

Co-opting Traditional Institutions in State Politics; A Case Study of Mashonaland Central Province, Zimbabwe

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Abstract: This study was a comparative analysis on the effects of co-opting traditional institutions in state politics focusing on the periods 2002-2008 and 2009-2013 in Mashonaland Central Province in Zimbabwe. The study employed a mixed method approach combining questionnaires with community members, focus group discussions with traditional chief's council members and in-depth interviews with traditional chiefs. The findings indicate that co-option of traditional institutions in politics negatively affect community peace. The study recommended that traditional institutions should remain apolitical in order to promote peaceful co-existence.

Keywords: Traditional institutions, co-option, community peace, politics.

INTRODUCTION

Traditional leadership is conceivably the oldest system of authority in Africa and Zimbabwe in particular. Traditional institutions were mandated with delivering peace, justice and development in their respective areas of authority. However, with the coming of colonialism, their authority was seriously destabilized. The visibility of traditional institutions was further pushed into near nothingness as globalization continues to currency, and thus, spreading a mixed culture that strives on Western confusion in most African countries including Zimbabwe, necessitated involvement and participation of society organizations.

Political motivated conflicts in Zimbabwe took a new twist at the turn of the 21st Century. This was caused by two essential developments, which were the formation of a new opposition political party in 1999, Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) as well as the implementation of the Fast Track Land Reform Program (FTLP) in early 2000. The MDC was formed from members of the board coalition of the civil society, individuals and workers, in particular the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU). The formation of MDC became a watershed development in the conflict dynamics in Zimbabwe. From the onset, the MDC has been accused in the ZANU (PF) circles of being a brainchild of the West, most probably because of its Western favoured policies. This study notes that this view had been exacerbated by the fact that by year 2000 during the constitution referendum campaign, MDC was backed by commercial farmers (most of

whom were from the Western countries in origin) to reject the draft constitution. Farmers also mobilized their workforce in favour of MDC. Simultaneously ZANU (PF) campaigned in favour of the draft constitution. However at the end, the vote 'NO' campaigned became victorious. In the same year, ZANU (PF) faithfuls and war veterans went into a rampage and invaded white owned farms and looted properties. The MDC was branded a neo-colonialist party without the interests of the Zimbabwean population but of the former colonial masters.

According to Sartre [1] neo-colonialism is a geographical practice of using capitalism, business globalization and cultural imperialism to control a country, in lieu of either direct military control or indirect political control that is imperialism and hegemony. The term neo-colonialism was coined in 1965 by the Ghanaian President Kwame Nkrumah to describe socio-economic and political control that can be exercised economically, linguistically and culturally whereby the promotion of culture of neo-colonialist country facilitates the cultural assimilation of the colonized people, and thus open the national economy to the multinational corporations and neo-colonial country [1].

Inherent in this view is the idea that former colonial masters resort to the use of various methods to operate in other countries not only in the economic field, but also in political, religious, ideological and cultural spheres. The MDC as viewed by ZANU (PF) was a puppet party which had nothing to offer on the

citizen's table but was only being used by the British in its push for the Mugabe regime change agenda.

ZANU (PF) government views and considers itself as a god-father of the nation who liberated the nation from the settler regime and regards themselves alone as the sole custodians of such a marvelous heritage and historical legacy. At the same time, the MDC regards itself as a democratic party which came with its real challenge to the ZANU (PF) hegemony. The MDC alleges to represent the interests of the people, the urban, rural, and farming populace while ZANU (PF) has managed to maintain its base on rural populace. The tension between ZANU (PF) and MDC is also caused by a generation gap. The MDC is mainly composed of youthful figures drawn from university students, civil society organizations; trade unionist and general populace while ZANU (PF) rear guard is composed of old school boys who happen to have participated in the liberation struggle which ushered independence in the country. They view any forms of opposition to their ideology as an opposition of the state not of ZANU (PF). To them, they are the state, the government and the party. The MDC claims to abide by the dictates of globalization, policies of which align it to the West while ZANU (PF) maintains its pre-independence rhetoric of Pan-Africanism. This conflict also sucked in the traditional leaders as they fight for political space between the ZANU (PF) and MDC intensified.

