

# **FAMILIES DIVIDED: THE PLACE OF THE FAMILY AND WOMEN IN ZIMBABWE’S FAST TRACK LAND REFORM PROGRAMME**

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## **Abstract**

Events in the last decade around the land question in Zimbabwe and the broader political contexts in which they have played out have been dramatic and transformative around the family fabric. The political history and the political economy continue to mould the quality of life for most families in significant ways. Human beings have always lived in families from the beginning of time. The family is a pillar of society as it influences the way society is structured, organized and functions, yet the Fast Track Land Reform Programme of 2000 in Zimbabwe came with disruptive tendencies to the family fabric and disadvantaged especially women. This paper targets the notion of split households as families spread their risk through maintaining dual farming households as fall back plan if ever they were evicted in one farm. The research set out to establish the nature and extent of split households resulting in increased insecurity for the family unit, some women and their children. The study also examined how new farmers have invested in new marital and cohabitation relationships in order to manage split households as well as how the structure of the family as it stood in the fast track exposed women to challenges of all kinds. Desktop research and also interviews were carried out with members of families that split as well as with citizens who witnessed the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP). Recommendations are that the government should carry out a programme that campaigns for the promotion of family values, for families that were split by the land reform to get back together or restore the traditional respectability of the family.

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**Keywords:** Family, fast track land reform, split households and women

## **Introduction**

The FTLRP of Zimbabwe has undoubtedly significantly addressed the racially-based land injustices which emerged and were consolidated under colonialism and which were perpetuated during the first two decades

of independence. However, crucial questions arise around other (unresolved) dimensions to the land question in Zimbabwe, (Bowyer et al 2005, Worby 2001). One significant dimension is gender, is that women's relationship to land has been mediated through men. Though less overt than the racial structuring of land relations in colonial Zimbabwe, patriarchy was intrinsic to colonial land dispossession and became embedded in the resultant agrarian structure, (Ranger, 1983; Gaidzanwa 1988, 1995; Moghadam 2004; Yacouba, 1999) . Historically, 'race' was invariably articulated as the key signifier for land in Zimbabwe and fast track over the past decade has sought to undermine the racial agrarian system. Be that as it may however, the fast track land reform programme has had little regard for the family fabric and this has led to the manifestation of various social problems in the country that had a direct bearing on family life.

No single definition of the family can be given as it differs context to context. Sociologically, the family is defined as a group of interacting persons who recognise a relationship with each other, based on a common parentage, marriage and/or adoption. The functions of families vary between different societies and there is no central function that all societies grant to the family (Ross, 1968 cited in Turner, 1999). In this paper family is both nuclear and extended.

## **Background**

Rural women's lives in Zimbabwe have been distinctively tied to the land, but this relationship to the land has historically been mediated through male entitlement and control involving the institution of marriage and the allocative powers of mostly traditional authorities, (Chidzonga, 1993). Women in the fast track suffered the same fate. Rutherford (2001), as well as MacFaden (1996, 2002b), note that the gendered aspect of land allocation appears remarkably consistent (cutting across colonial and post-colonial Zimbabwe) and is marked by rigidities, becoming one of those modes of power that sustain "women" as a category. Fast track must be understood in terms of the failures of land reform historically and in relation to the political crisis that emerged in the 1990s. Certainly, the programme is a manifestation and eruption of problems that have been simmering during the 1980s and 1990s, it is a catharsis, an eruption of too many things gone wrong.

Shortly after the results to the referendum were announced, war veterans of the Second Chimurenga began invading white-owned farms in spontaneous demonstrations which soon had the support of the government (Chitsike, 2003). In years that had passed (1998 and 1999), sporadic invasions of commercial farms by communal and other farmers took place, which the ZANU PF government on the whole denounced them as illegal, (Nyawo 2012). The nationwide land occupations starting in early 2000,

which led initially to arrests and detentions of occupiers, was soon legitimised by the government, and regularised and normalised through the Fast Track Land Reform Programme.

