



An analysis of Alick Macheso's Music in Promoting Mediation and Conflict Resolution

Richard Muranda & Dorothy Goredema

Midlands State University, Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Music has long been a powerful medium for social commentary, advocacy, and conflict resolution. In Zimbabwe, Alick Macheso's music has emerged as a critical platform for addressing issues of peace, harmony, and interpersonal conflict. Through a qualitative approach, the paper explores how Macheso's three purposively selected songs, Tererai, Kutadzirana, and Chikuru kurarama are useful as tools for communication, offering messages that encourage mediation, self-reflection, reconciliation and positive societal values. Drawing on critical discourse analysis and thematic interpretation, the study highlights how Macheso's select lyrical content integrates traditional values, cultural metaphors, and everyday experiences to convey messages that resonate with his audience. Through using a contextualised appeal to his lyrics within Zimbabwe's socio-political landscape, the paper examines the broader implications of his chosen songs to promote peace and resolve conflicts in communities. Findings suggest that Macheso's music plays a significant role in fostering dialogue, challenging harmful behaviours, value to life, and inspiring collective response toward peaceful coexistence.

Introduction

Music transcends entertainment; it serves as a vehicle for social transformation, cultural expression, and conflict resolution. Across Africa, musicians have utilised their art to confront societal challenges, bridging divides and advocating for peace. Zimbabwe has faced periods of political instability, economic difficulties, and social tensions, often leaving communities fragmented. Music has historically played a role in addressing these challenges, providing a space for reflection, expression, and healing. This study chose Alick Macheso to explore the role of conflict resolution and mediation through music. Macheso was born in 1968 in Shamva, a mining and farming community in Mashonaland West, Zimbabwe. He became a prominent sungura bass guitarist with Khiama Boys under the mentorship of Nicholas Zachariah in the early 1980s. Together, they recorded songs that became popular among the population. In 1999, Macheso went solo and formed the Orchestra Mberikwazvo Band, which he leads to this day. He serves as the bassist, lead guitarist, and lead vocalist of the band. Since 1999, he has released ten albums. Macheso, a celebrated figure in sungura music, is known for embedding profound messages in his songs, drawing from Shona cultural norms and values (Sibanda, 2020). His songs often address everyday socio-political issues such as family disputes, jealousy, greed, and moral decay, using storytelling and proverbs to offer solutions that promote understanding (Pfukwa, 2016). By addressing these themes, this paper argues that Macheso's music provides conflict resolution, resonating deeply with audiences facing similar struggles in their



lives. Through his lived experiences, Macheso imparts wisdom through his songs to support the findings of this paper. In Zimbabwe, sungura music, popularised by artists such as Alick Macheso, has become an influential genre for articulating the struggles, hopes, and aspirations of ordinary people (Mutonya, 2014).

The authors focus on Macheso's ability to communicate messages of peace and conflict resolution through his music. The article draws insights from the song "Teerera" to explicate issues of peace and reconciliation in the family context involving parents and their progeny. The song "Kutadzirana" brings to the forefront an appreciation of the fact that people face unavoidable misunderstandings that need to be resolved peacefully. Such misunderstandings can be used to build relationships and foster mutual understanding among people in the family and society. The crown of the paper comes when the song "Chikuru kurarama" is brought under the spotlight, as it underscores the sanctity of life. The authors demonstrate that through the song and Ubuntu, society ought to respect the endowment of life. According to Ubuntu, life is sacred, which compels humanity to eschew violence and causing death; hence, all people are required to live in peace with others. If individuals have sharp disagreements, they should part ways peacefully without engaging in violence. From the selected songs, the paper addresses issues of social differences and reconciliation while emphasising forgiveness and unity. By analysing the emerging themes and their cultural relevance, the study demonstrates how Macheso leverages his platform to influence attitudes and behaviours, contributing to social harmony (Chikowero, 2015). Whereas Chikowero looks at the power of African music in a colonial context and does not focus on Macheso's sungura, the current paper centres on social relations, dealing with the lyrics addressing social cohesion, conflict resolution, and harmony among people. The study explores how audiences should perceive and internalise the inherent meanings carried in Macheso's selected songs. It also examines the long-term impact of his music on community relationships and individual behaviours, as well as how other Zimbabwean artists contribute to conflict resolution and whether they draw from similar cultural and philosophical frameworks. It highlights the transformative power of music in addressing conflicts, promoting unity, and fostering emotional healing.

