

Christianity as a Colonization Tool: A Postcolonial Analysis of Chinua Achebe's Arrow of God

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Abstract

This paper seeks to elucidate the intricate connection between Christianity and colonialism in Chinua Achebe's novel Arrow of God. It aims to examine the intentional utilization of Christianity by European missionaries as a means of colonizing indigenous African populations, employing the theoretical framework of postcolonialism. This method focuses on the examination of ideology as a nuanced yet potent instrument used by colonizers to suppress indigenous societies, both before and during their attainment of freedom. The narrative surrounding colonialism's utilization of Christianity to advance its ideological objectives underscores the significant role that racial identity and cultural conflict played. The narrative crafted by Achebe sheds light on the significant ramifications of colonialism on Igbo priests and deities, resulting in the imposition of Western cultural norms, governance structures, and religious practices, ultimately leading to the erosion of indigenous belief systems. Achebe, a renowned African author, has exerted a substantial and contentious impact on the resistance against colonialism and the restoration of African identity. Achebe portrays the arrival of white missionaries and the subsequent eradication of native beliefs by using a dramatic portrayal of African religion. The storytelling method employed in this context serves to underscore the intricate impacts of colonialism on African societies. This article's immediate source material is "Arrow of God," and its main focus is content analysis. In addition, a range of secondary materials, including scholarly publications, encyclopedias, and internet sites, have been engaged with and duly referenced.

Keywords: Christianity, Ideology, Post-colonialism, Arrow of God

Introduction

The term "post-colonialism" encompasses a wide variety of ideas and concepts. It was coined by Childs and Williams in their book "An Introduction to Postcolonial Works" to describe the repercussions of authoritarian authority that occurred throughout the process of colonization (Childs and Williams, 1997)." The colonizers used various religious techniques to exert a more benign control over the colonized peoples. According to Althusser, using ideological instruments makes

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subjects willing to surrender voluntarily to the ruling class' power. Most of these worldviews are the product of the media, religious institutions, and educational systems (Loomba, 2001). Chinua Achebe is an author who writes in the postcolonial genre. In his work, he tries to demonstrate the negative impact that views like this can have.

Chinua Achebe's pious parents' Christian views greatly influenced his childhood in Nigeria. His father taught catechism for a Christian missionary organization, and he imparted these principles to the congregation. Achebe's neighborhood was predominantly Christian despite being encircled by a conventional Christian environment. They took part in traditional religious rituals, made offerings to their gods, and sang hymns in Igbo during prayer. Achebe highlights how many lifestyles coexisted during his early years, describing it as an "intersection of civilizations." Despite the vast diversity of beliefs and behaviours, the residents displayed a semblance of harmony and peaceful coexistence.

A significant turning point in Achebe's life was when he was first exposed to English at eight, a skill he diligently developed through regular sessions. Early language proficiency would later prove invaluable in his writing endeavours, enabling him to convey to a global audience the many complex facets of Nigerian culture and tradition.

After becoming fluent in Igbo, Achebe was overjoyed to be of Igbo descent and spoke about his heritage with a sense of pride. (Chua, 1996). Throughout their educational experiences, it would appear that most African writers, including Chinua Achebe, were profoundly influenced by the imperialist reality in Africa. After some time, it started to appear as a recurring motif in their works. Instead of accepting a scholarship to study medicine and pursue a career in that field, Achebe decided to pursue his interests in history, theology, and English literature. While teaching African literature to Nigerian students, he was required to read various authors, including Graham Greene and Joseph Conrad. How Achebe perceived Africans and Africa to be portrayed in these works considerably influenced his writings. Achebe was naturally opposed to the stereotypes and misconceptions that European authors had developed about Africa in their literature, and he expressed this opposition in his work. As a result, Achebe worked hard to create a novel and more authentic representation of Africa. As an author, he is responsible for several different regulations and tasks. He believes that books have a significant amount of educational potential, particularly in a society that places a higher value on community and togetherness than individualism. The author owes it to his readers to educate them about the author's home nation and the information they are legally

entitled to know to challenge or escape colonial authority. This presents us with two competing hypotheses that attempt to explain African literature's impact on society. The sensitive quality of African literature can be attributed, in part, to the fact that it functions as a critique of the writing done during the colonial era. The next stage is recognising that authors and critics are responsible for acting as cultural guides for future generations. (Achebe, 2007). Achebe's writings share a few characteristics, the most important of which is that they cover a wide variety of subjects and themes. He is relentlessly refuting notions, beginning with the idea that Africa is America's adversary. Because Africa was exposed to Europe's faults, it will never lose its pristine status. Throughout his works, Achebe places a strong emphasis on the significance of the matter at hand.