The government put in place emergency legislation to protect the new settlers from eviction. Any occupiers would only be moved once alternative land had been identified for resettling them. After the June 2000 elections, the President appointed what was referred to as a War Cabinet whose major thrust was to see the completion of the land reform exercise (now dubbed the Third Chimurenga or war of liberation) or jambanja (on the streets of Zimbabwe). What then followed was a comprehensive and holistic approach towards acquisition of commercial farms that were quickly subdivided into A1 and A2 modes, (Nyawo, 2012). The existing owners (i.e. commercial farmers) were given a time limit (according to a revised Land Acquisition Act) to vacate their land. Individual Zimbabweans with a serious intent to farm were invited to submit applications for land to the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, (Chaumba et al, 2003).

Fast track is said to have involved the ‘first radical shift in agrarian property rights in the post Cold War world’ (Moyo and Yeros, 2005a:3, 2007). In its own way, fast track became the solution to the land issue that the government had been haltingly seeking since 1980. In fact, in 2005, just five years after the beginning of the Third Chimurenga, the government of Zimbabwe was so buoyed by the extent of redistribution that it declared that the land question had been finally resolved. Launched on 15 July 2000, the fast track programme has become a watershed event in the history of Zimbabwe as it radicalised the land reform process and had in its own right prompted a lot of debate.

The main objectives of the fast track programme were to ensure food security, decongest communal areas and decrease pressure on land, increase employment and ease existing political pressure, (Moyo 2004, 2005). It is significant that the objectives of fast track land reform do not include the resettlement specifically of women, although fast track documents indicate that women were to receive 20 per cent of the land. Eventually by 2013, women had benefitted 12 per cent of the 20 per cent, (Nyawo 2013).

In terms of fast track beneficiaries, the selection process was undertaken primarily by the Rural District Councils (RDCs) and District Land Committees (DLCs); although many informal processes also were important. The patriarchal character of these institutions (at least in terms of being male dominated) disadvantaged women in the selection process. Issues of sexual harassment, sexual favours and gender violence against women were also visible. Some accounts indicate that women seeking allocation of a plot under the fast track scheme have been forced to exchange sexual favours to get on the redistribution lists and that war veterans and ZANU-PF militia

members raped women in the course of the land occupations (Human Rights Watch, 2001; Goebel, 2002, 2005a, b, c; Chingarande, 2004, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2010; Chingarande et al, 2012). The sources of this gendered inequity in land allocation under fast track relate to a number of constraints faced by women in applying for land, including bureaucratic constraints, gender biases amongst selection structures (which compromise mainly men), lack of information on the process, and poor mobilisation of women's activist organisations around the issue of applications (Moyo and Yeros, 2007; Jacobs 2000, 2001, 2003). Bottom line, women faced a lot of challenges even within their families in the fast track era.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The family is under threat and unable to play its critical roles of socialisation, nurturing, care and protection effectively, due to failures in the political economy, the legacy of colonialism, bad governance as well as various societal forces, such as high levels of poverty and efforts to reform. The fast track land reform has also kept the family in Zimbabwe under siege and has disadvantaged especially women. In addition, there is a disjuncture between the idealisation of the family and the cherished beliefs about what families are and should be and the reality points to the deterioration of the family. The paper sought to bring out the challenges that the family encountered as a result of the implementation of the fast track land reform in Zimbabwe.

### **Findings**

Research in the area has indeed confirmed the vulnerable nature of the family. The family, because of the fast track land reform programme, is facing various challenges which undermine its ability to function optimally. For instance, the violence that drove the fast track land reform was as though people do not hail from families where they are taught love for the other and compassion. Through socialization in the family children are taught to be tolerant of views other than their own and become active and responsible citizens in the future. Non-discrimination, mutual obligation and respect for diversity guides Government and other stakeholders in the manner in which they interact with families, (Steward et al, 1990), but all this was thrown out of the window during the fast track for even women were beaten up by young boys in full view of the police.

Colonial conquest and exploitation weakened the African family on two key fronts, (Ranger, 1983). Number one, enforced labour migration compelled families to live apart. In the same manner the fast track has separated family members given its chaotic manner of implementation. Members were thrown hither and thither as they tried to rush and occupy any

land they could grab. Second, the policies, laws and practices of colonialism were aimed at impoverishing African families, which also had dire long-term consequences for them (Goebel 1996, 1997). In a similar fashion, at its inception, the fast track was anti-property, it opened up spaces of vulnerability to hunger, immorality, unemployment to the farm workers, southward drift into South Africa, capital flight, food insecurity and the list can be longer. What was worse about the fast track land reform was the timing coming within what Sachikonye (2013) has called the lost decade 2000-2010 or the Zimbabwean crisis 2000-2005 according to Mlambo (2005) the programme could not have failed to worsen matters for families and mostly for women.