Music in conflict resolution and peacebuilding

According to Gonzalvo (2023), music is a communal activity that unites people and fosters shared understanding. McDonald et al. (2022) opine that music is a universal agent that appeals to humans' social, psychological, and emotional well-being. Music resonates with individuals in different communities in various ways (Agawu, 2023). It can evoke deep emotions, foster connections, and address societal issues in ways that few other media can (Hesmondhalgh, 2023). According to Wan (2024), music has played an essential role in navigating complex social realities; in Zimbabwe, popular music has been harnessed to promote unity and conflict resolution. Lederach (1997), Hintjens and Ubald (2019), Andriamasy (2023), and Afolaranmi and Afolaranmi (2024) highlight how cultural expressions, including music, are crucial tools for building peace. Lederach (1997) points out that resolving conflicts is not just about negotiations at the political level but rather about creating spaces where people feel heard and understood. This is where music shines. Espinosa et al. (2023) extensively document the role of music in fostering social cohesion and mediating conflicts. Lederach (1997) further underscores the importance of cultural elements in peacebuilding. Music, as a form of art and cultural expression, creates safe spaces for dialogue and emotional connection, which are essential for healing and reconciliation (Deane, 2024). This aligns with how Zimbabwean music artists use songs to address family, societal, religious, and socio-political issues.

According to Turner (2021), music is a platform for social commentary and resistance. During the liberation struggle, popular music artists used music to critique colonial rule (Chitofiri et al., 2017;



Gwerevende, 2022; Marara, 2023). Post-independence, musicians have continued to address political and social issues through song. Chitando (2002) highlights how Zimbabwean artists use music as a social agent to tackle issues ranging from political oppression to domestic affairs. Clarks and Lonsdale (2023) submit that music plays a critical role in shaping collective identity, which is essential for conflict resolution in divided societies. Frith (1996) argues that music helps communities affirm their shared identity, fostering a sense of belonging. In Zimbabwe, where political and ethnic divisions have led to social strife, music serves as a unifying force by reflecting shared cultural values and experiences. The above views suggest that music can address structural inequalities by amplifying marginalised voices. Music's ability to unite people is especially significant in Zimbabwe's post-colonial context, where nation-building efforts require tools that bridge ethnic and political divides (Curtis, 2008).

It should also be noted that music has an undeniable ability to heal. Scholars like Koelsch (2014) explain that music taps directly into emotions, helping to process grief, anger, and even joy. This emotional connection makes it a perfect tool for conflict resolution. Akombo (2006) notes that music is not just about individual healing; rather, music can also heal communities. As Brown and Volgsten (2006) posit, these communal music experiences create bonds that transcend differences, fostering unity and reducing social tensions. For a country like Zimbabwe, where political and ethnic divisions often run deep, the role of music cannot be underestimated. Another powerful aspect of music is its ability to create a shared identity. Frith (1996) opines that music helps people feel like they belong to something bigger than themselves. In Zimbabwe, this is particularly important. The country's history of colonialism, liberation struggles, and political upheaval has left scars (Maxwell, 1993), but music provides a way to bridge those divides. While there is a growing body of research on the role of music in conflict resolution, much of it focuses on Western contexts or large-scale political conflicts. There is relatively little academic work that looks at the grassroots impact of music in African societies, particularly in Zimbabwe.

Theory

The study embraces the Ubuntu philosophy as a guide to issues of peace and harmony in Macheso's chosen songs. This African worldview, popularised by thinkers such as Desmond Tutu (1999) and Nelson Mandela, aligns closely with the cultural and societal context of the study. Ubuntu emphasises interconnectedness, community, and the restoration of relationships, which are key elements in conflict resolution. Translated loosely as "I am because we are," Ubuntu highlights the interconnectedness of individuals within a community, prioritising collective well-being over individualism (Gade, 2012). Central to Ubuntu is the belief that humanity is expressed through compassion, empathy, and harmonious relationships. When conflicts arise, Ubuntu promotes reconciliation and restorative justice, seeking to rebuild relationships rather than assigning blame (Letseka, 2012). The Ubuntu philosophy fits the study well, as in Zimbabwe, music lyrics serve as a reflection of social and cultural values. Ubuntu advocates resolving disputes by repairing harm and rebuilding relationships rather than perpetuating division (Tutu, 1999). At public events, Macheso's live performances and traditional sungura music styles often diffuse tensions, uniting diverse audiences and fostering a sense of collective identity as a principle of Ubuntu: "togetherness." Through storytelling, Macheso's music conveys moral lessons, a cornerstone of the Ubuntu philosophy (Njogu, 2024). The Ubuntu philosophy fits the study well, as in Zimbabwe, music lyrics reflect social and cultural values.

