THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CULTURE OF CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA: A HISTORICAL INSIGHT

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Abstract
The widespread increase and institutionalization of corrupt practices in Nigeria cannot be properly accounted for historically without an indepth understanding of the operation of the socio-political economy bequeathed by the British colonial government. Deep in exploitation, subjugation, discrimination and racial chauvinism that manipulated the political system against the elite vis-à-vis the traditional institution, it entrenched a culture quite alien and subversive to the emerging nation. The socio-political and psychological impact was the creation of a class conscious political group whose only way to survive and maintain the status-quo, became manipulations and shady practices. This had a negative impact on the society, since government mirrors what the society should be. The military in an attempt to salvage the sinking boat became entangled in the web of corruption and even seems to have surpassed the civilians in the act. This essay is an attempt to trace the historical course of corruption in Nigeria and factors that seem to fan the embers of corruption. It takes an analytical approach and suggests that tackling corruption would require sincerity and drastic establishment of enduring political institutions and culture to drive the system, to which every player must be committed.

Introduction
The political history and development of the Nigerian nation, beginning from the time of independence from October 1, 1960, has continued to resonate with diverse problems in the course of nation-building. Among these challenges are the drive to attain national unity and economic self-reliance, considering the diverse nature of the cultural groups with conflicting interest. There is also the problem associated with ethnic-cum-religious bigotry, that has remained intractable with the emergence of the Boko Haram religious sect; with their struggle to enthrone Islamic religion in the nation. To some extent however, though the challenges remained undaunting, some measure of success may have been achieved in these areas from available records. Nevertheless, the cankerworm of corrupt practices have remained unsolvable despite its obvious consequences to the general well-being of the nation. This has led to a number of suggestions and the establishment of anticorruption agencies like (Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), National Agency for Food and Drug Administration Control (NAFDAC) and others, with the sole aim to fight corrupt practices in Nigeria. Various regimes had also put up some social re-orientation agencies like Ethical Revolution, War Against Indiscipline (WAI), Mass Mobilization for Self Reliance (MAMSER) and so on, with the intention to bring about changes in our value–system as a nation. However, despite these establishments, nothing seems to have changed. In reality, the situation in the country has continued to degenerate, with the monumental records of corruption both in the high and low places. This has raised serious concern on the dire consequence of corruption to the overall development and well-being of the Nigeria-nation.

In this exposé of the historicity of the genesis of corruption in Nigeria, attempt was made to review the socio-political – economy left behind by the erstwhile colonial government in Nigeria. It was discovered that the socio-political-economy they built and apparatuses of government that sustained it, were such that created the lacunae, which opened avenues for corruption in Nigeria’s
political system. In this light, suggestions were made on the need to revisit our cultural values, which tend to support communal interest as larger and superior to individual interest. Within the Nigerian cultural milieu, there are values, which had in the past acted as means of cohesion and unity; these also must be rejuvenated into the political system. It therefore suggests the need for changes in our present value system, which has obvious lack in character formation. This will definitely demand from our leaders (political and otherwise) the act of sincerity and honesty beyond the often manifestation of insincerity and duplicity among the political class. With these, it would become easier to obey the rules and see the institutions of government as bigger and larger than any personality occupying such position.

Concept of Corruption and the Socio-psychological Perception in Nigerian Society

“The main reason for the culture of corruption we now see established in this country is the greed for wealth, the ease with which it can be made by any deviousness and the public acclaim that is given to those known to have simply come by wealth. It is very unlikely that this culture can be changed within the foreseeable future by the present available social apparatus for law enforcement or by an ad hoc approach to the issue of corruption” (Justice Uwaifo Panel’s Report).

Corruption and its practices have received various definitions by scholars, authors and even the lay men in various idioms and conceptualizations. It is generally agreed upon, that corruption as a word deals basically with “dishonest or illegal behaviour, especially of people in authority”. It also manifest in a “change from moral to immoral standards of behaviour” (Hornby, 2010:329). However, according to S.C. Chuta, corruption implies “a departure from the status quo” (2004:3). It could also be termed according to Social Science Encyclopedia (1985) as “the perversion or abandonment of a standard” cited in S.C. Chuta (2004:3). The implication of these definitions is that for corruption to take place in a given setting, there must be a standard or a code of conduct, which its deviation amount to corruption. This definition succinctly paint the picture of corruption as it happens in Nigeria, where departure and deviation from the rules of conduct through unwholesome practices is the order of the day. But, one thing that is certain and agreeable is its encompassing effect in any society, where it is not sincerely tackled and punished accordingly. Such is the unfortunate case in Nigeria where as a result of the insincerity and dubious practices of the political elite, the system became corrupted with unintended consequences. The political system, the economy, the social and religious life of the people have therefore been indirectly infected by the hydra-headed problem of corruption.