Traditional leadership has been existence since pre-colonial times. In the pre-colonial Zimbabwe the role of traditional leadership was vital and was recognized since everything was based on traditional customs. Traditional leadership comprises family heads, village heads, kraal heads and chiefs who were responsible for maintaining peace and order in families and the community at large. In this pre-colonial era, traditional leaders also played a vital role in facilitating and mediating during the liberation struggle.

At independence, the Zimbabwe government adopted a post-socialist model of development and introduced Village Development Committees and Ward Development Committees [2]. This confusion at the local administrative levels was characterized by a lack of clarity on roles and functions between the traditional institutions of chiefs, headman, village head and the elected leadership of Village Development Committees (VIDCOs) and Ward Development Committees (WADCOs) in land matters. It precipitated a crisis of communal leadership in communal areas of Zimbabwe, whereby, on one hand, elected rural institutions had little real legitimacy according to traditional grassroots perspectives, while traditional leaders were not always acknowledged or respected by the state's modernization initiatives.

The measures appeared to undermine the authority of the traditional leaders. But their authority was reaffirmed with the constitutional amendments in 1998. According to the Act, the President shall appoint Chiefs to preside over communities, in appointing a Chief in terms of Subsection (1), the President shall give due consideration to the customary principles of succession, if any, applicable to the community over which such Chief is to preside and the President may, where he is of the opinion that good cause exists to remove a chief appointed in terms of Subsection (1) from office.

All substantive chiefs are also entitled to be paid by the state an allowance or salary that is decided by the government through an Act of Parliament. Section (4) of the Traditional Chiefs and Headman Act outlines 'subject to this act, a chief appointed in terms of subsection (1) shall be paid such allowances as may from time to time be prescribed from monies appropriated for the purpose by Act of Parliament. The powers are further re-affirmed in the new constitution Chapter 282.

Mutisi [9] argue that traditional institutions and African conflict resolution methods continue to prove that they are very effective in conflict resolution and transformation. Davidson [3] opines that traditional institutions are necessary for political transformation in Africa because they characterize the continent's history's culture and social context. Given this background, it becomes very important to analyze the effects of co-opting traditional institutions in state politics.

Data from the early 2000s to 2013 elections indicates that the traditional leadership institutions were either co-opted or chose to support ZANU (PF). Democratic deliberations were not highly factored in when the decision to re-empower chiefs in the late 1990s was taken. This could be a noteworthy obstruction to free, fair and credible elections. Traditional authorities such as chiefs, headmen/women and village heads (except religious leaders) were deployed to monitor political participation of villagers, carry awareness and political campaign for ZANU (PF) candidates; force villagers to vote according to their village settling order, thereby violating the inviolability of the ballot; persuade suspected opposition members to act as if to be illiterate so as to be helped to vote for ZANU (PF), and to allow horror to the rebellious voters. In this way, chiefs act as auxiliaries of the ruling elite. During the colonial era, traditional institutions were used by colonialists as agents for colonialism; today the same institutions become agents of electoral dictatorial regime of ZANU (PF).

The purpose of the study was to assess the effects of co-opting traditional institutions as political activists on peace building and conflict transformation during the periods 2002-2008 and 2009-2013.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Mashonaland Central Province. The province has a total area of 28 347km² and a population of 1 152 520 representing about 8.5% of total population of Zimbabwe, The province have seven districts which are Guruve with a population of 200 833 people, Shamva with a population of 98 077, Mount Darwin with a population of 307 946 people, Muzarabani with a population of 121 127 people, Mazowe with a population of 198 966 people, Rushinga with a population of 67 829 people and Bindura with a population of 156 842 people, Census Report, 2012.

The study used a mixed methods approach combining questionnaires, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Survey data was collected from a sample of 250 respondents which was drawn using a stratified random sampling approach from all the 7 districts in the province. In-depth interviews were done with 7 participants representing the 19 traditional chiefs in the province. Seven focus group discussions were conducted with 65 out of 87 members who comprise the Chiefs’ Councils (*Dare Ramambo*). Purposive sampling was used to identify participants for both the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socioeconomics Characteristics of Participants
Gender of Participants

Seventy percent the participants were male while thirty percent were female (Figure 1).