Methodology

The researchers preferred a descriptive qualitative methodology to engage in language discourse (Nassaji, 2020). They used critical discourse analysis (CDA) to interrogate and unpack Macheso's three



selected sungura songs (Dewi, 2022). The songs “Teereraï”, “Kutadzirana”, and “Chikuru kurarama” were purposively selected based on their predominant focus on mediation, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding within the family, community, and society. The study employed Fairclough’s (1995) CDA to explore the song text, social cognition, and envisioned social context of the chosen lyrics. Through the analysis of the songs’ lyrics, the researchers emphasise meaning, principles of peace, mediation, and reconciliation within Zimbabwe’s social context (Hasminur et al, 2024). The chosen songs are in Shona, the mother language of the researchers, which enables them to explicate the veiled and explicit meanings. They also considered the vocal intonations and emotive expressions that the singer employs in articulating the lyrics. The selected song texts are examined in terms of mediation, highlighting the power of promoting conflict resolution and peacebuilding through music.

Macheso’s *Teereraï* (obey me) on family cohesion

The song “Teereraï” is situated within the context of the family nucleus to promote peace, unity, and togetherness in the spirit of Ubuntu. He implores, (*teereraï vana vangu vandakabara*), listen to me, the children I bore. The above text calls attention to a parent’s willingness to provide guidance and counselling to their progeny. Macheso emphasises the importance of children in a family working and living together as one entity. The text goes, (*pakukura vana vangu musashorane*), as you grow up, my children never demean one another, as he denounces looking down on others. He urges family members to show respect for one another, especially as they grow up. As an Ubuntu personality, Macheso urges that (*patadza mumwe wenyu tauriranai*), when one of you errs, kindly resolve through dialogue (*pamhanya mumwe wenyu dzoreredzanai*), if your kinsperson strays, restrain them. This context positions Macheso as a mediator of peace and conflict resolution. (*Ukaita zvoitsvene, newe uchagara wakaziva zvisingade mumwe wako mukurarama*) If you do well, you will know what is undesirable to others in life. Societal norms and values inform individuals about what is expected and not expected in society, thus shaping the behaviour and character of the people. To Macheso, this is an Ubuntu school with lessons for living harmoniously together.

The foundation of peace or hatred is critical during early family socialisation, making the call for unity and peace essential. He warns, (*mazvake mazvake munosvika poiko*), disunity will lead to nothing. In this, he dissuades members from acting as lone rangers and encourages collaboration. Understanding the consequences of good (*chakanaka*) and bad (*chakaipa*) behaviour helps maintain focus on desirable actions. Macheso asserts that (*ruzhowa pamusha iwirirano*), the defence of a home is unity, meant to (*mweya yetsvina itsvekenyedze*) avert evil spirits from invading. The climax of Macheso’s treatise emphasises that (*ukaziva chisingadiwe, muhupenyu unorarama zvakanaka*) recognising what is undesirable in life fosters peaceful living. Indeed, it is crucial to know and uphold societal expectations. Drawing from the ideas presented, the potential for peace is remarkably strong. Macheso concludes his discussion with (*chinhu chakanaka chakanakira tose, chinhu chakaipa chakaipira tose*), emphasising that any good is beneficial for all, while any evil harms all. Such words resonate, particularly when engaging with family and society at large, helping to temper extreme tendencies toward violence. The song “Teereraï” provides a context for conflict resolution, mediation, and peacebuilding, instilling the mindset of Hunhu/ Ubuntu expected of family members and, subsequently, society. He promotes peace and comprehension among families, who should also strive to be exemplary members of society. Society consists of individuals from diverse families, and these members can contribute to peacebuilding if they come from peaceful homes. In Macheso’s view, a family where unity prevails is ideal for raising peacemakers. From the family level, individuals become citizens of the nation, and thus their upbringing significantly influences their character; in this instance, a positive outlook is what Macheso aspires to.