Africa must develop its own values and theoretical framework to dispel the idea that it is at odds with Europe. The preparatory stage lays the groundwork for the subsequent phases. Africa needs to showcase its distinct qualities without trying to outcompete Europe. Furthermore, looking into how literature functions in today's politics and society is imperative. During his early years, Chinua Achebe lived in a Christian home and was mentored by his father. During his formative years, this upbringing exposed him to the strategies used by catechists to convert Africans to Christianity. "Arrow of God," the author's well-known book, attempts to provide a comprehensive understanding of African religious practices. Achebe's skill as a storyteller is evident in his deft portrayal of the tension brought about by European missionaries who introduced Christianity while undermining native African beliefs. Achebe deftly captures the complex forces at play, shedding light on the collision of civilizations and its profound impact on African society.

The relevant literature will be presented in this part. In his piece titled "Arrow of God," published in 2021, Deepak Shinde discusses the clash between European colonization and indigenous Igbo culture. In his research paper, Mpalive-Hangson Msiska states that "Ezeulu's relationship with the forces of Western culture might be understood as both strategic and subversive." (2018) Msiska also says that "Ezeulu's relationship with the forces of Western culture might be understood as both strategic and subversive." He ponders how a leader and his followers might react if confronted with a direct threat to their way of life and the intelligent system by an opponent with more potent spiritual and destructive energy. His mode of thought and his natural competence contribute to the formation of his style. In addition, Chinua Achebe's collaborative writing approach illustrates the innate cognitive stimulation that promotes adaptability. It is more likely to occur during cyclical transition than due to a desire for superiority or self-aggrandizement.

Ezeulu, like the proverbial bird, needs to change his methods to avoid being undermined or destroyed by the new technologies of power. He is in danger of any of these outcomes. It must be demonstrated that indigenous knowledge may solve the problem of unwelcome external encroachment. When religions advocate for the colonization and standardization of the treatment of non-civilized people, this practice is frequently criticized. According to Zouche, the "inferior position" of Africans was even sanctioned by religion when Biblical interpretation was used to claim that the negro race was a lesser race to serve the higher white race. This was because the negro race was considered inferior to the white race. Such acts often seemed evidence to defend the colonization of Africa and the occlusion of millions of Africans as part of a goal to civilize the people of the continent who lived there (Zouche, 2002). After gaining control of the Igbo region, the colonial rulers intended to institute a new form of governance.

The people concerned have created it unmistakable that they like to warrant chiefs to be appointed. Because the warrant, a piece of colonial legal paperwork, is the only source of his legitimacy, he will be referred to as the chief from this point on. When the warrant chief system was implemented, many African communities were in chaos. The colonial authority used these warrants as puppets to control African communities. Many leaders concluded they did not want to act as puppets for the colonizers. People such as Ezeulu reacted to the administrative system that was in place (Batra, 2013). To reestablish one's identity, it is necessary to investigate the loss of that identity. As a form of counter-discourse, a decolonization process ought to be implemented. The method of preserving one's cultural frameworks and ideals is what we mean when discussing decolonization. The goal of decolonization is to recreate the natural rhythms of existence that were destroyed (Nayar, 2008).

2. Discussion

One of the colonial state's fundamental goals was to avoid monarchy and forestall the establishment of dictatorial power. The Africans, on the other hand, believed that their predicament required a solution that could be identified. They were worried that the hegemony of white men would eventually lead to the destruction of their customs, values, and sense of who they were as individuals. Because of this, they attributed this power to God to shed light on the impending outcome.

