always have responsibilities assigned to them. Such responsibilities culturally, have attached to them certain remunerations which often times were in kind. In Pre-Colonial Nigeria social structure played remarkable rules in poverty reduction. Certain groups were culturally recognized as the Okpu-Uzo, (Blacksmiths), Ndi-Dibia (Native Medical Practitioner), Ndi-Agha (Warriors), Ndi-Ahia (Traders), Ndi-Aja (The Priests), Ndi-Ibu (Head Porters) Ndi-Odebe Iwu (Law enforcers) etc, all had trainees attached to their offices. The creation of these offices with certain remunerations and dignity attached to them was to enhance dignity of labor and also aimed at providing sources of livelihood to the indigenous people. It also created political cohesion and thus entrenched stability.

Unrestricted inter-group trade relationship was also one of the major aspects of Economic empowerment of the native people. It was through the inter-group trade that cultural exchange was promoted and harmonious relationship that would promote economic development encouraged. Again such cultural exchange promoted peace and stability which prompted prolongs Economic and Political growth. In Crowder's submission, 'Benin and Oyo both looked to the interior for their trade. The Creeks of the Atlantic littoral had been inhabited only by a few small fishing communities. Contact with the outside World was across the great Sahara desert'. Such inter-group trade has even extended to involve groups far away from the immediate trade zone. This too, was made possible due to Political stability encouraged by the indigenous leaders.

Trade organization which was responsible for poverty reduction was supported by the bountiful farm articles from active farmers who engaged over 80% of native employment. In that respect Farm work and trade formed the key sectors that provided work for the natives during the Pre-Colonial era.

Social structure and status equally influenced farm supply. Among the Igbo people of Nigeria, Yam title 'Ogbuji' elicited the interest farmers into aggressive yam farming since every able male indigenes noticed it as an important medium to assume honorable status in the society, they therefore saw it as a life time task that must be accomplished.

Apart from the yam, farmers also produced spices, pepper, leather materials high in demand articles that were exported across the Sahara desert before the colonial era. Hunting also provided job opportunities for the Ivory and hide hunters from Elephants and Buffalos were also in great demand likewise, the Blacksmiths who fashioned farm tools and hunting materials. The Pre-Colonial Economic structure was positioned in such a way as to

accommodate every able body individual to a vocation. Except during famine and any other natural disaster unemployment rate during Pre-Colonial Nigeria was very low.

POLITICAL IDEOLOGICAL AND STRUCTURE OF NIGERIA DURING THE COLONIAL ERA.

The coming of the European not only altered the Political equation in Nigeria, but also economic status of the indigenous people of Nigeria. Again it should be noted; Colonialism not only usurps the indigenous Economy, but permanently and effectively tied it to the Economic apron of the metro pole. This of course would mark the beginning of economic decline and increasing rate of unemployed people. In addition, this had far reaching effect on the social and political expression of the people whose socio-political and economic views are now colored to reflect the expectations of the colonists. In fact, when the Europeans concluded the balkanization of African Continent after the Berlin Conference, midwife by the German leader, Otto Von Bismarck in 1884-1885, the focus of the explorers moved from the 'journey of discovery to the usurpation of the indigenous Economic and Political system.

The usurpation of indigenous Political system became apparent when the Colonists realized that for them to gain strong footing, Economic supervision should also come under their control as well. The aspiration toward the actualization of the two policies became the key ideology of the Colonial Administrators. The quest to hijack the indigenous political institution became apparent when the Europeans began to coerce the Traditional rulers into signing repressive treaties. In other words, the subsequent 'introduction of Colonialism in its predatory, exploitative, brutal and repressive forms, introduced new elements into the system which were bound to have a fundamental effect on the policy and which unfortunately has remained with us until today'. Although the period of British formal Colonization of Nigeria was relatively short, occurring from the last quarter of the nineteenth century and lasting till 1960, the eventful contact with the colonial administrators however left an indelible mark on its indigenous Political system vice versa the Economic system. The European interference and alteration of indigenous Political equation in Nigeria began when the coastal region of Nigeria became a trade hub for the European Merchants who converged to promote trade. With time the Southern regions of Nigeria, especially the Yoruba, Edo, Niger-Delta, Igbo, and Efik/Ibibio transformed into frontiers of opportunities and drawing of population. The effect of the above development was the emergence of new Political unit, the house leadership that came to collaborate with the British Economic interest. The House leaders were the key recipients and distributors of the British substandard goods delivered to ridicule the natives who have come to cherish such goods far above the indigenous products.

