

POLITICAL PARTIES AND POVERTY OF IDEOLOGY IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Political ideology is an important vehicle of a political party. And there is no political party without one or two manifestoes during their electioneering campaign, Nigerian parties seem to be suffering from ideological barrenness unlike what is obtainable in advanced democracy. Unless leaders of political parties form and maintain political ideologies on their stand, cross carpeting from one party to another will continue to exist, it is only in Nigerian that candidate worked against their parties when they failed to secure parties tickets to contest elections. Basically, Nigerian political parties have many similarities than differences, the only visible difference being their names, it is sad that we lack the opportunity to vote in term of party ideology rather we vote for personality. Political parties during the days of the late Obafemi Awolowo were driven by meaningful ideological stance. Today we lack parties that prioritize the needs of the citizens, what the country parades today are party that unashamedly lack ideology. Unfortunately, the electoral umpires continue to put on the ballot, parties whose manifestoes are unknown to the electorate, party which do not articulate any public policy decision. This paper address the importance of political party in a democratic atmosphere .It argued that despite the importance of political parties, Nigerian political parties have been manifesting ideological indisposition resulting to poverty of ideology. The paper adopts secondary source of data with clear suggestion that political party can only perform their fundamental roles as well as ensuring democratic consolidation through meaningful ideological disposition.

Keywords: Political Party; Ideology; Poverty; Election; Democracy; Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

With the spread of democracy in Africa and Nigeria in particular, the formation of political parties have gathered more momentum. Political party is *sin qua non* to electoral democracy and one of most complex and critical institutions of democracy is political party. The decades of 1990s witnessed what Huntington called the third wave of democratization for Africa (Omotola, 2009: 1), political parties are makers of democracy and neither democracy nor democratic institutions are thinkable without political parties. The functions and responsibilities of political parties in a democratic society cannot be over-emphasized. In fact political parties are not just serving as platform for electing public office holders but also performing the roles of opposition as well as watchdog to the government of the day. They not only perform functions that are government related, such as making government accountable and exercising control over government administration; and electorate related functions such as political representation, expression of people's demand through interest articulation and aggregation as well as structuring of electoral choices; but also linkage related functions, playing an intermediary and mediatory role between the government and the electorates.

Unarguably, political party is a fundamental political institution in the actualization of democratic regime and the major concern now is to examine the determination of the extent to which political parties in Nigeria contribute in the consolidation of our nascent democracy through ideological disposition. However, the role of political parties in the emergent political experiments in the country has raised more questions than answers. One can easily pose the questions; does political party in Nigeria have ideology at all? Nigeria's political parties have many similarities than differences, the only visible difference being their names. It is sad we lack the opportunity to vote in terms of party ideology rather; we vote for personalities. This is because the best they could do in the absence of party Ideology is to look for the candidate of their choice. Political parties during the days of the Late Chief Obafemi Awolowo's Action group (AG), for instance, were social democrats, and when you voted AG, you would be sure to access free education if the group won the election. Today we lack parties that prioritize the needs of the citizens. The conflict between All Progressives Congress (APC) and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) is a reality check about our political status as a country. The poverty of

ideology has been spreading like hurricane in Nigeria since the inception of the fourth republic. When individuals that make up parties in Nigeria are not driven by any political ideology then the issue of party ideology becomes a mirage. People are desperate to achieve their political objectives at the detriment of ideology; politicians change parties almost on daily basis. The case of former president Atiku has been generating sleepless night among the scholars and keen watchers of Nigerian political happening; he has demonstrated high level of indiscipline, lack of ideological disposition right from 2007 till date (Oyenuga, 2014:12), the recent concluded 2015 general elections was another clear demonstration of poverty of ideology.

Immediately after the emergence of General Mohammed Buhari as the new President of Federal Republic of Nigeria, thousands of people if not millions have changed from People Democratic Party to All Progressive Party not only that, within the All Progressive Party now there are five blocs with their divergent opinions and background that cannot make the party to be driven by any meaningful ideology. We have five governors who defected from PDP to APC because of their egocentric and ethnic chauvinism, former members of CPC as well as ACN, ANPP and some members of APGA. Even if all these individuals have any ideology to dispose it will definitely result to ideological collision because there were no basis and proper marriage between the defectors and the new party.

