THE SINGLE PARTY IN AFRICA: NATURE, EVOLUTION AND ROLE IN THE POLITICAL GOVERNANCE. FROM THE INDEPENDENCE PERIOD TO THE PRESENT DAYS

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ABSTRACT

The last decade of the 20th century was characterized by a resurgence of multiparty in African. From 1960 to1990, African states were under the single party system introduced by the new elites who have the responsibility of the management of these states. For many years, single parties were ruling African States and brought dictatorship in the mode of governance. The result was negative and from 1990 another mode of governance called multiparty system appeared. This new system put the single party in a bad situation and opposition parties emerged in order to challenge the single party's authority. To be visible in the political arena, the single party made changes and didn't disappear. Despite the wave of democratic renewal in African countries, the former single party is still in front of the political stage and is still in power in some countries. The present study aims to study one the evolution of the single party system since it was installed after independence until the present days.

Keywords: Single Party, Governance, Democracy, Multiparty System.

1. INTRODUCTION

"Fifty years is enough!"; "No to dictatorship from father to son". These are the slogans carried by people in Togo since the events of August 19, 2017 by the opposition against the ruling regime. These recent events in this small West African country are the consequences of the management of the State by members of a political regime for fifty years despite political pluralism. The advent of multiparty politics in Africa from the year 1990 transformed the mode of governance in the continent. But it is clear that democracy as a new form of governance has not erased the mismanagement and the negative side of the political, economic and social development in many African countries. Since independence, African countries have experienced a long period of political instability related to military coups but also to a clan management without sharing power. The introduction of the multiparty system as a guarantee of democracy does not mean the end of the reign of some African leaders and their parties in their countries for several years. Compared to this reality, it is important to ask this question: how to understand the single party in Africa before and after the introduction of multiparty system and its impact on the governance and people in Africa in the 21st century? The aim of this research is to study in a comprehensive manner, the evolution of the single party system after the independence until today. This study will focus on changes made since more than two decades by the old single parties to become majority parties in African parliaments. This study will be based on a selective bibliography through general and specific documents and scientific researches. The expected results are outlined in three parts. The first one will highlight a brief history of political developments in Africa at the beginning of the independence. This will show the role played by political parties in the continent during the decolonization process. The second part will study the nature of the single party and its evolution in Africa through the mode of governance and the consequences on the national identity. The third part will present the new face of these old single parties which are always at the front of the political arena, especially the majority in parliaments, despite a galloping multiparty system.

2. IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE MULTIPARTY

The Political life in Africa was expressed during the last decades of the colonial system. The context of the post Second World War as well as the desire of people to a new way of governance was suitable to the multiparty system. The period of decolonization was thus marked by a creation of political parties for the conquest and the management of power. This tendency continued during the first years of independence in Africa

2.1. An Active Political Life Before the Independence

The history of political parties in Africa can be determined during the second half of the 19th century with the creation of the *True Whig Party* in Liberia in 1860. The British territories in Africa have been the theater of political life which started in the year 1920s with the *National Congress of British West Africa* (NCBWA) in Accra in Gold Coast[1]. The recommendations of this conference reaffirmed the adoption of policy measures to prepare Africans to manage their territories. After the Second World War, associations with political characters swarmed these British territories such as *West African Student Union* (WASU) but also political parties like the *National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon* (NCNC) etc. (M'bokolo 1985: 138; 144).