Their religious ideas significantly impacted their perspective that white men would eventually obtain positions of control. One sentiment expressed the fear that: "Upon the advent of the Caucasian individual, the entirety of our customs will be utterly eradicated, akin to the manner in which illumination eradicates obscuri

ty." It was believed that the strength that the white man possessed sprang from a solitary and powerful deity, representing brilliant authority. The topic discussed earlier is investigated by Achebe (1964), who highlights the reverence displayed toward the deity on the eighth day, which represents the deity's significant significance inside the community. Achebe uses the character of Ezeulu to illustrate the process of introspection following his incarceration. This helps to bring attention to the realization that the deity, Ulu, was the one who provoked his exploitation as a means of exacting retribution against the Umuaro community for their disobedience to its control.

Osterhammel asserts that the Iberian and English colonial thinkers of the 16th century pompously regarded European advancement as a contribution to a divine plan for the exemption of the pagans, as well as a secular duty to "civilize" the "barbarians" or "savages" to achieve a global mission. These assumptions about the superiority of European culture serve as the foundation for these remarks (Sugirtharajah, 2004). It was much simpler for the Europeans to achieve their goals because the religion practised in the colonies did not have a canonical sacred text. Even after it became clear that their theological concepts were profound and old, the colonists still recognized the necessity for conversion. In the view of Ashcroft, Christianity might be characterized as an "accretion religion" (Ashcroft et al., 1998). It makes repeated attempts to incorporate the customs and rituals of the colonial people. For example, several pre-colonial religions and African churches coexisted with one another. It is incredible how quickly Christianity spread across Africa in comparison to Europe.

Because of the work that they did, a sizeable percentage of the native population became Christian as a result of their efforts. Ezeulu is widely recognized across Africa as the most revered cleric. The festival of gourd stalks and the feast of young yam are African celebrations held in honour of the new moon. Ezeulu was in charge of everything, including planting the crops, hosting the New Year's celebration, and bringing in the harvest. Even though he was the head priest, he maintained a prominent role in his community and was regularly called to make decisions. In modern-day Africa, "religion" refers to a completely different concept than its European conquerors understood it to signify. Even though African religious traditions differ significantly from one another in many specifics, they share many core beliefs.

In the article "Okot p'Bitek's Critique of Western Scholarship on African Religion," written by Samuel O. Imbo, the author analyzes the true nature of religion in Africa from the perspective of Okot (Imbo, 2004). According to Okot, religion has never been given a name since people in traditional African societies never separat

ed their religious practices from other aspects of daily life. They consider their relationships with the afterlife, marital rites, and employment practices to be sacred traditions. According to Okot, Western academics ignore this problem and incorrectly believe that Africans do not retain solid religious convictions. They were more concerned with the propagation of their faith than with the religions of the African people they encountered. At the beginning of the book, it looks like Ezeulu has a lot of power. Still, as he continued to think about the nature of his authority and the context in which he would be wielding it, he became increasingly anxious. The aptitude for logic he possessed was being examined right now. He was aware that to prevent the loss of life among the people, he needed to proclaim three significant feasts. Ezeulu expressed scepticism on the veracity of this information. He thought about the degree to which he had control over the year, the harvests, and the population. The Chief Priest of Ulu was obliged to demonstrate much more than that. If he did not declare the day, there would be no celebration, planting, or harvesting. Was he able to decline the offer, though? No former example was found, a Chief Priest raising a protest. As a result, such a thing could not occur. It is inconceivable for him to act in such a manner (Achebe, 1964). Carroll states in his book that Chinua Achebe has selected the ideal figure to symbolize this predicament and that he praises Achebe for doing so.

Ezeulu was a self-centred and stubborn guy who attempted to exert control over other people by conflating his ambitions with those of God (Carroll, 1980). Even though Ezeulu detested that he had to share Ulu's authority with the other significant men in the village, he maintained a close relationship with Ulu. Even if he abhorred the dialectical approach to dominating people and craved direct control, he couldn't achieve either of these goals in Africa because of how the political system was structured there. The leaders of the numerous tribes that could be found in Africa made judgments, and most of those decisions were unanimous. As the book progresses, the narrative takes on a more compelling quality. Famous man Nwaka violated Ulu's orders and attempted to instigate a fight between them.