## Discussion

To start with, one major problem faced by women who remained in the communal areas was the absence of able-bodied men in African villages or communal lands, which greatly undermined the extended family in many ways. It also meant that only women and the elderly were in a position to play vital roles in meeting the needs of the family causing switched roles. This arrangement placed a significant burden on women and contributed to the phenomena of female-headed households and absent fathers, to this today, (Nyawo, 2013). For generations, it was migrant labour system which was known for continual undermining of the African family and creating conditions for its disintegration.

In a number of cases as this research found out, women who remained in communal areas doubled as fathers of households. They now had to herd cattle, cultivate land with ploughs, cut firewood with axes, go fishing and even hunting for small animals to feed the family. These chores, things being equal, are men's responsibilities. These women would also stand in as care givers, nurses and doctors to the elderly who remained in the village. The fast track land reform programme attracted able bodied young men who were adventurous and had energy to start a life, a new homestead and with a future to forge fresh relations. As such, their services were removed from the communal areas which had seen them grow, removing them from offering some cultural or traditional responsibilities. For instance, in the Zimbabwean culture, a young brother can be tasked (secretly though) with making a brother's wife pregnant if the elder brother has no fire (*kupindira maiguru*). With the youthful ones gone, the real status of the elder brother's barrenness was exposed and the shame would be suffered by the women. Coming also from the interviews was the fact that with young adults due for marriage chasing after pieces of land, ripened girls in the village remained with no suitors, delaying their marriages and turning them in some cases into prostitutes, *tsikombi* / overgrown brides.

Notwithstanding the abovementioned, the family is still a dynamic unit of socialisation that has not remained static. It is characterised by changing patterns of socialisation and interaction. The character and form of the family have evolved and still continue to do so – from the onset of colonial rule to the present democratic dispensation and an increasingly globalised world, (Gaidzanwa, 2000). Although Zimbabwe has experienced consistent economic growth in the past decade, the onset of the lost decade/Zimbabwean crisis, according to Sachikonye (2013), from 2000 threatened the country's economic growth and by extension the family fabric. Industries were either closed down or had to reduce their workforce scattering family in an unprecedented manner. The loss of hundreds of thousands of jobs meant that many families were facing a grim future, due to lack of income and yet life had to go on.

Human beings have always lived in families from the beginning of time. The family is a pillar of society, as it influences the way society is structured, organised and functions. The family remains central in the lives of its members, from birth to death, and provides them, among others, with psycho-emotional and economic support. The family has been and continues to be the principal institution in society, playing a vital role in socialisation, nurturing and care, as well as determining the conditions of social reproduction. The family derives its meaning from being both a biological and a social unit and continues to be a cornerstone of human civilisation, because of its ability to transmit society's values, norms, morals and mores.

Sadly however, the onset of the fast track land reform was chaotic, disruptive to the family and fast as denoted by its name, (Nyawo, 2012). To begin with the movement of people in a disorganized manner meant that family was not around when one got beaten up, mobbed, raped, was infected with deadly diseases, got verbally abused, felt hungry or was even killed. Family support had no chance or place where individualism and brute force seemed to be the order of the day. At least during fights for prime cuts of the land men would stand their ground, most women ended up losers, beaten up, raped, displaced and destitute or ended up in some marriage of convenience to be 'protected.' Interviews showed that a number of women ended up eloping or cohabiting with men who never really married them in the African manner of going through the aunties and paying lobola. The girls or women would end up not marrying *vematongo* as the Zimbabwean culture would recommend (marrying from the neighborhood, among people whose culture and practices would not be strange to you).

Although in various parts of the world, the structure and content of the family have undergone changes over the centuries and is continuously changing and adapting to societal and global transformations the fast track brought with it changes that were too rapid, anti-family and strange in a way.