The song “Teereraï” highlights the importance of addressing disputes through understanding and dialogue. Similarly, “Teereraï” addresses conflicts from family to societal structures, encouraging individuals to reflect on their actions and prioritise collective family well-being, which serves as a microcosm of community. Ubuntu’s emphasis on forgiveness and understanding as tools for healing is mirrored in Macheso’s songs to curtail betrayal and promote reconciliation. Macheso emphasises male responsibility and integrity in family life, reflecting Ubuntu’s view that individual behaviour impacts the community. Ubuntu extends beyond reflection to encourage reconciliation and healing. Macheso’s music often challenges listeners to take action to resolve conflicts and mend relationships. Macheso teaches acceptance and resilience in the face of loss or hardship, echoing Ubuntu’s focus on collective healing (Letseka, 2012). His themes and songs embody Ubuntu’s values of living together, respect, and interconnectedness, addressing not only individual struggles but also broader societal critical matters (Udah et al, 2025).

Kutadzirana kunoitika (conflicts do happen)

Through the above song, Macheso affirms that conflicts are bound to occur at different stages of life, arising from various reasons. Some reasons may be relational at both the family and societal levels. In his words, Macheso says, (*kutadzirana, kupopotedzana kunoitika*), conflicts, quarrels do happen, and people should appreciate this fact. The possibility of conflict among people may not be apparent to the public, even though it is unavoidable. Macheso explains the alluded esoteric fact (*ndizvo saka kwakava neshoko rinoti iro*), that is why there is a saying that goes (*chakafukidza dzimba idzi matenga iwaya*): people cannot know what is hidden behind closed doors. In reality, what happens behind closed doors is unknown to outsiders, but deep-seated issues do transpire. Despite the concealment of home life, Macheso says, (*kumwe kuburana kunoita kuti tinzwisisane*) that some of these squabbles help shape how people relate to one another. Macheso positively views the alluded fights, compelling those involved to forge mutual relationships and resolve conflicts through dialogue. He acknowledges that conflict can arise in marriage, families, churches, workplaces, and society.

Once people understand what others like and dislike, especially after a conflict, they should maintain positive ways of engaging and relating to one another. From the above, it is evident that the concept of non-violent coexistence can extend to society as a whole from just a few individuals. Macheso also believes that life is more important than engaging in violence for any reason. In Ubuntu, life is a precious gift from the creator and should be treated as sacrosanct. In the same song, he encourages people to part ways if they cannot agree. He discourages ill-treatment of one’s spouse through song, (*kutora mwanangu kumuita nhapwa aite nherera*) to treat my child like a captive and as an orphan. Here, Macheso’s stance is that one should return home to their parents if it means living like a slave. It is not humane to treat one’s wife or husband like a convict. Some spouses get maimed, while others die because they want to maintain appearances, even when they endure violence in marriage. His word of wisdom is that life transcends any wealth found in violent relationships.

The selected songs highlight the futility of escalating conflicts by addressing anger and destructive responses. His music calls for patience and calmness in resolving disputes (Sibanda, 2020). On the other hand, the song “Kutadzirana” instils a sense of hope, encouraging people to seek resolution through amicable means. Pfukwa (2016) opines that the track “Kutadzirana” emphasises the importance of forgiveness, portraying it as a pathway to healing and rebuilding relationships. It reflects on the destructiveness of holding grudges and the liberation that comes with reconciliation (Pfukwa, 2016). Macheso presents critical issues through music to underscore the unity and collective strength that emerge when individuals set aside their differences to work toward common goals (Mutonya, 2014). Cultural values and moral lessons are additional themes that can be gleaned from



this song, as Macheso uses traditional metaphors and proverbs to emphasise values such as respect, humility, and kindness.