The succeeding priests opposed Nwaka in this conflict because they were dissatisfied with the subordinate roles and division to which they had been assigned. Nwaka was encouraged to start the struggle, and assurances were made that the python deity Ezidemili, who had long sought Ezeulu's position of power, would help him if he did. They planned to stir up trouble over some property to gain their desired outcome. The white males were finally able to put an end to the political and theological conflict. In addition, the people of Okperi enraged the people of Umuaro when they welcomed white missionaries with open arms. Carroll postulates that the book's author wants the reader to identify with Ezeulu. As a result, after describing the problems that tested Ezeulu's logic and his fight with

rival monks, the author describes the beginning of the war (Carroll, 1980). In addition, the white government is involved in these struggles. Based on what the author has said about him, it seems likely that he is another Umuaro leader. A sharp breeze came in at dusk, hinting at an unexpected weather shift. This foul, chilly wind posed the most significant danger to Africa since it was able to seize the naive European who exposed himself to it and received its kiss of death. This was Africa's greatest peril. He would ponder whether horrible rituals were carried out in the African forests during the night or whether it was simply the cadence of the darkness that pervaded the continent (Achebe, 1964). Because Captain Winterbottom told the story from his point of view, which was very different from that of the Africans, it was necessary to point out that when he described the beginning of the conflict, it appeared to be an entirely different situation. This event was essential because the narrative was presented by Captain Winterbottom from his point of view, which was very different from that of the Africans.

After five years of warfare, the captain finally reached the village, took down the cannons, and quickly became famous. In collaboration with Ezeulu, he was to decide about the land component. When Ezeulu agreed to return the land to Okperi, the white officials stated that he was the only person who was honest about the decision. As a result, he earned a reputation for honesty. He developed a strong friendship with Captain Winterbottom as a direct consequence of this. The colonists sincerely desired to convey the impression that everything said about them and the people who backed them was accurate.

Carroll believes "telling the truth" is essential to Ezeulu's strategy to restore Ulu's magnanimity. When he declared, right before the war was about to start, that Ulu would not continue to support it, he won the favour of the white men. This was soon before the war began. Ezeulu understood what Captain Winterbottom was trying to tell him, thanks to Winterbottom. This happening occurred as a part of an effort to strengthen the relationships that Ezeulu had with the white missionaries. While simultaneously undermining Ezeulu's position as the head of the African religion, this strategy succeeded in bringing a member of Ezeulu's family into the church. The church was responsible for reading and understanding the Bible as one of its obligations. Protestants were the ones who were responsible for making the Bible available to the general public in translations that could be understood. They also encouraged people to read the Bible.

They reasoned that since the words of the Bible could not be changed in any way, it was inappropriate to discuss or analyze them in public. Consequently, Protestant churches spread across the lands they had conquered and formed new churches there. They were affiliated with the English and Overseas Bible Associa

tion in their activities. They devised a strategy that consisted of three distinct parts. They began by seeking to do away with the people's "useless" and "heathen" practices. Next, they proposed the Bible as the only medicine for their disease. Finally, they successfully implemented their strategy through ideologically driven healthcare and education institutions. Protestants who do not have Bibles are just as unprepared for defence and assault as soldiers who do not have guns (Sugirtharajah, 2001). These devoted Christians in the evangelical movement believed that proclaiming the Word of God was a "divine calling." They thought the Bible was the cornerstone of England's power and prosperity. As a result, they desired to instil these achievements and the values of the magnificent nation in the impoverished native populace. Educating people was not this program's central focus; it was intended to promote Christian literature. They didn't want to appear to be a biased group trying to evangelize the local community, either, because they didn't want that perception. They portrayed themselves as a trustworthy organization that only carried out the routine and seemingly harmless activity of delivering Bibles (Sugirtharajah, 2001).

According to Sugirtharajah, the colonized people are quoted as saying, "In the beginning, we had the land, and you had the Bible; today we have the Bible, and you have the land" (2004). The most critical issue was not enough to simply read the Bible. The mandatory command was that everyone also needed to attend church regularly. According to Stirrat (1992), the church utilizes its position as the keeper of an unchangeable legacy to justify its existence and exercise authority over others. Humanity was reassured by the church that it was the only way to reach God and truth and the sole channel through which God could communicate with people (Stirrat, 1992). The inhabitants of Umuaro believed that Ezeulu was responsible for the presence of white people and their ability to stay alive. This was because Ezeulu collaborated with the white government and sent his son to the church.