In respect to the above assertion, it is obvious to concur that Colonial political system was repressive and fundamentally structured to relegate the indigenous political and Economic institutions. This however, could not have been possible if not for some obnoxious Economic policies enacted to entrench effectively the act of Colonialism. Among some of such policies included the imposition of new forms of taxation, penalties on food production and transportation, the restriction of the political powers of the indigenous people by proxy etc. All these and many other repressive measures laid the foundation for the introduction of the Colonial Political ideology. According to Ifemesia, "Divide and Rule policy which was introduced by the British Colonist who invented direct rule administration in Igbo Culture, through the establishment of native court, derived her revenue from indirect taxation" by this act the colonial administrators imposed an Economic system that was at variance with the traditional system.

Politically the British Colonial government crafted the dependency theory into political administration of her Nigerian Colony by castigating the indigenous political institution as inferior. With such strategy they ended up imposing their political ideology on people who had no knowledge about such. The elites who would as their mouthpiece were left in defensive posture instead of being at the offensive to protect the indigenous Political and Economic system. This was obvious when they began to demand for recognition in the new Political equation that later, would successfully relegate the traditional political institution to the background.

As noted earlier, the Colonial Political system was glued to the Metro pole. This is because every Political step taken during the Colonial era must receive the support of the Metro pole. Interestingly, whatever policy adopted for implementation was structured to favour the Colonial Home government. It was as a result of that, that made those who vigorously resisted such as the Aro and Borgu were ruthlessly suppressed and put down with massive destruction of the sources of their erstwhile power'. The Colonial Political ideology was to intimidate and to cajole African to submission, as evidently shown, when most often the recalcitrant Emirs, Obas and other rulers were deposed and more pliant ones installed in their places it was on that account, that the desecration of the royal stools in Africa weakened the traditional Political system, even as the Colonial administrators capitalized on that too, to widen the Colonial territorial Control.

It is therefore worthwhile to say, that the Colonial Political ideology was aimed to relegate, suppress, humiliate and to ridicule the indigenous Political institution. In fact, the hesitancy that characterized the involvement of Nigerian in the administration of their Country meant that the emerging Nigerian Political leaders lacked a common Political Orientation reasonable enough to prepare them for the new Political system. From the above account it thus became obvious that the British Colonial government in Nigeria deliberately sew the seed of the Conflict and instability that characterized the Political institution, which has also affected her Economic policies over the years.

In the area of job creation and poverty reduction, the colonial government came with different Political and Economic policies, with specific focus on how to promote the colonial interest. This act was tailored to undermine the well being of the natives to some reasonable extent. For instance, in the colonial civil service the disparity in salary meant a discriminatory policy against the black people. This made the civil service work less attractive to qualified indigenous people who could not tolerate such behavior. Nevertheless, colonialism made some positive impact, for instance, it created identity for Africans in contiguous territories'. In the area of economic development 'Colonialism built economic infrastructure and exploited the mineral resources for the betterment of the metro pole. It also created urban areas and exposed the people to the goodies of urbanization.

Nevertheless, it created antagonized civil service due to poor salaries. For instance, when the Coal miners of Enugu protested over poor remuneration they were ruthlessly suppressed. This also demonstrated the colonial economic policy of oppression. However, the emergence of urban centers in Colonial Nigeria led to the massive rural-urban migration. The consequences of this were that, the rural areas lost reasonable number of her able men who were initially engaged in agriculture. The drift to the emerging urban centers by the youth in search of white cola jobs brought in its momentary improved standard of living. Again, since not all that migrated to the urban cities could be employed, some resorted to robbery and other social vices to survive. This created new scenario to the social maladies.

THE GENESIS OF IDEOLOGICAL CRISES IN NIGERIAN POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

Politically, in Nigeria today there are traditional and foreign leadership institutions. The two have been operating since the inception of Colonial government although at variance. The first, which confers natural political power based on hereditary, started losing ground when the Colonists empowered rivalry, mostly made of men of dubious character. This marked the genesis of Political ideological crisis. This collision is started when the newly created warrant chief institution was given official leadership recognition. By assigning superior duties to the warrant chiefs as the case may be the traditional ruler suffered further relegation.