The French West Africa (AOF) had a less agitated political life until the end of 1920, except the election of Blaise Diagne of Senegal as a deputy in the French parliament in 1914. In 1934, the *Parti Social Senegalais* (PSS) was created by Lamine Gueye, an affiliated party of the SFIO[2]. This party is considered as the first modern political party in the whole French West Africa region for a while (M'bokolo 1985: 139). After the Second World War, the context was good for Africans to create political parties for political actions. The French Africa will know a strong and effective political life characterized by the creation of a dozen of political parties (Carbone, 2007: 1). This political liberalism derived from the Constitution of the Fourth French Republic in 1946. It took into account the recommendations of the Brazzaville Conference[3] which will mark a revolution in the colonies (Coquery- Vidrovitch&Moniot, 1974: 129-131; M'bokolo, 1985: 145; Gayibor, 2005: 474-475). The territories of the French colonial empire will have a local assembly whose members are elected with a certain financial independence. In this context, the former mandate territories, Togo and Cameroon, became trusteeship territories from 1946. They will serve as pilot territories for the establishment of political parties. Long before other territories in AOF, political parties have been created in Togo in 1946. It was *Comité de l'Unité Togolaise* (CUT) whose founder was Sylvanus Olympio and *Parti Togolais du Progres* (PTP) founded by Nicolas Grunitzky[4]. From 1950, a proliferation of political parties will be founded throughout the colonial Africa. Because the international context was favorable to a liberalization of political life. The action of the United States of America and of the Soviet Union in favor of people under domination for their freedom, the independence of India in 1946, of Ghana in 1956, the Bandung Conference in 1955, the Indochina war of liberation (1947-1954) and Algeria war (1954-1962), were the important elements of the emancipation of the colonized people and the proliferation of political parties.

The creation of the *Rassemblement Démocratique Africain* (RDA) at the conference in October 1946 in Bamako led to a political and social dynamic to the demand for greater autonomy but also for independence. In this context, political parties affiliated to the RDA will be created throughout the French colonial empire in West Africa. This is the PDCI-RDA in Ivory Coast, US-RDA in Mali, UDV-RDA in Burkina Faso and in Guinea PDG-RDA (Bat, 2016). The presence of these political parties was in fact a multiparty system in the French territories whether in AOF, AEF and in the Trusteeship Territories. The struggle for independence was the work of these parties during decolonization. After the independence, the multiparty system continued to exist before facing troubled periods.

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[1] Current Republic of Ghana.

[2] Section française de l'Internationale ouvrière.

[3] January-February 1944.

[4]These two persons will animate Togo political life in a remarkable way. Sylvanus Olympio is the leader of nationalist and will be the first President of Togo from 1960 until his assassination in 1963. Nicolas Grunitzky will be the opponent of the nationalists throughout the period of decolonization and will, he also appointed President of Togo 1963A 1967 and finally deposed by a military coup. Apart from the parties of the two politicians, other parties were created with close persuasions of both parties to animate the political sphere of the country. One can cite the CUT Juvento ally and supporter of immediate independence, the Togolese People's Movement (MPT), the Union of Northern leaders and populations (UCPN) ally of PTP and close to the colonial administration (Gayibor 2005).

2.2. The Political Life in African States After the Independence

The period of independence was the work of the various political parties to control the political power. During the first years of independence, the multiparty system continued to exist in some of the new states created for example in Botswana, Gambia and Mauritius. The nationalist parties which were leading the liberation movements in the former colonies took the political power and started facing an opposition even from their former allies. This was the case in Togo where the CUT faced an opposition from its former ally the Juvento and from PTP. Since 1960, it can be affirmed that the multiparty system continued to exist despite a slow control of the State by the ruling parties.

3. THE SINGLE PARTY IN AFRICA AND ITS DEVELOPMENT UNTIL 1990

The political life of young African States was stopped abruptly by the intervention of the army, an institution of the modern State. The first military coup[5] in Togo opened the way for a series of the change of civilian political regime into military ones. The single parties were an invention of military governments. If this seems true, this type of political regime was also the work of civilians. After their independences, some African countries adopted the single party regime as a political method of State governance. The single party was the party that embodied the struggle for independence under colonization and the party leader became the head of State and party leader. As emphasized by Odile Debbash "*decolonization served at the same time the rise of a leader who has supported the national movement*" (Debbash, 1966: 51). The long struggle for decolonization has created a "state party" like in Kenya with the *Kenya National African Union* (KANU). This party became the single party headed by Jomo Kenyatta after the independence of the country (Afrique contemporaine, 2013: 108-109). The newly independent countries such as Guinea, Ivory Coast, Senegal, Malawi, Algeria, Cameroon, Central African Republic, for example, have established the single party and it was the party and their leaders who naturally took in charge the administration of the political affairs. These parties have enjoyed legitimacy with local populations, and leaders were seen as liberators and fathers of independence. Historical factors for accession to international sovereignty came from the action of one party accompanied by a hard struggle and / or a long period of decolonization. These factors gave legitimacy to the single party and allowed new African leaders to be able to enjoy the power that comes from independence (M'bokolo 1985: 335; Huntington, 2006: 424-425; Debbash, 1966: 52-65). In the logic of the "consolidation of the state" and the "nation-building", the opposition parties have been removed through a political elimination and the state is personalized with the rise of authoritarian leaders. Democracy was not the priority and the single party was considered as the legitimate option and the best way for a rapid development and national integration (Carbon, 2007: 3). From 1963 to 1990, African countries, in particular sub-Saharan Africa countries, lived under the single party regime initiated by certain African leaders.