Social phenomena are also constructed and given meaning in the family environment, for example, the concept of marriage, the bearing and raising of children; religion, governance, authority, the value and importance of education and the rule of law, (Goebel, 1999). Responsibilities and obligations to both family and community members and society in general are also defined within the family milieu. When individuals eventually leave their family and enter other settings, such as school and the workplace, the family would have already prepared them for the transition. The former can only transpire within a family that has the capacity to execute its roles and responsibilities in society. In the main, a strong family, as opposed to a weak one, is able to achieve this competently. The fast track divided the family for various reasons weakening its capacity to function fully.

Examples of a disruption of this ordered family fabric can be drawn from interviews where women who cohabited with men in the resettled areas articulated how the men did not permit them to visit their elderly and sometimes ailing parents back in the communal areas. One woman said that each time she asked to visit the village the man would always cite the volume of work at hand or lack of money as an excuse. That means cohabiting men removed themselves from taking responsibilities with in-laws. Beyond not paying lobola, they emotionally tormented their partners. Some women ended up being disowned by their families because they no longer actively participated in the up keep of their elderly folks in the village, in other words they no longer belonged.

The concept of marriage itself changed face in the fast track land reform programme of Zimbabwe. Cohabiting, prostitution and fathering of children out of marriages was on the increase and worse in the era of HIV and AIDS. To begin with, in Zimbabwe, for marriage to take place families of both the groom and bride should be completely aware, involved and should give their blessings. In the fast track, there was a fast tracking of all these procedures and in the process most arrangements between groom and bride went unannounced. The payment of lobola which is a token of love and commitment and central to this bond was never honored in most cases resulting in an increase of cohabitation cases. Given that laxity, men got an opportunity to take anyone of their choice at anytime even cross generationally increasing chances of being infected or spreading HIV and AIDS as well as other such diseases. The HIV and AIDS pandemic is at the heart of the crisis of dividing family during the fast track land reform, (Oxfam international, 2000). The pandemic rocked families through decimating resources accumulated by family, draining the human resources base, demoralizing family, introducing vulnerability to poverty, food insecurity and risks of all kinds. Oxfam International (2002) notes that, there is a clear and critical two-way relationship between HIV and food security.

The pandemic is driven by poverty and hunger that then drive people to adopt risky coping strategies in order to survive. These coping strategies included travelling in search of food and additional sources of income, migrating, engaging in hazardous work, and, more deadly, women exchanging sex for money, land, food or other favors. These actions facilitate the spread of HIV and AIDS, putting individuals at risk of infection, especially those in the vulnerable group, women and children.

This research found out that HIV and AIDS increasingly and disproportionately affects women and adolescent girls as what happened especially in the chaotic fast track land reform of Zimbabwe. Oxfam international (2002) observes that traditional power relations between men and women means women are less able to negotiate concerns about sexuality and are therefore less able to protect themselves from the risk of infection. Women and girls are at high risk of coercive sex and violence and even forced abortions. The situation is compounded by the stigma and discrimination faced by women living with HIV and AIDS, who often face eviction from their homes if they disclose their status. The fast track land reform of Zimbabwe recorded an increase in new infections with HIV and AIDS an indication of the disorder that the reform ushered. Women suffered more since, if they were not sick themselves, they were care givers who ended up infected themselves. Where they were patience themselves they were faced with double trouble, being chucked out by those they cohabited with, having to walk long distances for medicines, lacking family support, experiencing debilitating poverty and sometimes even falling pregnant. As such, those women who found themselves in such a situation were reduced to a life of destitute with no means of improving themselves meaningfully.

In her research on women in Mwenezi District of Zimbabwe in the fast track era Mutopo (2015, 2014, 2011) observes that women benefited on their husbands's pieces of land and managed to grow vegetables such as tomatoes, bean and peas to sell in South Africa and bought food for the family. While the family's food was put on the table, the women were vulnerable as they travelled to sell in foreign lands. They were sometimes robbed, raped, denied what was due to them. For some women, going to South Africa to sell made them to find other jobs and they stayed longer until xenophobia caught up with them. The burden of going to sell has reduced women to be on the move all the time carrying manually loads that destroy their bodies gradually. Such women today look older than their age because of the labour they have endured. While the act of going to sell to get food for the family is a plus in bringing the family together it also has adverse factors. For instance, one interviewee articulated that some women have been accused of running affairs in South Africa and have since been disowned by their families. Others have found their husbands cohabiting with other



women back home alleging that their wives were always away and were not yet ready to be wives who know their conjugal duties. Thus, in this regard the benefits of the fast track to women have been bitter sweet. The women have been left confused on how they should contribute to benefit their families since entrepreneurship has caught them trouble, (Chitsike, 2000).