Corruption and its practices as it were, cuts across the barriers of ethnicity, language, religion and geography, and has brought the nation very low in the comity of nations today. Corrupt practices manifest in diverse and different forms like bribery, forgery, Advanced Fee fraud (AFD), false declaration, inflation of contracts by government officials and their collaborators and so on. To say the least, it has permeated deep in the socio-psychological perception of the Nigerian people- that one often hear people say “are you not a Nigerian?” In other words, as a Nigerian, as long as you can “play your card well”, compromises, cheat, engaging in deception, falsehood, embezzlement you are accepted as living a normal life.

Every system in the nation has been thus infected by the virus of corruption. It manifests in politics, in the form of election rigging and bribery of the electoral officers to declare false result. It manifests in the economy in the award of bloated/inflated contract, with 10 percent for the awardees.
and their collaborators. It manifests in the civil service as those entrusted with the pensions of retirees, corruptly amass stupendous money to enrich themselves. It manifests in schools at tertiary, secondary and primary levels in form of exam malpractice and the exploitation of students through levies, hand-outs, sexual harassment of female students for high grade. It manifests in the society generally as most Nigerians acting on “assumed opportunity” to defraud, either by cheap articles, or inflated prices and so on. Infact, corruption has assumed a disturbing proportion in Nigeria that many altruistic people, have begun to see it as a more serious challenge than ethnicity, religious bigotry and so on. No wonder, based on this disturbing increase in corruption, despite the establishment of a number of anti-corruption agencies like ICPC, NAFDAC, EFCC and others, the situation still look hopeless and bleak. Thus, in his general observation of corruption in Nigeria and how it has infected the system, Aluko made the following allusions;

At the first stage, corruption and the value-system runs on parallel lines. This leads to the emergence of a counter – cultures, which runs counter to the existing norms in the society. At the third stage, corruption begins to enter into the realm of the normative system, a stage of partial institutionalization. At the fourth and fifth stages, corruption becomes completely institutionalized, it becomes a norm, part and parcel of the culture. While at the sixth stage socialization and resocialization for the aged begins and people now accept corruption as a way of life. At the final stage, new forms of behaviours emerge which runs counter to the old social orders but conforms to the new value system in which corruption has been completely institutionalized and entrenched. The new social order becomes the yard stick for measuring behaviour. Corruption now governs the society (2000:224) (quoted in Madukwe, 2012: 214).

In reaction to the retardation of economic development that Nigeria has witnessed over the years, and in comparison to the great strides made by some Asian countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, Korea and others; who were once at par with Nigeria (development wise), in the 1960s and 1970s; despite her abundant human, material and mineral resources, Otonti Nduka opines that,

…along with such countries as Malaysia, Indonesia, Korea,…etc (who) not only consolidated their positions up the ladder of development, Nigeria on the other hand has slid down the rungs of the ladder to the extent that by 1993 the World Bank Report rated her the 13th Least Developed Country (LDC) in the world. Indeed, the poverty index for Nigeria rose from 28:1 percent in 1980 to 70 percent in 1997, while that of Indonesia, for instance, was only 7 percent (UN 2000 Report), cited in (Otonti, 2006:52).

This is the case of the effect of monumental corruption and mismanagement of resources that have continued for years. The despicable subversion and perversion of standard in both (the high and low cadres) of government, has thus brought the once self-acclaimed “giant of Africa” to the level of being called the “ant of Africa”. What a pity!

The Colonial Links and the Collaborators
Lipset’s view that corruption in societies has had a long history in the development of human societies cannot be denied. (Lipset, 2009) Thus, its’ traces and dimensions in developed and underdeveloped societies abound.
Omotaye Olorode argued, “that the cause of corruption (in Nigeria) is the socio-economic and political conditions of the people within a materialist point of view”. He further claimed that:

The ruling circles because of their control of the economic or material base of the society entrench and reinforce their own perception of morality or values on the society, inclusive of corruption.

The introduction of colonial rule in Africa and Nigeria in particular had far-reaching impact on both the colonized and the structures that emerged following the end of colonial rule by the 1960s in most African nations. Colonial rule in Africa took full control of political administrations, from the beginning of the 20th century, in a manner that is akin to master-servant-relationship (civilizing mission). In a way, it depicted a consummate manifestation of exploitation, dehumanization, segregation and brain washing. Its’ structures were built on the principle of self interest and racial superiority. In the establishment of indices of development like education, health care services, industries and so on, care was taken to make sure that such developments only benefits the system that runs it, vis-à-vis the colonized people. As such, it is likened to what was obtainable during the infamous trade in human cargo – the trans-Atlantic slave trade era – that ran through from the 16th century towards the 19th century, in which millions of able-bodied African men and women were transported to Europe and the ‘New world’, to work in the plantations.