The recent National Assembly elections that produced Bukola Saraki and Ekeremadu as the senate president and deputy senate president respectively was another testimony of poverty of ideology in Nigeria. The current senate president of the National Assembly emerged through the support of opposition party, the senate president could not be regarded as a loyal member of the party because of his 50 percent in PDP and 50 percent in APC (The Nations2015:10). From whatever perspective one looks at it, the reality of political life across political systems, developed or developing, is the fact of multiple political options from which inevitably, choice (s) must be made. At such critical crossroads, ideology provides a reality guide for appropriate action. Philip W. Shilvely posits that ideology is useful to people both for their own personal ease and satisfaction and for their public political activities. At the individual level, ideology helps to make sense reasonably easily and quickly of the varied political questions that come to

one's attention in term of public utilities, it helps people to make persuasive arguments convincingly to enlist popular support for a given public policy.

POLITICAL PARTY IN PERSPECTIVES

Political party is a popular concept in a democratic environment and is the only yardstick to elect people into various public offices. A political party is defined as an organised group of people with at least roughly similar political aims and opinions that seeks to influence public policy by getting its candidates elected to public office Ogunlade, 2013:12), Parties tend to be deeply and durably entrenched in specific substructures of the specific society in a sustainable and well functioning democracy. They can link the governmental institutions to the elements of civil society in a free and fair society and are regarded as necessary for any modern democratic system.

Political parties perform key tasks in a democratic society, such as

1. aggregating and articulating needs and problems as identified by members and supporters
2. socializing and educating voters and citizens in the functioning of the Political and electoral system and the generation of general political values
3. balancing opposing demands and converting them into general policies
4. Activating and mobilizing citizens into participating in political decisions and transforming their opinions into viable policy options
5. Channeling public opinion from citizens to government

Political parties are often described as institutionalized mediators between civil society and those who decide and implement decisions. By this, they enable their members' and supporters demands to be represented in parliament and in government. Even though parties fulfill many vital roles and perform several functions in a democratic society, the nomination and presentation of candidates in the electoral campaign is the most visible function to the electorate. A political party is a political organization that typically seeks to attain and maintain political power within government, usually by participating in education outreach or protest actions.

Parties often espouse ideology or vision bolstered by a written platform with specific goals, forming a coalition among disparate interests. Political parties are funded by contributions from party members, individual and organizations which share their political ideas or who stand to benefit from their activities or governmental public funding. Political parties and factions, especially those in government, are lobbied vigorously by organizations, business and interest groups such as trade unions. Money and gifts to a party, or its members, may be offered as political parties are funded by contributions from party members, individuals and organizations which share their political ideas or who stand to benefit from their activities or governmental public funding. Political parties and factions, especially those in government, are lobbied vigorously by organizations, business and special incentives. Some countries provide both direct and indirect public funding to political parties. Funding may be equal for all parties or depend on the results of previous campaigns or the number of candidates participating in an election. Frequently parties rely on a mix of private and public funding and are required to disclose their finances to the Electoral Management Body. The Emblem of socialist parties is often a red rose held in a fist. Communist parties often use a hammer to represent the worker, sickle to represent the farmer, or both a hammer and a sickle to refer to both at the same time but reverse is the case in Nigeria. To perform the above mentioned tasks and functions, political parties and citizens need some rights and obligations guaranteed or ruled by constitution or law. These include

- Freedom of organization
- Freedom to stand for election
- Freedom of speech and assembly
- Provision of a fair and peaceful competition
- Mechanisms of plurality
- Inclusion in the electoral process and contacts with the EMB
- A level playing field and freedom from discrimination
- Media access and fair reporting
- Transparent and accountable political finance

The internal functioning of individual political parties is to some extent determined by forces that are external to political parties, such as the electoral system, political culture, legal regulations,

etc. However, internal processes of political parties, such as the personality of leaders and staff, the ideological foundations, party history, and internal political culture are considered to be even more influential on the internal functioning. If a political party would like the democratic principles of electoral politics to be applied within the party, they may consider practices like Internal information and consultation processes, internal (formal or informal) rules and structures for the organization and decision-making within the party, and transparency in the party's functioning at all levels. Party members may also take on more formal roles in decision-making like participating in internal elections for Leadership positions or in selecting the party's candidate(s) in the upcoming elections. Many parties also work actively to enhance the role of traditionally under-represented groups in their parties.