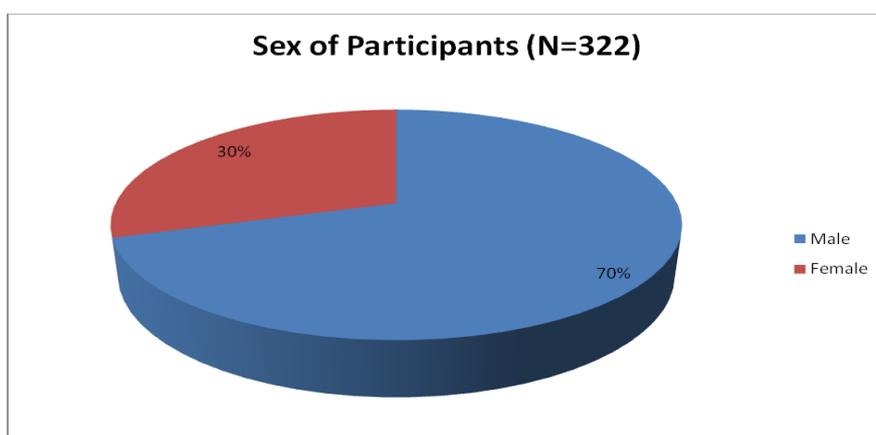


Fig-1: Gender of Participants

Age of Participants

Seventy-four percent of the respondents were

aged between 20 and 40 years while only 3.2% of the respondents were older than 50 years (Table 1).

Table 1: Age of Participants

Age range	Sex of Participants		Total (N=322)
	Male (N=225)	Female (N=97)	
Below 20 yrs	3.4%	2.7%	3.2%
21-30yrs	52.0%	52.7%	52.2%
31-40yrs	21.1%	23.0%	21.7%
41-50yrs	20.0%	18.9%	19.7%
Above 50 yrs	3.4%	2.7%	3.2%

Source: primary data

There were no differences on age distribution between male and female respondents.

Marital Status of Participants

A majority of the respondents were married while only 2% were single (Figure 2).

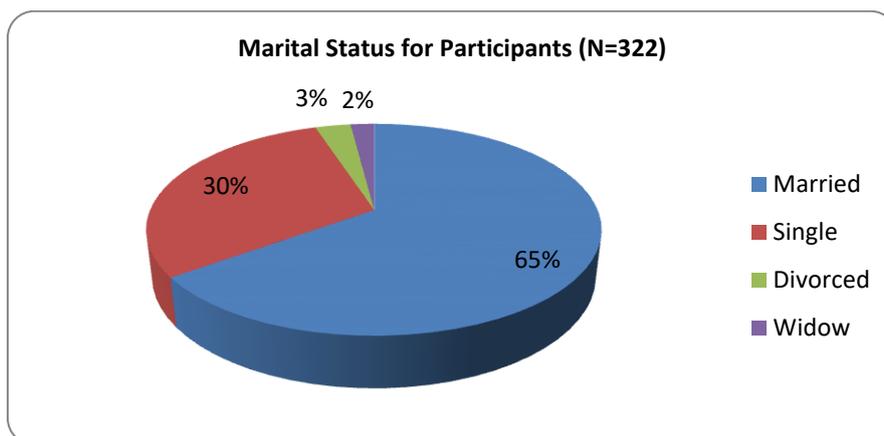


Fig-2: Marital Statuses for Participants

Married people had a duty in community not only to safeguard and protect themselves but also to do the same to their families if peaceful co-existence is to have meaning.

Educational Qualifications of Participants

According to Figure 3, the majority of participants in this study had post primary level qualifications. The majority of them had attained secondary school education and a few had PHDs.