3.1. The Nature and Ideology of the Single Party

The introduction of the single party as an administrative structure and the African state policy comes from the permanent crisis of the postcolonial state. This crisis is characterized by ethnic problems but also by economical difficulties that African leaders struggled to find immediate solutions. To solve this crisis, the single party, from a civil coup or military action will be formed to fight "*against tribalism and for a real national development policy*" (Kipré, 2005: 30; M'bokolo 1985: 342-343).

Based on the theory of traditional African unity, the single party was thus a security against the collapse of the african society and the loss of cultural values. The aim of African leaders, by creating the single was to bring together energies where factors such as "*national cohesion, national unity, stability of the independent state*" will constitute the foundation of this political regime (Latoki 2009: 8). In this logic, several single parties had grown in Africa with a leitmotif like rally, revolution, unity etc. For example single parties in Africa used those words like the Popular Movement for the Revolution [6](MPR) in the former Zaire[7], the Togolese People Rally[8] (RPT) in Togo, and Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (CPDM) in Cameroon. If single parties mentioned from their uniqueness formations and the single thoughts as sources of social well-being, their natures have shown that they were just only an "authoritarian dominant parties". The absence of competition immediately put the party in a strong position and authoritarianism is characterized by coercive and violent methods, absence of individual and collective freedoms, bad political governance , poor economic and social system (Carbone, 2007: 14-15).

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[5] January 13, 1963.
[6] Mouvement Populaire pour le Révolution.
[7] Actual Democratic Republic of Congo.
[8] Rassemblement du Peuple Togolais.

The ideology of the single party established in Africa comes under the idea of nation's building of this type of political regime. The single party is seen as the only alternative to the union of the sons of the country. It is considered as the best option for the economic and social development. Considered as the "*legitimate option*", the single party is seen as "*the best way to a rapid economic growth and to a national integration*" (Carbone and Larouche St-Sauveur, 2006: 20). The single party must set an "authoritarian transition" as Samuel Huntington affirms it and must provide the State of a political order, laws and conditions for successful economic and social development. Once these conditions are fulfilled, democracy and citizen participation can be updated (Huntington, 2006: xiii). It becomes a "*State Modernization party*" and must play a crucial role in the national cohesion project (Sy, 1975: 1).

The African single party is created at the time of the Cold War and the regime is faced with antagonisms of the capitalist and communist blocks. Marxist ideology has influenced some African leaders for example in the People's Republic of Benin where the single party regime was clearly identified as a supporter of the eastern bloc. On the other side, in most African countries, the political system has been characterized by ideological vagueness that looks like a communist system because the party and its organs look like those of communist regimes. If the supporters of the single party didn't have a clear position for the block of the east, african leaders promoted socialist ideology at the same time. Economic development process and social transformations models have been copied from marxist theories (Debbash, 1966: 11-12). For the supporters of the african single party, it is better to understand its ideology as an "African socialism" or "national socialism". But between this African socialism and communism the relation is so closed. This statement has been affirmed by Seydou Sy as follow :

> Inspired by European socialist and communist models. It adopts an internal organization of "mass party". It's about integrating the most possible people in a party designed to control the government. From the top to the bottom, the party organization must have the most possible members for the life of the party which is actually run by activists aware of their responsibility for the nation (Sy, 1975: 2).

The mode of operation, including the restriction of freedoms of association and the prohibition of the struggles of social classes, was similar to the communist parties. The African single party was therefore a channel through which the communist bloc could expand its influence on the continent (Latoki 2009: 8-9).