Academic Freedom

Academic freedom is the freedom of teachers and students to study and pursue knowledge and research without unreasonable interference or restriction from law, institutional regulations, or public pressure. Its basic elements include the freedom of teachers to inquire into any subject that evokes their findings to their students, colleagues, and others; to publish their data and conclusions without control or censorship; and teach in the manner they consider professionally appropriate for students, the basic elements include the freedom to study subjects that concern them, to form conclusions for themselves, and to express their opinions. In reality, however, this is seldom the case. Perhaps due to the shallowness of democratic roots especially in the developing countries, other forces of identity particularly ethnicity and religion would appear to have taken the place of ideology. (Omotola, 2009:12), The rising influence of money politics represents another crucial limiting dimension. The fundamental question is this? What is the situation for Nigeria? Put differently, do Nigerian parties have ideology? How has its ideological condition shaped and influenced the course of party politics in the country. The central argument of this paper is to critically engage these questions with a view to suggesting ways of restructuring the consciousness of Nigerian parties with regard to the centrality of ideology to party activities and effectiveness.

PERSPECTIVES IN IDEOLOGICAL BASED PARTY

Ideology is very crucial aspect of politics, not only serving as a cognitive structure of looking at society generally and providing a perspective formula, it also serves as a guide to individual action and judgment(Dosumu,2015) ,ideology is also a powerful instrument of conflict management, self-identification. In fact, ideology is an engine room of any political party. The success of any political party is determined by the degree of political ideology especially in advanced democracy (Dilly, 2005:12). This issue of ideology has been so central to the activities of political party across the time and space, ideology has been regarded as the durable convictions held in common by party members in respect to the most desirable form, institutions, spirit and course of action of the state determines the natural attitude of a party towards every public question. (Iyare; 2003:12) Instead of ideological identification, Nigerian political parties have been found to mobilize and associate on ethno-religious basis, which has had serious debilitating effect on the polity. Ethnicity and religion have acquired divisive character in Nigeria and have been largely unhelpful in the quest for democratic consolidation in Nigeria. (Dosunmu, 2015:5) , lack of political ideology by parties plying the Nigeria political routes have denied the country serious gratifications which can help in the development of her democratic infrastructure and consolidation. Political ideology helps people to make persuasive arguments convincingly to enlist popular support for a given public policy (Omotola,2009:617),ideology is an indispensable element of politics, it does not only serve as a major instrument of convincing the electorates ,playing major role in the acquisition, but also functions as political lifeline for the animation of politics. Nigeria journey to civic culture which is the fastest route to democratic consolidation has been lengthened rather unnecessary by non-ideological political space. Ideology enriches the content of politics and as such help in the development of discursive democracy.

The availability of manifestoes by political parties means that electorate can take parties on national issues and would help determine their choice of party to vote for in elections, parties and their manifestoes need to espouse the ideology on which they plan to run government in order to give the electorate a clear picture of where the country is heading and decide whether or not to work in that direction (Okoosi-Simbine, 2005),lack of manifestoes and culture of debate in a

democracy is slow poison that would kill the system in due course, manifestoes provide the yardstick for measuring the performance of political parties and help election to fulfill its reward mandate.

In a democratically matured climes, political ideologies are the oil that grings the wheels of successful political parties and their activities. Ideologies serve as the roadmap that guides a party's quest for control of the apparatus of government.

Ideologies act as a recipe for dishing out piquant manifestoes to the electorates in a bid to get their votes during election. Ideology functions as a means of self-identification, as an instrument of conflict management, as a prescriptive formula and as a mobilization and unifying force. Nigerian parties, despite their pretence through party manifestoes, do not have clear cut political ideologies (Omotola, 2009:6270), consequently, the parties have found it extremely difficult to emphasize politics of issue. Rather, their mobilizations of population forces have been largely driven by ethnicity, religion and influence of money politics. These forces, more than anything else, also determine the pattern of electoral victory of the parties.