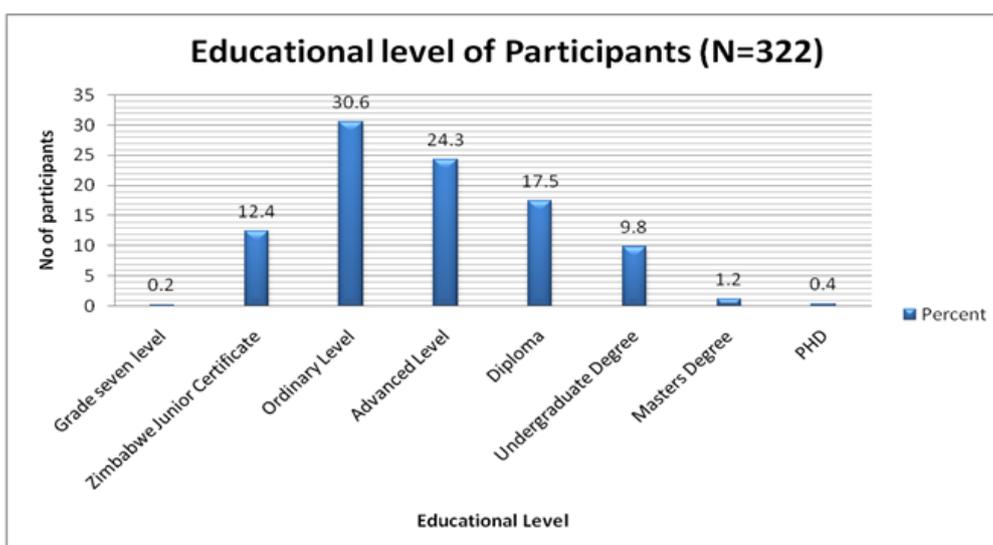


Fig-3: Educational levels of Participants

Community Relations in Community as a Result of Conflict Dynamics

The study also looked at relationship among community members as a result of conflict dynamics in

Zimbabwe. Results show that none of the respondents indicated that community relations were very peaceful or somewhat peaceful (Table 2).

Table 2: Community Relations after Dynamics

How conflict affected community relations	Percentage of respondents		
	Male (n=175)	Female (n=75)	Total (n=250)
Very peaceful	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Somewhat peaceful	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Neither peaceful or violent	17.1%	13.5%	16.1%
Somewhat violent	20.0%	20.3%	20.1%
Very violent	62.9%	66.2%	63.9%

Considering the gender perspective, there were no notable differences on how male and female respondents were affected by conflict dynamics. Only slightly more male than female indicated that community relations were neither peaceful nor violent than female. This might mean that the situation was entirely violent or peaceful, but experienced episodes of both peace and violence.

Focus group discussion (FGD) data indicated that there was no peace at all. Popular view indicated that the community relations were very violent. One FGD informant said *“the situation reminded me about some hard episodes I witnessed in 1979 during the liberation struggle. Vatengesi (sellouts) hardly sleep in their houses, but in mountains like baboons”*. A few FGD informants said the relations were somewhat violent.

Key in-depth interview (KII) informants indicated that community relations were very violent. When probed further on what KII informants said very violent, popular view indicated that mistrust, instability and a ‘war spirit’ engulfed the community. One informant expresses his sentiments by saying *“I have never witnessed such an episode in my life that family members can be enemies of one another due to political matters”*.

Data presented above from household survey, focus group discussions and in-depth interviews indicated that community relations were marred by violence. Despite the fact that 16.1% of respondents indicated that it was neither peaceful nor violent, the

majority of respondents concur with data gathered through focus group discussions and in-depth interviews that community relations were violent.

Madondo [4] and Makumbe [5] believed that times of brutal conflicts have left unwanted reminiscences on the people of Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe has a history described as marred by violence which pre-date the colonial times. Incidents of violence include the 1893 War of Dispossession in Matabeleland, the 1st and 2nd Chimurenga, the Gukurahundi violence in the Midlands and Matabeleland in the early 1980s [6]. Violence in Zimbabwe has bit by bit been increasing since 2000 and quite a lot of regions of the country particularly the rural areas (including Mashonaland Central province) have become theatres of political violence. In 2000, 2002, 2005 and 2008, political violence exploded as a result of the extremely charged and challenged nature of elections. The 2000 land invasions which were initiated by farm invasions of the Svosve people and Operation Murambatsvina (2005) are also brutal cases in point [5]. On the other hand, the June 2008 pre-runoff election violence is possibly one of the tough episodes of Zimbabwe’s electoral violence.

Incidences in Community as a Result of Conflict Dynamics

The major forms of violence experienced in the communities as a result of the conflict dynamics were beatings with 85% of the respondents indicating occurrences, followed by abductions and killings with 5% and internal displacement of victims with 71%, (Table 3).