3.2. The Single Party Methods in the Governance

The ideology of creating national unity and economic development of African countries was the basic of single parties. Initially, the operation of the single party relied on the bodies that govern the life of the party and activists as part of cells in cities and village committees. The party is therefore based on a pyramidal structure including subsections and regional federations. But the important decisions were taken by political board and / or the Executive Committee. The different structures such as youth and womens associations' action regulate the population in order to transmit the ideology. The citizens become de facto the militant of the single party like in Togo and in the former Zaire. They must show their belonging to the party by carrying the effigy of the president and founder of the party on their dresses in all circumstances. The must also buy the party's card. The single party becomes a mass party and is involved in coaching and training of the masses.

After a decade of the introduction of the single party, one of the purposes of prohibiting the proliferation of political parties or any activity that does not reflect the aspirations of the regime has been reached. Associations and political parties considered as an opposition were abolished or integrated into the single party. These oppositions are considered as a loss of energy, sources of instability and are able to destroy the national construction. The leaders of the single party considered multiparty as a luxury that the state's budget couldn't support (Oliver& Fage, 1970: 262). From the independence, the idea to annihilate any opposition was a project of single parties. This project was clearly defined during the congress of the MESAN[9] in the Central African Republic in August 1962 in these terms:

> We will break with no pity latecomers who persist in maintaining a negative opposition ... if there can be no question of dissolving the minority parties, or force their hand, unless special circumstances dictate it, it will be necessary to convert few unhappy people that foreign organizations support and encourage called opposition (Debbash, 1966: 83).

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[9] Mouvement pour l'Emancipation Sociale de l'Afrique Noire.

The absence of an opposition contributed to the cult of personality. The party leader became de facto the head of state, called the "Guide". In short, the right man without whom the nation cannot exist and its influence on the party sprinkled on the governance of State. The leader developed the program of the party and the country's politics (Sy, 1975: 4) and from the single party we arrive to the State-party. In the name of national unity, the single party has established an authoritarian state with corruption and tribalism as governance. A new concept appears in the governance called "regional balance". This balance is to incorporate in the state's administration, an ethnic group considered as a "minority" under previous regimes. With this, nepotism, corruption and ethnicity will become common attitudes in the management of the State under the single party. The party became a personal instrument based on family ties (Rossatanga-Rignault, 2012: 62).

3.3. The Mass Nationalism

The mass nationalism was the single party trademark. The support of citizens in to the party ideology was marked by the mass dictatorship. It is part of the nature and mode of dictatorial regimes. The dictatorship feeds itself by force and by the control of the mass. Samuel Huntington argues that the stability and strength of a political party depends on its institutions and its level of participation. He continues saying that a party with a solid foundation based on the mass is stronger than a party without a base (Huntington, 2006: 402). From this statement, the party's basic organs such as local federations constitute a breeding ground for recruitment and population control. The slogans in favor of national unity are launched towards the working classes in the cities and in the countryside for their memberships. The control of the mass allows the single party to understand the desires of the mass, using and manipulating them in manner to control the majority of the population.

More than two decades after the introduction of the single party in Africa, it is clear that the results were negative in most cases. The goals have not been achieved because of weak institutions established by these parties. The economic and social development has not started its takeoff. From the 1980s, the economic policy of the African States is confronted with the desiderata of the Bretton Woods institutions under the structural adjustment programs. The single party regimes which were governing African States were "*no longer able to provide basic social services, public services and infrastructure*" to their populations (Traore, 2010: 6). The entire economy was down and the population began to feel the negative effects of these programs. The influence of single parties and their leaders began to decline in front of the people. The nation building's project as a goal to create a national identity was a failure. It is in this context that the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the speech of La Baule in June 1990 opened the way to multiparty system and allowed the end of the single party for a time in the African continent.

4. DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL: ANNIHILATION OR THE STRENGTH OF THE OLD SINGLE PARTIES

The early 1990s was a turning point in the sub-Saharan countries. The gradual collapse of the Soviet bloc characterized by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the speech of the French president François Mitterand in June 1990 in La Baule who invited the heads of state to the emergence of new political institutions in Africa encouraged African people to seek for freedom in the mode of governance (Siliadin, 2014: 15). African leaders who ruled their countries with the single party have been invited to open the political space. They were forced to introduce multiparty as the expression of democracy and development. This change has not been operated smoothly. The African people have showed their hostility against these regimes through popular revolution. The single parties have thus operated mutations in order to keep the state apparatus.