For the reason best known to the colonial administrators, the animosities created between the two leadership statuses lingered through the colonial era, have been sustained over the years. In other words, by reducing the power of the traditional leaders to mere figure heads, and by using imposed foreign legal system to back it up, the new power equation has relegated the traditional leadership institution to the point of having kings without kingdoms; In that regard, the masses at the grass root have been denied quality leadership in the process. To add salt to the injury, 'The leaders who inherited power from the colonial masters were essentially the elites, men and women who had absorbed the social, cultural and political values of the colonial overlords and are always ready by way of intimidation, at all times, to display such among the natives. By the actions of the elites, it was obvious that, 'They were trained to protect and sustain colonial interests after the symbolic end of colonialism, and this they did religiously'.

Evidently, the leadership institution created by the colonists tend to have gained upper hand in recognition, to the point that only few natural leaders are accorded the honor of Political leadership recognition in Nigerian space since independence. However, few indigenous leaders have managed to retained their places of honour due to the fact that, the stools have been accorded international acclaim, and have also existed for several years before the arrival of the colonists. Again the prominence of the few indigenous Political stools were anchored on large empires and kingdoms they once controlled, which of course had grown to have recorded years of popularity with strong international exposure and contacts through trade.

Meanwhile, at the end of the colonial rule, the initial crises created by the Colonial rule began to manifest. Firstly, it appeared within the first set of political parties formed by the elites prior to and immediately Nigeria gained independence. Most of the Political Parties then originated from the cultural organizations with strong ideology of promoting and protecting ethnic and sectional interest. Even the NCNC which was formed to promote National interest promptly began to lose it national colouration, when the Egbe Omo Oduduwa and the Arewa groups took the stance of fighting for the Yoruba and Hausa ethnic groups respectively. The danger this portend was clash of sectional interest, this obviously undermined the process of Nation building. The fear of sectional domination of the national Politics in Nigeria was responsible of corruption of election rigging in Nigerian Political space.

Colonialism also denied the Nation political cohesion, where as in the South-West of Nigeria the Action Group adopted Democratic Socialism, the South-East of the NCNC projected Pragmatic Socialism, and this contradicted the Northern Feudal or conservative Political system. Various regions have taken strong stance on promoting regional Politics due to fear of domination and personality clash. The contention elicited by such conflicting interest snowballed into uncontrollable Western Political crises of 1960s, the military in her bid to install sanity and unity had introduced decree 34 by Gen. Aguiyi Ironsi the then military

Head of State who pledged to sustain unitary system of government as to bring unity so as to enhance the process of Nation building. However, the lingering fear of domination which informed the transformation of the regional cultural groups into political parties informed the counter coup in the same year. The crises that resulted from that second coup have continued to subject the political development of Nigeria in disarray.

LEADERSHIP POLICIES IN THE POST-COLONIAL NIGERIA AND POVERTY ERADICATION.

In order to understand leadership policies with emphasis on political leaders in Nigeria, let us look at the concept of leadership within the ambit of our research, which is political leadership and poverty reduction. A Leader within the context of our discussion is one whose responsibility is to link the work of various groups in the country. 'He seeks to discover what actions groups under various conditions require if they are to achieve their goals'. Post-Colonial leadership vestiges involved Colonial legacies or Colonial imprint left on our present political system in Nigeria, those imprints are responsible for the political problems in Nigeria.

Although it has been pointed out at various times by some scholars that Nigerian leadership challenge was created by the British Colonial authority who' brought divergent groups with unique traditions and histories together to create the Nigerian state and did little or nothing to harmonize their political system before independence. This, it is believed affected every stratum of Nigeria in Post-Colonial era. In terms of Poverty reduction, Nations generally apply certain indexes to assess the levels of progress in economic development 'vice- verse' Poverty reduction. One of the preoccupations of the new leaders when Nigeria gained independence was on how to improve personal living standard. At that time the following challenges adversely affected the living conditions of the people because there were no clear policies as to improve the living standard of the masses, thus:

- (i) Low Economic Production per Person.
- (ii) Lack of improved agricultural methods.
- (iii) Industries that overly depend on imprints of capital, skilled labour, technology and spare parts.
- (iv) Markets that are fragmented due to small population.
- (v) Poor Harvest that account for poor harvests per-capita.
- (vi) Heavy indebtedness to international monetary organization.
- (vii) High level of infant mortality, illiteracy level, unemployment etc.
- (viii) Over Reliance on Exports of raw materials that are essentially of low value.