In fact, Ezeulu instructed his child to attend church regularly to preserve the purity of his religion and shield it from the unknown influence and knowledge of white people. Okot contends that missionaries' teachings are pointless to people of African descent and have no impact on how they approach life. Okot then inquires why the colonists continued to attend church services despite their inability to comprehend Christianity. He contends that colonised people did not participate in the church to have their sins forgiven because they did not have access to Christianity. He believes that they were helpless since the church was the only method for Africans to acquire wealth and power, which were the church's primary pulls for Africans. He also believes they had no other options (Stirrat, 2008).

To hasten the natives' transformation into Christians, it was vital for the

missionaries to instil in them a sense of embarrassment concerning their religious practices and ways of life. In addition, to persuade the Africans that the Bible is the only book from which one may find salvation, they intertwined historical facts and stories from the Bible (Stirrat, 1992). Oduche first refused Ezeulu's request to migrate to the church when Ezeulu first asked him to do so; nevertheless, as time passed, he became increasingly attracted by the English language and the culture of the United States, and he longed to learn both.

Native converts now look at their lives through new lens provided by the Bible, and every element of their lives may be analyzed using the Bible as a resource. Missionaries attempted to portray the local practices and values as corrupt and evil to spread the church's intellectual influence and replace them with their own. This was done to replace the local traditions and values with their own. Oduche decided to commit this act to draw attention to himself after hearing a preacher claim in the past that a faithful Christian would be willing to kill a python.

To justify his actions, he even invoked a passage from the Bible. It is a fallacy to assert that the Bible bans people from taking the lives of snakes. Moses, a veteran soldier and a devout Christian, was lauded by many for endeavouring to end the conflict between Christianity and African tradition. Following the dismissal of Oduche's concerns against the slaughter of pythons, the missionary offered to give him the honorary name of Peter in honour of Saint Peter to encourage him. When Oduche got caught by the snake, everyone blamed Ezeulu because it was said that he had forced his child to go to church. Both he and Python, the God of Ezidemili, regarded his son's conduct as disrespectful. Ezeulu believed that it was inappropriate for him to send his kid Oduche to church. White males were getting more substantial; hence, if Africans wished to fight back against the Europeans, they would need to know their way around. This is because the Europeans were getting more powerful. Ezeulu wanted his son to serve as his eyes and ears so that he could keep learning even while he was at church. However, he was not confident that the church's teachings would affect his kid. It was a conundrum to him as to what to do with it.

In the beginning, he believed that some people needed to grasp the traditions of his own deity. The reason was that the white man had come in with such might and conquest. He approved for his son Oduche to be appointed as the one in charge of analyzing the unconventional approach. Ezeulu formed this opinion of the white man's intelligence because he had encountered Wintabota and been told stories about his people. In addition, he wishes for himself to develop due to his experiences. Ezeulu, on the other hand, was beginning to feel concerned that the novel religion was analogous to that of a leper. In the past, Ezeulu expressed

concern about how his kid progressively transformed into a different person (Achebe, 1964). The church's missionaries' work was so fruitful and efficient that it allowed them to usher in something novel.

Ezeulu was concerned that the gods' prophecy, which stated that white people would take over their land, might actually come true. As a consequence of this, he came to the conclusion that it would be prudent to maintain his son's involvement with the church. What would happen if, as a significant number of oracles predicted, white people invaded and took control of the region? In this particular situation, it would be a good idea to have a member of your family join his band (Achebe, 1964). As was previously said, one of the primary goals of the missionaries was to replace traditional beliefs and values with those based on Christian doctrine. The ringing of the bell kept up a dreary monotone throughout the service. One of Ezeulu's friends, Akuebue, paid him a visit once and informed him about the limits of his authority and the fact that he was still accountable for his choices, such as adhering to the law and taking his son to church. As he contemplated the power that Ezeulu possessed, he once more began to feel antsy. Indirect colonial rule succeeded direct colonial authority and was implemented similarly to each province's governor. It was problematic since no single power controlled the entire Igbo culture.