4.1. The 1990s and The Weakness of the Single Parties in Africa

The winds of democracy and political changes that swept the continent from the 1990s have weakened single parties. Formerly known as a powerful political machine and having hegemony over the life of the state, the single party faced an opposition through popular protests. This opposition was conducted by the african civil society, students and lawyers. African leaders with their single parties have been taken over by the socio-political events that took place on their soil and faced internal and external pressures. Reforms were made for a "*significant introduction of multiparty politics in Sub-Saharan Africa*" (Carbone and Larouche St-Sauveur, 2006: 19). The reform permitted the creation of hundreds of political parties in which many associations got together to be a significant political force. The Front of Associations for Renewal[10] (FAR) under the

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[10] Front des Associations pour le Renouveau.

leadership of the LawyerYaovi Agboyibor, constituted a formidable machine in Togo in 1990. Through actions "*linking ability and political pressure from the street through popular mobilization*" the RPT regime of General Gnassingbé Eyadéma was seriously shaken. This situation opened the way to the democratic process after two decades of unchallenged power (Siliadin 2014: 16). The reforms were effective at the end of sovereign national conferences and new constitutions were adopted and the existence of political parties was included in the constitutions. The multiparty system became the hope for African people. As a hurricane, these reforms have weakened the old single parties who must deal with the opposition parties on the national political scene. Periods of "*democratic transition*" were introduced, and in the best cases, led by an opposition figure in order to set up new institutions and prepare for future democratic elections.

Democratic renewal has weakened all African dictatorial regimes. For example, regimes of Mathieu Kerekou, Mobutu Sese Seko, Paul Biya and Gnassingbe Eyadema, became fragile and relied on a small group of faithful members who tried to "live politically". In this context, the new opposition parties occupied the field and with some popularity expressed the desire to put to death the old single parties. In Togo, for example, as Jonas Siliadin pointed out, the transitional parliament from the National Sovereign Conference, with the goal of annihilating the former single party, decided to dissolve the RPT in 1991. He affirmed that "*it has been proceeded to send away from the administration, people suspected of belonging to the former single party. At the level of the security forces, the various staffs have been restructured*"(Siliadin, 2014: 53). In the same context, there will be defections from the ranks of single parties from some activists and executives who will join the opposition. In front of this situation that may completely destroy the single party politics, structural and organizational changes will be done in order to make alive the party in the African political microcosm.

4.2. Mutations of Single Party Regimes in Front of the Ideology of Democratic Changes

The single parties were not completely dissolved from the political arena in Africa with the rise of multiparty politics. In spite of the context of multiparty, single parties resisted to their political death. To exist, the strategy has changed in the perspective of the influence of the political life. This strategy was part of the forthcoming elections advocated by the sovereign national conference. One of the strategies was to implement the party in the area of the opposition parties in order to weaken its electorate. This mutation consisted of playing the democratic game through elections while developing a legitimate operational defense when the party would be under difficulties. Dahuku Péré, an important member of the RPT in Togo, attested very well these mutations of single parties into a political party. He affirmed that the strategy was to promote:

> An honest and objective criticism of the practices and methods of the Party (...) All together activists and leaders accordingly agreed a new contract policy making plenty of values, methods and practices conform to the new democratic order and rule of law they had resolutely decided to accept and assimilate (Siliadin 2014: 56).

The new strategies adopted by the former single party allowed them to rebuild their political health and to start gradually impose in politics. The President of the Republic is no longer part of the political board of the party and the former single party is found in the democratic game. Despite the reforms, most of the former single party didn't change their acronyms. They were preserved and some mobilization methods didn't even change.