Table 3: Community Occurrences

Community Occurrences due to Conflict Dynamics	Percentage of respondents		
	Male (n=175)	Female (n=75)	Total (n=250)
Beatings	86.3%	81.1%	84.7%
Killings	69.1%	54.1%	64.7%
Amputation of body parts	51.4%	74.3%	58.2%
Ambushes	62.9%	54.1%	60.2%
Livestock raids	54.3%	60.8%	56.2%
Abductions and Disappearances	70.9%	79.7%	73.5%
Rape and defilement	57.1%	54.1%	56.2%
Internal displacement of victims	70.9%	73.0%	71.5%
Others (Torture and Intimidations)	13.7%	18.9%	15.3%

On beatings in the community as occurrences which happened as a result of conflict dynamics, there was no significant differences males and female. However, significant differences between males and females were noted on killings in community and ambushes. This means that males were more aware than women that political dynamics resulted in losing life for some victims, particularly males. Significant differences on the amputation of body parts, torture and

intimidations and partly disappearances and abductions indicated that more females than males were affected. This clearly supports the notion that women are the major victims and sufferers of violent conflicts in any given situation, Mutisi [9], Zartman (2006) and Chitsike [10].

Fig 4 indicated the occurrences in the community due to conflict dynamics from the

perspective of members of the chiefs' council through focus group discussions. Beatings followed by torture were the major occurrences in communities. Killings, displacement of victims and ambushes followed. Sexual harassment rapes were other occurrences mentioned among the rest as depicted on Fig 4. This data is similar to household survey data although there are slight variations on the magnitude of occurrences. The

differences may be a result of inter-generational gap between the two groups, where household survey was dominated by young adults while the majority of members of chiefs' council late adulthood and the aged. This means the young folks may have the energy and zeal to actively participate in both perpetuating and as victims of community occurrences as a result of political dynamics.



Fig-4: Chiefs' Council on Occurrences in Community

According to data gathered through in-depth interviews, there was no much difference with what their council members above as indicated on Fig 5

below. Beatings, torture ambushes and killings were rampant. Also, the data was similar to what household survey portrays.

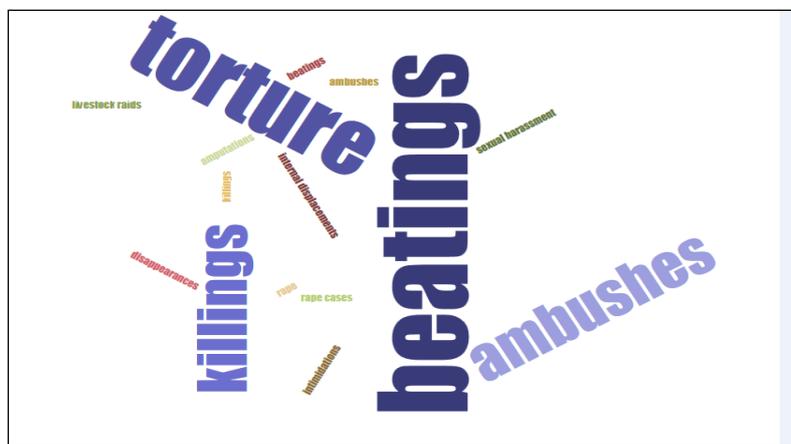


Fig-5: Chiefs on Community Incidences

Madondo [4] and Makumbe [2] believed that Zimbabwe has to accord with sufferers of conflict who comprise internally displaced people (IDPs), the widowed, orphaned, maimed and traumatized. The past of Zimbabwe is characterized by a series of challenges which, at diverse revolving points, manifested themselves through violent conflicts. Since its independence, the issue of achieving sustainable tranquility and development has remained a challenge due to deficiency of comprehensive approaches to

issues of human rights violations. The political proceedings of the previous decade in Zimbabwe have formed challenges that have drawn the awareness of both domestic and international actors. For example, since the intermittent, violent land seizures of 2000, punctuated by the aggressive elections in June 2000, March 2002, March 2005 and March 2008, the ruling party and government have fascinated worldwide condemn for their poor human rights record, which resulted in targeted sanctions for the ruling leaders.