In a nutshell, the poverty of political ideology that has come to envelop Nigerian parties over the years, coupled with its attendant crisis and contradiction, has been of dramatic effect not only on the parties, but also on the entire project of national rebirth, integration and sustainable democracy and development. Right from independence, the country has had political parties with ill-defined ideological, rather than improving on the structure of our established political parties, they have continued to diminish political parties in the country (Simbine, 2005:24). Similarly, Political ideology is a certain ethical set of ideas, principles, doctrines, myths or symbols of a social movement, institution, class, and or large group that explains how society should work, and offers some political and cultural blueprint for a certain social order. A political ideology largely concerns itself with how to allocate power and to what end it should be used. Some parties follow a certain ideology very closely, while others may broad inspiration from a group of related ideologies without specifically embracing any one of them. Not only that, political ideology are set of basic beliefs about the political, economic, social and cultural affairs held by the majority of people within a political party. Political ideology is a set of opinion or beliefs of people within a political party, is just like a mandate of political party that

reflects the agendas, manifestos as well the programs of the party. The recent activities of political parties in Nigeria represent total betrayal to the original principle of political ideology and one is tempted to ask whether Nigerian political parties have any ideological dispositions at all? This is because Nigerian elections, electoral campaigns on the basis of ideology and issues of importance in the polity have been scarce, the politics of 'do or die' has become a dominant factor in Nigerian politics rather than the debate of the most important issues in governance.

NIGERIAN POLITICAL PARTIES IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

Political parties have suffered a chequered history in Nigeria. Right from the adoption of the Clifford Constitution of 1922, the Nigerian political space has been littered with the emergence of political parties in each of the epochs that have come up in the close to one hundred years of party politics in the country.(Dosumu,2015:1).The foundational developmental circumstance of party in Nigeria is colonial rule and the opposition to it by the country's nationalist movement, which transmuted into political associations to contest for legislative elections as the country progressed between 1922 and 1960.(Adele,2011:2), from non representative government to independence, under competitive party and electoral politics. Ngou (1989) estimates that including the three major political parties, a total of fifteen others contested the critical election of 1959, the more prominent of the parties in this emergent multiparty system between 1922 and 1960 were the Nigerian National Democratic Party (1923), the people Union (1923), Union of Young Nigerians (1923) , the Nigeria Youth Movement 1937,the national council of Nigeria and Cameroons (1944). The Northern Elements Progressive Association 1945,the Northern peoples's Congress 1951, the United National Independence Party 1953,the United Middle Bet Congress 1955 formed through the merger between the Middle Belt League 1950 and the Middle Belt People's Party 1953, Bornu Youth Movement 1956,Dynamic Party 1955, and the National Democratic Party of Nigeria and Cameroon 1958((Hodgkin,1961:195) Omotola in his work on the origin of political parties in Nigeria traced the emergence of political party to 1923 following the introduction of the elective principle by the Clifford constitution, Nigeria parties had very limited and self-serving objectives(Omotola,2009:620), when the first political party in Nigeria, the National Democratic Party (NNDP) was formed in 1923, under the leadership of Herbert Macaulay, its activities were restricted to contesting elections into the Lagos city council for

years, the UNDP was hegemonic in its dominance in electoral politics in the country, this was to be challenged by the Lagos Youth Movement-later Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) –formed in 1934 and defeated the NNPP for three seats allocated to Lagos that year(Adele,2011:10). By 1944, the increasing tempo of nationalist agitation had resulted in the formation of another political party-the National council of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC), under the leadership of Herbert Macaulay and later Nnamdi Azikwe (Omoiya,2012)This was followed by the transformation of the Egbe Omo Oduduwa, a Yoruba socio-cultural organization into a political party, the Action Group in 1950 under the leadership of Chief Obafemi Awolowo and the Northern People Congress NPC in 1959 with dominance in the northern region.(Dudley,1973),by 1951, a breakaway faction of the NPC consisting mainly of radical youth based in Kano formed the Northern Element Progressive Union (NEPU).These parties dominated the political landscape of the country particularly in their respective regions towards independence and the First Republic (Dudley,1973).The period of second republic witnessed the emergence of more political parties; there is no significant difference with what obtained under the first Republic.(See Osaghae,1998), what happened was the reincarnation of parties of the First Republic under different nomenclatures with some additional parties like National Party of Nigeria (NPN), the Unity Party NPP replacing the NPC, AG and NCNC, respectively. Others were the people's Party (GNPP), and later Nigerian Advance Party NAP, which was registered in 1982, after failing the first round in 1978. These were the major parties in the Second Republic. With the abortion of Third Republic, there was a fundamental change in the mode of party formations in Nigeria.