A strong family has particular features which enable its members to contribute meaningfully to their own development and prosperity, as well as the betterment of society. Sociologists concur that a strong family usually has access to different kinds of resources, ranging from emotional and material to spiritual resources, which enable it to meet the needs of its members. Where resources are concerned, the fast track was one programme that was not for those with baggage to carry. Its manner of implementation was such that those with little or no property moved faster and were first on prime pieces of land. In fact, some people sold their property to travel light. Also, the pole and dagga huts that those who occupied land were asked to build for themselves were too small, too temporary and too hurriedly built to be able to contain meaningful property. That lack of property would come back to haunt the new farmers once they got settled. The dagga huts by their very nature housed a few individuals, lacked privacy, introduced monotony into people's lives. The worst affected by this scenario were women, they lacked space to order the home, cook and care for the family and even private space with their man. They were also almost always at home if they were not working on the land, unlike men who went out drinking or hunting with friends or even went to loiter at the townships. At the dagga hut where the woman remained 'prisoner', there was no entertainment of any kind and even floors were a luxury. Most floors were just sand or cow dung and these had their own kind of hazards.

A family also demonstrates commitment to the family unit. Each member is appreciated, recognised and valued to prepare them to deliver to their best, reciprocate the care and the love to other members as well as to give them space to reach self actualization. The family that the fast track introduced is one that has little regard for the family unit itself. To begin with, the period of the fast track was of high moral decadence, people were in transit and a lot of hit and run and one night stands occurred. People took little care about protecting the other. Those that remained in the communal areas were also affected in the sense that the able bodied members of their families left them to the same risks that those who left faced. Those in communal areas faced hunger, poverty, lonesomeness and support of all kinds. Families were divided and split and no one had prepared these families for such a prompt split (Nyawo 2013). It is this lack of preparedness that took its toll on the family and especially women because their men went for long periods on end and in other cases these men never came back or

came back in coffins to be buried. Such widows would never find closure with no explanation of how their men died. The women would not feel appreciated or valued. They would feel they were victims, ponies of a conundrum they never wanted to be part of. Interviews conducted during this research revealed that most women suffered immensely in the fast track because families got divided and they ended up with chores that were never theirs in the first place. They suddenly found themselves having to herd cattle, plough the fields, milking the cows and skinning dead animals on top of their own responsibilities. Since responsibilities were not shared women felt overwhelmed, over-burdened and over-loaded all the way.

Another attribute of a strong family is the ability of members to share experiences, complement each other and spend time together. This enables family members to do many things together. There was no quality time spend with family because either they were absent, too busy clearing a new farm, overwhelmed with double duties or too tired after a day of working to catch up with the day's work. Too much all the time also put members of the family in a bad mood, they were almost always bitter, angry, tired and a shadow of themselves. Such a scenario would make it very difficult for the women to keep the family together, make them sit together, eat together and share as well as resolve their differences.

Sociologists also argue that strong families are able to effectively deal with conflict, stress and crises. As such, conflict resolution is an attribute that should begin at home. The fast track land reform programme trained people otherwise. It came with unprecedented violence, chaotic and disruptive tendencies. The fast track land reform programme enjoyed the actual meaning of the Machiavellian Theory that the end justifies the means, (Nyawo, 2012). The implementation, the displacement of the white farmers, the settling in of new farmers and the handling of the farm workers were not smooth. People were traumatized, men were fighting and beating up white farmers in the view of their wives. The episode made children and women to witness a kind of violence that does not leave the memory easily. In most of the cases, as interviews would have it, men were the perpetrators of the violence in the form of the youth and war veterans. To worsen matters, family was not around to make instigators of violence come back to their senses, neither was family there to nurse and comfort those damaged by the violence. Sadly, there even seemed to be a quest to see more action of violence. The hunger to see blood, suffering and agony would not end with the fast track land reform, it would also be embedded within elections, the worst coming in 2007, five years down the line.