Chikuru kurarama, life is prime

The song begins with the following text, which sounds more like a declaration to the audience: (*Ukaona muri vadanani muri mukomana ne musikana*), If you are in love as a young man and young woman (*muchangodanana kana kuti makadanana kare*), whether you have just fallen in love or have been in love for a long time (*muchinge musiri kunzwisisana nekuwirirana*), and you encounter some disputes. (*Mukaona kuti matadza kugadzirisana mega pachenyu*) If you fail to solve your misunderstandings independently (*wanai muyananisi, anokunyananisi*), find a mediator to help you resolve the differences. (*zvikaramba munotenderwa kunge muchisiyana*) If you cannot resolve, you are allowed to part ways. Through the song, Macheso presents a typical form of conflict between those in love. His aim is to let people know that some problems can be solved while others need mediation. He warns that when disputes arise, seeking resolution is critical rather than engaging in violence.

His words encourage peace through mediation to resolve disputes among those in love. The effort to engage a peace broker is an important aspect of Ubuntu that may result in peace or parting ways. Macheso is aware that while seeking resolution can work, he says (*zvikaramba munotenderwa kunge muchisiyana*). If a conflict is irreconcilable, those involved may be allowed to separate. As someone over 56 years old, Macheso recognises that conflicts among people in marriage, families, and communities are inescapable, regardless of what occurs in relationships. He underscores the value of life, emphasising that (*chikuru kurarama*), life is a principal gift. Despite differences that can escalate into violent clashes, people need to resolve issues without causing harm to others. If resolution fails, Macheso urges that (*zvikaramba munotenderwa kunge muchisiyana*) individuals are free to part ways before any physical abuse occurs. The critical point is maintaining peace, even if one has decided to leave. After leaving, there is a chance they may meet someone who could love them, irrespective of their past experiences. The song highlights life's importance, urging people to avoid murder and foster peace instead of violence. Regardless of how deeply one feels provoked, Macheso admits that (*zviitiko zvakaita saizvozvo, zvinowanikwa kwese*) such events occur worldwide, illustrating that conflict arises among people everywhere. Conflicts occur in (*kushamwari neshamwari*), among friends, (*nevavakidzani*) between neighbours, (*kumabasa zvakare vashandi nevashandirwi*) at workplaces, involving workers and employers, (*nevabereki mudzimba matigere imomu*) and parents in homes, (*muzvitenderowo, muteam neteam dzeparoad*) among religious groups and roadside acquaintances, (*vanosvika pakuzomboisirana zondo wani*) yet they manage to resolve issues and share the cowheels.

All his lyrics emphasise one key point: amidst all squabbles, people should endeavour to work out their differences. As a peace broker (*zvakana chese kutora matanho*), it is recommended to take measures (*pasazombowanikwa pachinzi pakuvadzana vamwe*) so that people do not injure one another (*nyangwe tingatadzirane, zvingaveiko*), regardless of the gravity of provocation (*zvisasvika mukuti tipesane zvinorwadza*) so that we do not part with bruises. His words are meant to avoid parting ways with pain (*munenge magona kusiyana zvichakanaka*), allowing for a peaceful separation. Macheso's treatise focuses on peace in conflict resolution. He emphasises the sacrosanctity of life when he says, (*kundisiya ndiri muupenyu*), leaving me alive, (*kundisiya ndichizvifambirawo*), leave me walking on my own (*chinhu chikuru kuva murarami*); the main thing is to be alive. This message reminds people of the value of life over the feeling of being wronged. When people part ways in peace, they may need each other in the future; hence, allowing everyone to continue to live is vital. People can consider reconciling as friends, married couples, or business partners as long as they are alive. Once one dies, the option of reconciliation is lost. In this statement, (*ramangwana tinosangana*), in the future, we may meet (*tinokwazisana*) and greet each other (*kumba vana vakadii*) regarding how the children are at home.



Macheso demonstrates how crucial it is for people to remain sober and allow others to live, even amid acute disputes. Finding another person who may show you true love as long as one is alive is possible. Macheso believes (*uchawana mumwe achakudawo, ane rudo newe ruzere*) you will find someone who will give you total love. This is why his song detests violence and the causing of injuries and death. The song reiterates the need to resolve disputes and allows all parties involved to leave with the gift of life. To Macheso, nothing is worth dying for (*chinhu chikuru kuva mupenyu*); the greatest thing is being alive (*ndakusiya urimupenyu*). To leave you alive (*kukusiya uchizvoifambirawo*) is to ensure you can walk independently. This guarantees that one can meet others who may wish to associate with them. All potential relationships, business deals, and hopes are shattered if one dies. With such an emphasis, Macheso sings about mediation, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding.