These are some of the noticeable challenges facing the Post-Colonial leadership of Nigeria. Some of these challenges had its genesis closely linked to the legacies bequeathed to the Country by the Colonial administrators. However, African leaders are not passive over these challenges as some of them have adopted the following measures to address them, thus:

- (i) The development and promotion of home grown Economic Policy
- (ii) Minimize acceptance of foreign loans and aids.
- (iii) Support for industrialization Policies.
- (iv) Increased adoption of Mechanized system of agriculture.
- (v) Development of Educational, Economic infrastructure, improved Health facilities etc.

In effect, the benefit of such is yet to be felt. However, as long as the Nation would continue to receive interference on her Economic policies in spite of having attained political independence, the dangers it portends would remain stunted Economic growth. Again since the foreign donors have continued to insist the adoption of certain alien Economic policy as the conditionality before loan is granted, the consequences has been poor implementation and the dwindling Economic returns that has increased poverty level. According to Anthony Nwabughuogu, 'African governments have been forced, by the circumstances of their poverty, to accept policies dictated, by other nations of the world which increases African Poverty and tie them permanently to the control of neo-colonial masters'. This conspiracy is responsible for the high rate of poverty necessitated due to high level of unemployment in Africa. In 1980s some countries in Africa Nations including Nigeria were forced to adopt structural adjustment programme to revamp their Economy, the untold hardship it unleashed in Zambia, Cote d'Ivoire, Malawi, Nigeria etc was beyond description. In fact, in Zambia, when the Country was forced to adopt this foreign Economic policy the price of Maize, the Country's staple food, rose by over 125% in 1987. As long as the leadership in Nigeria has continued to experience interferences in the domestic policies poverty eradication will remain a herculean task. It should be noted too, 'that poverty breeds corruption, nepotism, ethnicism and insecurity'.

CONCLUSION.

In Nigeria Ethnicity has affected the disposition of National Political leadership, it has moved to affect every facet of leadership. There are now perennial contentions among the various Ethnic groups instigating fighting to occupy National leadership space, in addition; good leadership has often been circumvented by Ethnicity due to leadership antagonism.

Ethnic induced competition over the control of government resources, resentments over the division of Political power and Economic assets have shifted leadership focus. Separatist agitation plaguing Nigeria is a fall out from years of bad leadership. Onwudiwe aptly captured the character of leadership in Nigeria when he stated, thus, 'Nigeria has a problem in producing leaders who have qualities of Plato's philosopher kings-qualities. Personal and sectional interest has always been the guiding aspiration of Nigerian leaders. In extension, most African leaders have placed themselves above the law and have no interest in being subjective to the rule of law a case in point was the crisis of tax burden that erupted in Kenya leading to violent protest that sacked senator and caused President Ruto to go hiding.

The ideas of good leadership are far away from the knowledge of Nigerian leaders because the orientation from the colonists was not to offer purposeful leadership to the people but to implement policies that will have recourse to the Metro pole even after they have gone. This inherited Political ideology has manifested through the activities of the multinational cooperation and unwarranted interferences often experienced from the metro pole. Such attitudes have failed to produce selfless leaders in Africa vis-à-vis Nigeria. Onwudiwe, has stated, thus, 'Nigeria has produced leaders who are selfish, shameless, overbearing, arrogant, tribalistic, power hungry and more so do not care about the needs of the average Nigerian'. A leader who cares less about the welfare of the citizenry may not have good vision for the people. Again the current Political system in Nigeria is mortgaged under a Political mafia group.

Membership to this group is mainly retired Military Heads of State and civilian collaborators whose interest is to sustain a sectional interest at all cost. According to Chinweizu, the strength of this group is drawn from the Sokoto Caliphate. The Caliphate with Religious

Colouration intends to control the Nigeria Politics; this is against the principles of Democracy. Under the guise of the Mafia it has continued to dictate the leadership of the Country. This cabal has flouted praise singers in various part of the Country. The singers, who are grossly incompetent, are won over with juicy contracts and political appointments thereby weakening the Political institution the more. By recruiting these jobbers to foment trouble in their various communities, the cabal has not only succeeded to remain relevant in the corridors of power in Nigeria, but have widened the policy of divide and rule. In effect, intensive pressure from the masses who desire democratic government, recently led the cabal to re-strategize in order to accommodate new sectional puppets from various zones. In view of the above challenges, Nigeria must restructure her Political System if she must free herself from Political Quagmire inflicted due to greed and avarice. Power must not only return to the people, but vital indigenous Political concept should be engrained in the new Political system so as to rebuild people's confidence on their leaders.

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