Finally, a strong family has what is known as rhythm, which is expressed in routines, rituals or traditions. These patterns of behaviour enhance family stability and glue it together. The fast track land reform

according to interviewees, introduced a devilish liking of the township, gregariousness, mob kind of existence, love for stories of destruction, lack of order and seriousness. Things fell apart with the fast track and the center could not hold. The glue that kept the family together suddenly got watery. The rituals and traditions, of marriage, of rain making, of burying the dead, of welcoming a new born and more that kept people together in the communal lands were missing in the resettled areas and, as such, the vulnerable were the biggest losers. As an institution the family lost out and within it women were hardest hit.

There is a strong link and interplay between the family and other institutions in society, for example, the structure of a country's economy will influence the extent to which members of a family are able to enter and participate in the labour market. The way an economy is structured will, to a large extent, determine whether family members are able to derive livelihoods from decent work opportunities, earn a living wage and have benefits which enable them to have acceptable standards of living. In the fast track era a lot of property and infrastructure was vandalized from farm houses, the land itself, schools, clinics and dip tanks. There was of settling of people in areas that were very far from service centers. As such, a lot of children could not attend school resulting in them not receiving education that would prepare them for the job market. In fact, most of them would hang around the farm as farm workers or ready for use in the 'rent a thug' kind of arrangement introduced by the fast track (Nyawo, 2012). Much as the welfare of children in a family is a concern of both parents, mothers were troubled more by the status of their children not in school. When the children committed crime; robbery, impregnating a girl or any other such, the father would blame the mother for not have nipped the behavior in the bud. Since the mothers are the ones always home, they would receive all the insults from those who would have been offended by their children.

The economy's structure will also have a bearing on the ability of family members to access quality health care, quality education and decent employment. In the same vein, the burden of disease and illiteracy, due to, among others, lack of skills and income may be shouldered by the family. Since the fast track displaced a lot of farm workers who then settled in the periphery of towns causing squatter settlement, women were also left with another kind of settlement that did not respect their privacy. For instance, the squatter settlement kind of arrangement did not always come with toilets, men can be okay with the use of the open or bush for toilet but women cannot always use the bush with the same kind of comfort. Other displaced farm workers moved into towns partially prompting 'Operation Drive out Dirty' of 2005. Informal businesses sprouted in the city also causing a lot of women to drift to South Africa to bring in wares to sell. The volume of

vendors in city centers increased also following the fast track land reform programme. Statistically there are more women vendors compared to men. As these vendors are out hunting for ware to sell from as early as 4:00am and coming back as late as 10:00pm, some responsibilities to family suffer considerably.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, however, although the family is regarded in a positive light, because of its caring and nurturing functions, it also has the ability to foster and legitimise the oppression of women in certain circumstances, for example, patriarchy has emerged as one of the family's most enduring forms of domination. In Zimbabwe, as in most African countries, patriarchy existed alongside colonial subjugation and racial discrimination. Women, particularly black women, carried a double burden under colonialism as they remained subordinate to both men and a settler population. Hence, women's choices were severely limited because of their gender. This is starkly illustrated by the manner in which colonial capitalism reinforced patriarchy through the labour issue. This system favoured men for employment opportunities, while the labour of women was merely seen as an adjunct to men's efforts. The dawn of land reforms did not significantly alter the former arrangements, despite the country having instituted a progressive Constitution and after instituting forward-thinking legislation. The fast track land reform programme allocated 20% land to women on paper but on the ground by 2013, only 12% had realized the benefit.

Zimbabwe continues to be a strongly patriarchal society. This is evident from patriarchal systems embedded in customary areas and the broader patriarchal practices and discourses that exist even in the fast track land reform programme processes. It is questionable whether any progressive national legislation that has been enacted in post-independent Zimbabwe has had any impact on the marginalized status and realities of women within the family unit which is itself under threat. In fact, many problems affecting women in Zimbabwe emanate from flaws in government legislation and from the family itself. There is need for a relook at the status of the family unit in as far as it should function as well as at the way women were and continue to be treated in land reforms. As it stands today, the fast track land reform programme of Zimbabwe and other economic factors have not kept the family together and as such rules of engagement within families got eroded to an extent and women have been affected gravely.

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