Whilst dissimilar explanations are given for the origins and character of the current socio-political crisis, it can be argued that Zimbabwe faces a versatile crisis which requires comprehensive approaches and responses.

Community Relations as a Result of Traditional Institutions being Political Activists

The researchers wanted to find out if participation of traditional institutions as political

activists affects community relations. This was done by looking at period of high political instability (2002-2008) and during period of low political instability (2009-2013).

Table 4 below shows that, during the period 2002-2008 participation of traditional institutions created or facilitated or promoted more political instability than during the period 2009-2013.

Table 4: Community Relations as a Result of Traditional Institutions being Political Activists

Period	Community Relations Status	Percentage of respondents		
		Male (n=175)	Female (n=75)	Total (n=250)
2002-2008	Very peaceful	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Somewhat peaceful	3.4%	0.0%	2.4%
	Neither peaceful nor violent	3.4%	6.8%	4.4%
	Somewhat violent	13.1%	8.1%	11.2%
	Very violent	77.1%	77.0%	77.1%
	Do not know	3.0%	8.1%	4.9%
2009-2013	Very peaceful	38.9%	44.6%	40.6%
	Somewhat peaceful	38.9%	44.6%	40.6%
	Neither peaceful nor violent	16.0%	5.4%	12.8%
	Somewhat violent	6.2%	5.4%	6.0%
	Very violent	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	Do not know	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

There were no much differences between male and female on how political dynamics affected community relations. However, it shows that women were a little bit affected more than male. Generally, the period 2002-2008 was marked by high levels of violence compared to the period 2009-2013.

Data gathered through focus group discussions and in-depth interviews indicated that the period 2002-2008 was marred by high levels of politically motivated violence from the opposition MDC party and ruling ZANU PF. One of the informants expressed the sentiments as “zva2008 hazvidi kuyeuchidza munhu kani, panga pasina chakanaka kumamisha kana madhorobha”, FGD informant. (2008 era is not a period to remember for anyone, there was chaos in both rural and urban areas).

Survey and case study data indicated that political dynamics caused violent relations among community members. It seems that 2002-2008 was deadly and an episode marked by bad memories. 2009-2013 was peaceful. May be a few areas never experience violence at a great magnitude.

As mentioned earlier on, Zimbabwe has a profile of violence which pre-date the colonial period. violence was witnessed in the 1893 war of dispossession in Matabeleland, the first, second and allegedly called third Chimurenga, the Gukurahundi killings in the Midlands and Matabeleland in the early

1980s [6]. Violence in Zimbabwe has progressively increasing since 2000 and numerous regions of the country particularly the rural areas have been turned into theatres of political violence. In 2000, 2002, 2005 and 2008, political violence exploded as a result of the extremely emotional and contested nature of elections. The 2000 land invasions which were initiated by the invasions of the Svosve people and Operation Murambatsvina (2005) are also violent cases in point [7]. Nevertheless, the June 2008 pre-runoff election violence is arguably one of the ugliest episodes of Zimbabwe’s electoral violent behavior. The violence witnessed abductions, rape, torture and beating and the most vulnerable group were women (Research and Advocacy Unit, 2009). Violence was even witnessed during the COPAC outreach programmes and the horror unleashed by some youth militia called Chipangano in Harare (Bulawayo, 24, 2012). These various violent indulgences have been escorted by transitional systems such as the Lancaster House Conference (1979), 1987 Unity Accord between ZANU and ZAPU which consummated into the formation of ZANU PF and the recent Global Political Agreement of 2008 entered into by ZANU PF and the two MDC formations (MDC-T and MDC-M) [8].

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study finds that community relations were negatively affected by the political dynamics in Zimbabwe since early 2000s to 2013. The study also

revealed that gross human rights abuses occurred at grassroots levels.

In addition to this, co-option of traditional institutions in state politics brought more harm than good to their subjects in the community.

The study recommended that victim centered reconciliation and healing exercise be carried as a priority towards peaceful co-existence.

Also, traditional institutions should be guided by constitutional rights in carrying out their duties without political influence. Promoting and safeguard lives and welfare for their subjects should be a first priority.

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