The notion of resilience and positive living is also present in Macheso's song "Chikuru kurarama", as it reflects on the hardships of life, encouraging perseverance and hope, and reminding listeners that challenges are temporary and can be overcome through unity and personal effort, a sentiment echoed by Chikowero (2015). In view of Ubuntu, "Chikuru kurarama" celebrates life itself and advocates for contentment and gratitude, emphasising that peace and happiness come from appreciating what one has (Mutonya, 2014). From the ongoing discussion, the study reveals that Macheso's music resonates deeply with Zimbabwean audiences due to its grounding in Shona traditions and relatable storytelling (Pfukwa, 2016). The study also submits that Macheso's songs impact behaviour as they encourage self-reflection and foster positive behavioural change, particularly in areas of anger management, forgiveness, and cooperation (Sibanda, 2020). Furthermore, by addressing common societal issues, Macheso's music creates a shared space for dialogue and understanding, promoting social cohesion (Mutonya, 2014). Lastly, the study reveals that Macheso's music aligns with conflict resolution strategies, offering practical and culturally relevant information for resolving disputes peacefully (Chikowero, 2015). Through Shona proverbs and traditional rhythms, he reinforces a shared cultural identity that resonates with Zimbabweans across different backgrounds. His use of sungura, a genre deeply tied to Zimbabwean culture, ensures that his music feels familiar and accessible. One of Macheso's most prominent themes is the resolution of family and relationship disputes, thus setting the context for a peaceful population.

Conclusion

Macheso's music transcends entertainment, serving as a powerful communication tool for peace and conflict resolution. His ability to blend traditional values with contemporary issues makes his work a relevant and impactful force for social change. By addressing the root causes of conflict and promoting forgiveness, unity, and resilience, Macheso offers a blueprint for navigating personal and communal challenges. The study posits that musicians like Macheso play a crucial role in shaping societal attitudes, providing insights that policymakers, educators, and community leaders can leverage to promote peace and harmony. Macheso's work is a testament to the music's command. By combining cultural traditions, heartfelt storytelling, and messages of forgiveness and resilience, Macheso has proven to be a vibrant voice for peace in Zimbabwe. His music does not just entertain; it educates, heals, and unites, making it a valuable tool for navigating the complexities of Zimbabwe as a modern society. Deeply rooted in Zimbabwean traditions, Macheso sings about family struggles, economic challenges, and social injustices, always with an eye toward reconciliation. His ability to use sungura music to address sensitive issues, such as broken relationships and conflicts, aligns with the principles of Ubuntu, a philosophy centred on togetherness and harmony (Ramose, 1999). Macheso uses storytelling to confront the pain of betrayal, ultimately encouraging forgiveness and healing. Music, as Eyerman and Jamison (1998) suggest, does not just reflect society; it can shape it. In Macheso's case,



his lyrics and melodies provide a mirror for Zimbabweans to see themselves, reflect on their struggles, and consider paths to resolution.

Macheso's songs in this paper serve as a moral compass, addressing conflicts within families and communities while promoting reconciliation and understanding. Sungura, a genre that has been popularised, is deeply ingrained in Zimbabwean culture. In view of the above, Pfukwa (2014) notes that the genre's storytelling tradition allows artists to address complex issues in relatable ways, making it an effective intermediary for conflict resolution. Macheso's music reflects the struggles and aspirations of everyday Zimbabweans, using familiar language, idioms, and cultural references to engage with their audience. This accessibility makes his music a powerful tool for fostering dialogue and promoting social cohesion.

As Pfukwa (2014) observes, Macheso's music educates and unites people. Macheso's ability to address complex social issues in the selected songs makes him a vital figure in fostering social cohesion. Thus, Macheso is not just a musician but a counsellor, moral guide, and, in many ways, a mediator. His music addresses a wide range of conflicts, from personal struggles and family tensions to broader societal issues. Beyond personal conflicts, Macheso's music also tackles larger social tensions. The three songs present a mediatory force, reminding listeners of the need for conflict resolution, reconciliation, and peacebuilding. This aligns with Lederach's (1997) idea that cultural tools like music are essential for sustainable peacebuilding.

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