There were Social Democratic Party (SDP) and National Republic Convention NRC and with the annulment of June 12 1993 presidential election by the military regime of General Babangida made the activities of political parties during this period to be more myopic in nature (Jame, 2007;12)With political transformation from military autocracy and absolutism to civilian government in 1999 the country has witnessed another dimension of party formations. Initially, three political parties were formed; People Democratic Party, PDP, the All peoples Party APP, later All Nigerian People Party ANPP and the Alliance for democracy AD were registered by the Independent National Electoral Commission INEC. (Omoiya, 2012:10). By December 2002, the number of registered parties rose to thirty 30, while additional three political parties were

registered in January/February 2006(Momoh,2005),the formation of political parties during the fourth republic has become unimaginable and the process is still ongoing. The era of fourth republic witnessed unprecedented number of political parties as there are over 60 political parties in the countries (Dosunmu,2012:12), but notable among them are People Democratic Party who has been producing presidents at the federal level since 1999 as well as majority of governors at the state level. In 2013 All Progressive Congress was formed, an alliance of four opposition parties, the Action Congress of Nigeria, the Congress for Progressive Change, All Nigerian Party and the All Progressive Grand Alliance.(Stanley,2015:10)

Furthermore, scholars have continued to criticize the lack of ideologies held by political parties, the People's Democratic Party PDP are described as a fractious and ideologically inarticulate congeries of politicians (Suberu,2007:101). Whilst the All Progressive Congress (APC) has been described as participating in political prostitution (Soyinka,2014).Nigeria as a country has been experimenting poverty of ideology, Nigerians are tired of ideologies on the pages of newspapers as well the those stipulated in the party's constitution without any practical disposition. Political parties in Nigeria right from the inception most especially the current republic have embraced poverty of ideology, lack of internal democracy as demonstrated by PDP in their recent primaries across the country which has not provided full blown internal democratic practice within the party. Also, if parties of previous republics were found wanting on ideological stance and commitment those of the Fourth Republic are obviously worse.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN IDEOLOGY AND POLITICAL PARTY

Ideology has been regarded as the most important vehicle of any political party and the absence of ideology in Nigerian parties is of great concern. (Olaitan, 2014:2). Political parties are no longer after the doctrine, myths or beliefs; they refuse to offer anything special to differentiate them from other parties. (Omoiya, 2012:12) Interestingly, Nigeria political parties have many similarities than difference, the only difference being their names, logo, people don't go to polling unit with the mind of casting their vote base on party ideology because of lack of substantial political ideology and this factor is aiding the phenomenon of election deviation and vote buying (Ojo,2007:13) .Unlike what is applicable in advanced democracy, party ideology is one of the major determinants for the electorates to select the candidate of their choice for any

elective positions ,in Nigeria, forces of identity particularly, ethnicity and religion ,vote buying appear to have taken the place of ideology in Nigerian political system.

Omotola (2009) assert that Nigeria parties seem to be bereft of clear ideological commitments upon the relegation of politics of issues to the background across the various republics and its place the ascendancy of identity or money politics. Undoubtedly, political party is one of the most complex and critical institution of democracy or what Omotola called Makers of democracy and neither democracy or democratic society are thinkable without them base on their functions and responsibilities (Omotola,2013:12), with the absence of ideological based party in Nigeria as well as massive spread of democracy in Africa or what Huntington(1991) referred to as the third wave of democratization to Africa including Nigeria, leading to an unprecedented resurgence of multiparty politics, there is no controversy about the fact that the mere adoption of party pluralism with no clear ideology will not automatically advance the cause of democracy in Nigeria.(see oyinloye,2009)