It was one of the primary goals of the colonial state to avoid becoming a dictatorship; hence the selection of a monarch was avoided. In any case, Africans believed there was no way out of their situation. They believed that the dominance of white men would inevitably lead to the destruction of their traditions, values, and sense of self; as a result, they attributed this power to God to explain whatever would occur. This belief was based on their religion that white men would eventually take over. "All of our traditions will be obliterated once the white guy arrives, just as light dispels darkness. The strength of the white man originates from the one and only genuine God, who has a brilliant presence. Every eighth day, we provide a sermon about the God that we love. As was previously said, one of the primary objectives of the missionaries was to replace traditional beliefs and values with those based on Christian doctrine. The ringing of the bell kept up a dreary monotone throughout the service. One of Ezeulu's friends, Akuebue, paid him a visit once and informed him about the limits of his authority and the fact that he was still accountable for his choices, such as adhering to the law and taking his son to church. As he contemplated the power that Ezeulu possessed, he once more began to feel antsy. Indirect colonial rule succeeded direct colonial authority and was implemented similarly to each province's governor. It was problematic since no single power controlled the entire Igbo culture.

Before he could focus on European missionaries, he realized that he needed to defend the peace within his own population to preserve African religion. He had the opportunity to serve as king, but he declined it, resulting in him devouring a substantial amount of time behind bars. The longer he was held in custody, the more often he was vindicated of all charges. Consequently, it appeared that he was unintentionally receiving support from other white guys, which enabled him to depict himself as robust and determined. He desired to illustrate to his soldiers that he was not to blame for the arrival of the white men, and he did so by demonstrating this to them. After some time had passed, his family eventually began to recognize his worth and started paying him visits in prison. When he returned to Umuaro, the prominent members of the community came to see him and asked him to declare the New Yam Feast, but he declined their request. He said there were just three yams left and that he would have to consume all of the remaining yams to signal the beginning of the feast. Ezeulu maintained her strength even though she knew the peasants would be deprived of their crops if the feast was not publicized.

His followers believed he was powerless because he could not stop Ulu when he attempted to interfere. At the same time, his detractors asserted that he was looking for vengeance because the day in question was essential to the Umuaro community, and he was going through a challenging time. Relations between Africans deteriorated after the entrance of sinless missionaries and their capture of the administration. There were two distinct groups of followers among the Africans who adhered to the teachings of Ulu and Christ. The two groups were unable to maintain their unity and seeing white males occupy the position of ultimate control made them increasingly drawn to Europeans as potential allies. Ezeulu, a famous priest among the Igbo people, disapproved of their request since he believed that the current circumstance was significant for African religious practice. According to church missionaries who had been seeking to create strife among the community, Africans may offer the yams to the Christian God in exchange for protection from Ulu's wrath by trading the yams for a blessing. The concept was well received by the Umuaro people, and as a result, they began gathering yams to present them as offerings to the Christian God. Following that, individuals initiated harvesting practices in the name of the Christian God. Ezeulu was concerned that the introduction of European missionaries would result in the eradication of African religious practices. The conflict erupted directly from the monarchs' unequal treatment of the African people and their limited delegation of authority to a select few chiefs and areas. Ezeulu made a valiant effort to defend his people and the African religion against their attackers, but in the end, he was unable. In addition to Ezeulu's child, every African person converted to Christianity and pledged their loyalty to the Christian God.

3. Conclusion

Considering the comprehensive analysis presented thus far, it is reasonable to infer that the dissemination of Christianity constituted a notable progression in the chronicles of human civilization. However, this transformation was not without repercussions, particularly for the indigenous communities whose traditions were abruptly and adversely affected. The communities experienced substantial changes due to the fraternity's fundamental structure being disrupted, the established social framework being disrupted, and the turnover in leadership. Christianity was perceived by numerous Africans as a gradual yet persistent intellectual assault that diminished their ancient beliefs to superstition. Having his authority taken over, Ezeulu, the esteemed guardian of the African religion, needed help to strategize his people's enduring existence.

Therefore, the absence of a cohesive plan posed a significant risk to the viability of his town. The efforts of white missionaries were dedicated to the conversion of a substantial number of Africans to Christianity, and their collective endeavours played a pivotal role in achieving this result. The action undertaken can be interpreted as a purposeful endeavour to assert white dominance over other racial categories rather than being solely motivated by religious conversion. The conquerors, driven by a perception of their own advanced culture, had the belief that it was their sacred obligation to impart knowledge to the ostensibly rudimentary African tribes. They employed several tactics to extend their dominion under the guise of civilizing efforts, often employing Christianity as a tool for colonialism.

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