However, some single parties were defeated during in the first democratic elections in Africa. The regime of Mathieu Kerekou was defeated by Nicephore Soglo in Benin during the presidential elections. Jerry Rawlings regime with his party the National Democratic Congress (NDC) handed over to the opposition in 2000. The same thing with the Socialist Party in Senegal which ruled the country since independence was also defeated in 2000 by the opposition represented by Abdoulaye Wade with his party the Senegalese Democratic party (PDS). The cases of Mali, Niger and even Côte d'Ivoire where the old single parties were defeated constituted some examples.

But it is clear that political change has not taken place in some African countries. The changes made by single parties at the beginning of the democratic process did not allow a change in the leadership of these states. The leaders at the head of the African States under the single party are still in power like in Cameroon, Republic of Congo, Djibouti or replaced at their death by their sons like in Togo and Gabon. If it is true that the State party has disappeared with the multiparty system, it is also true that the former single party continues to influence institutions and dominates the country's political sphere. Hamid Chriet emphasized that "*the supporters of the single party were very reticent towards multiparty because they did*

not want to receive criticism of their management of the public governance, but they were also afraid of losing certain privileges" (Chriet, 2015: 1). Former nostalgic members of the single party permitted a regression of democratic values. The intrusion of the army in the political system favored the dominance of old single parties in the democratic system in Africa. The army is at the service of the old new single party by using brutality and intimidation toward the opposition. The resignation of the population, the lack of financial support of the opposition allowed the former single parties to dominate the political arena.

The political renewal showed at the beginning of the democratic era has gradually been transformed into the institutions submission to the political power. Reforms made by these former single parties are called "minimum" and do not fit with the logic of changes (Carbone, 2007: 4). All sectors of the administration were in the hands of the regime and the old procedures of governance known as ethnicism, nepotism are encouraged as at the time of the single party. The political alternance as a guarantee of a healthy democracy does not exist in some African countries where the ruling party always wins the presidential and parliamentary elections since the democratic process in 1990 to the present days. Elections therefore become opportunities to legitimize the power of autocratic regimes. Since the end of 2002[11], constitutions were revised and the mandate's limitation is removed in order to allow a life term for leaders and their control on parliament. Despite a favorable electoral code to the ruling party, elections are still marked by fraud and irregularities.

4.3. A Peaceful Democracy or a Soothed Dictatorship

It is necessary to ask whether the mode of governance in Africa is part of logic of peaceful democracy or soothed dictatorship. Supporters of the former single party still in power in African countries affirm that their domination guarantee 'peace and stability' for their countries. The African Presidents with their 'dominant' parties have an average of thirty years in power and even fifty years in the case of Togo. Despite a long reign, the indicators are still in the red. These countries are always under international financial assistance. The locking of the political system and the exclusion of a part of the population in the governance of the state does not allow a peaceful democracy. Despite an emergence plans to be achieved in 2030, 2040 etc. african countries conducted by the former single party constituted a curiosity. These particular countries with their rulers or their sons as new leaders can be called soothed dictatorships or just dictatorships in Africa in the 21st century.

5. CONCLUSION

Overall, African countries after independence have faced political instability that have consequences on the management of the state. Initially, the period before independence was marked by a proliferation of political parties that animated the life of former African colonies. After independence, the multiparty system was removed initially by the parties that fought for the creation of the new state and then by military coups. These two factors have established the single party that ruled the African states from 1963 to 1990. During this period, national unity and national harmony are put forward to promote the development of African countries. But it is clear that the single regime has not brought prosperity and development in African countries. The cult of personality, authoritarianism and mismanagement had a negative impact on the mode of governance in Africa. From the year 1990, the situation has changed and the unique party system have been called to change the methods of governance and to promote multiparty as a guarantee of democracy. But in some sub-Saharan countries, the same parties are still in power and political institutions are under their influence. Democracy seems impossible because of the locking of the political system and the weakness of the opposition.

However, despite the control of State the old single party and its political governance have shown its limits today in Africa. These leaders and their parties have nothing to offer to their people after a long reign. Recent movements and revolutions of the population in Africa recently have shown the negative consequences of dictatorships and single party regimes in Africa.

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[11] The first changing of the constitution was conducted in Togo in December 2002. It allows President Eyadema Gnassingbe to run for a third term and to grant de facto a life term. The new constitution also provides for vote in one round instead of two.

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