Basically, Nigerian political parties are not driven by any substantial ideologies and the party agendas are *sin qua non* to democratic consolidations, the agendas of parties suppose to influence the decision of the citizens at the poll but reverse is the case In Nigeria political system most especially under the current fourth republic.(Gadan,2009:10).Similarly, Jinedu,(2008:3) made a critical observation of what he called “ developmental circumstance” of the party in Nigeria such as the country’s social structure, religion, language, ethno-communal, rural urban divide, ideology and education at all level. Party ideologies have been bastardise; religion and ethnic sentiment have become fundamental factors. Whatever the case, it is imperative to note that at the very heart of success or failure of political party is the important question of political ideology. The emergent political parties from the mid 1920s reflected the dominance of the nationalist movements by a combination of petit-bourgeois middle class and proletarian strata of the country’s social structure yet the logic of competitive party and electoral politics and unfading ethno-federal political structure in the country meant that the emergent political parties must have speculated ideologies as part of their electoral strategies unlike the current fourth republic(Gabriel,2007:13), there were symbiotic relationship between a number of political parties during 1950 and 1960.Although class and ideology division seemed not to have been

significantly salient element of social structure of Nigeria, there is a sense in which the emergent party system in the 1950s and 1960 reflected class and ideological differences, most of the Nigerian parties during this period was what might be characterized as elite parties, with the exception of the Northern Element progressive Union(Panter,2010:12)Interestingly, in a democratically matured climes, political ideologies are the oil that grinds the wheel of successful political parties and their activities, ideology serve as the roadmap that guides a party's quest for control of the apparatus of government, moreso, ideologies act as a recipe for dishing out piquant manifestos to the electorates in a bid to get their votes during election.(Stanley,2015:1), infact one can rightly posit that an ideology succinctly describes what politician stand for, it is his life blood, ideology here refers to that set of economic cum political beliefs strongly held by members of a political party be it People Democratic Party or All Progressive Congress, with which the party hopes to arm itself with in order to tackle socio-economic issues if voted into power. Sadly, in Nigeria, political parties are no longer than a cabal of kleptomaniacs who are united by their sordid motives of looting the nation's treasury. Political ideologies are largely alien to Nigerian political parties which are utterly bereft of any modicum of a sense of direction (Aba, 2013:12), political parties are just constitutionally recognized platform for elevating our light-fingered leaders into vantage positions of authority, from where they loot and stash away unquotable figures in Swiss accounts while the masses wallow in penury. Hence, we have opposition parties who are just groups of disgruntled elements itching to have a bite at the national cake. This lack of ideology and a sense of direction accounts for why carpet-crossing is the order of the day in Nigerian political setting. Recently, allegiance is bought with "Ghana must go sack" and politicians change parties faster than a chameleon changes colour in ballroom light fittings. (Stanley, 2015:2)The idea of carpet-crossing and counter carpet-crossing that have become the order of the day in Nigerian politics should not be done without due recourse to party's ideology as this will be tantamount to dinning with the devil with bare fingers, joining political party should be determined by parties and political ideology. The current political landscape in Nigeria has demonstrated high level of indiscipline and lack of ideology, where politicians change party as if they are changing cloths. The structure of political party has allowed for little democratic space, this indiscipline and lack of clearly defined ideology have not provided for full blown internal democratic practice within parties and if there is any issue

that needs to be addressed within all political parties in Nigeria, it has to be the lack of discipline, internal democracy and ideology (Peter, 2014:11)

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Political parties is *sin qua non* to the attainment of democratic government. Political parties are the only platforms through which leaders get elected into their various positions. Given the obvious poverty of ideology that characterizes the first three political parties of the Fourth Republic, PDP, APP and AD, it should not be surprising that almost all the others parties that sprang up or broke away from them did not do so because of ideological disagreements. Neither was it that they have articulated alternative views of governance for sustainable democracy and development as a viable basis of popular mobilization to wrestle power from the incumbent party. Rather, they were products of adversarial elite behavior taken to the points of irreconcilability. Little wonder, these parties also have no ideological stance on major national questions other than the transformation and manipulation of forces of identity particularly ethnicity and religion. The implication is that the so-called political parties are not in competition with one another. They are in factions; these factions are more in competition within themselves than with another party. Nigerian political parties are not driven by any substantial ideological disposition because there are no clear objectives for party formations as well as admission of members. Parties must be driven by meaningful ideology for the fulfillment of it original objectives as well as ensuring democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

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