Thus, with the introduction of colonial rule, it set in motion forces that brought a dislocation of socio-cultural and political economy of the people. The implication of this, was that for one to survive in the new dispensation which is alien and foreign to the people, abandoning the native system became sine-qua-non. This had the added effect of making the people not only to abhor their identity, but to begin to see that imitating the European amounted to being a sure way of progress in the new dispensation. In shamelessly imitating the European, apart from abandoning their identity that gave value to their well-being, Nigerians began to follow the white-man in their selfish and exploitative lifestyle, which was very strange to the culture of the people. For instance, with the introduction of monetized political economy, it meant that from then onwards measurement of values changed, with money assuming a position that it never did prior to the time of colonial rule. The former indigenous values like truthfulness, communality over selfish personal interest, filial and kin relationship, started to be thrown over board. It is on record for instance, that in building most of the infrastructure like railways, seaports and others, for the exploitation of African resources that forced labour and low wages were the order of the day. This seems to be more pronounced in French colonies than British because of the system of assimilation put in place. The British on the other hand, in making use of the indirect rule system employed the tactics of divide and rule, thereby sowing disharmony between the traditional institutions and the emerging elite. The concomitant effect became competition and contention for political authority, which subsequently laid credence to the need for the accumulation of wealth in order to maintain the status-quo, which in the mean time involve corrupt practices.

The building of the railway lines that transverse the three regions of Nigeria, that is East, West and North, in the early part of the 20th century captures succinctly the picture in the scenario of the British colonial administration during the period under review. For instance, the railway system which was indeed a novelty in Nigeria, though supportive and augmented other means of transportation like roads, sea and air transport systems, in easing off the means of interactions among the various Nigerian cultural groups; but with the combination of ineptitude and corruption it had remained in a comatose state. But, in establishing the railway system in Nigeria by the British,

tactfulness and shrewdness was the name of the game. The railway lines conspicuously enough, were laid to traverse the routes to the sources of raw material products like coal and palm products from the East, in Enugu; zinc, tin, from the North central, in Jos; cocoa fruits, from the West and groundnut from the ‘core North’ in Kano. These sources were then linked up to the two main ports in Port Harcourt (Rivers State) and Lagos port, (Lagos State), for onward transit to Britain. The same principle can be deduced from the establishment of schools and colleges, whose primary goals were to produce the needed manpower to serve the colonial system. In other words, the colonial subjects’ interest was secondary in almost all the policies of the British administration in Nigeria, thereby jeopardizing the future progress of the emergent nation – when it came.

Michael Crowder thus opined that:

The railways in Nigeria, for instance, depended on compulsory labour. In 1925, 38% of the 12,500 labourers on railway construction in the North were ‘political’ labour … (1968: 208) (cited in Buell, Native Problem, 724).

Another implication of the colonial political economy was that with the attainment of independence in 1960, the economy of Nigeria continued to be tied to her former colonial master. This was a system of trade relation that support the supply of raw materials to the imperial economy of Britain, while depending on their finished manufactured goods for survival. Therefore, the colonial political economy that depended heavily on exploitation was inherited by the emergent elite. This meant that for them (elite) to continue in their position, the status quo must be maintained. In doing this, it also meant that exploitation and deprivation of the majority of the population would continue. With this scenario on ground, the political elite and their cronies began to see themselves as a special class whose tastes and positions like their colonial teachers, must be maintained either by hook or crook.

In Nigeria, ethnic diversity and its application in politics compounded the problem of nation-building and to a large extent corruption.

The Institution of Corruption in Nigeria and Some factors that Support it

In an attempt to trace the history of corruption in Nigerian political development, the colonial legacy must not be discountenced. The colonial legacy as was inherited by the elite had left much to be desired as Nigeria continued in her quest for political, economic and social harmony. It was a system built on inequality and exploitation in which the values of the Nigerian people became corrupted and compromised. Hence it created a wide gap between the rich and the poor. It also had a socio-psychological impact on the emergent elite, who now began to see their growth in status with how much they resemble the Europeans in what Prof. Ayoandele described as “deluded hybrid”. By so doing, they began to develop hatred for all that define them as people (culture) (Ugwu .C. 2012:61).

Thus, part of the fundamental problem that most Africans faced, and Nigeria in particular after independence, centred on the absence of any cultural decolonization, even after attaining political freedom in 1960 (Chinwezu, 2011) quoted by (Ugwu, 2012:61). With this, there was no conscious effort made to reverse the wrong misplacement of values as we inherited from Britain. Hence, the development of a culture that was alien which its values were rooted in over-bearing personal consciousness. This, readily manifest in money-mindedness and excessive acquisition of wealth, rooted in exploitation and corrupt practices. Consequently, it became easier for them (the elite) to bend the system to support their inordinate desire for expensive foreign made goods without any corresponding check on their actions. Thus, as O.E. Obinna (1989:298) opines,
Members of such class can have foreign currencies as they wish and they can engage in all sorts of importation and exportation while the sources of their original wealth remain above investigation.

The same views have been echoed by eminent Nigerians especially from the academic circle. Prof. J.U.J Asiegbu, commenting on a system that condones corruption which was a heritage of our colonial history cited by Anya, says:

A nation where executive privilege or parliamentary immunity always successfully parade itself against the will of the people or regularly pleads the cause of crime and of criminals is a nation in a state of terminal social decay…

(Anya, 2008:14)

Prof. Anya O. Anya for instance, in pointing out the abysmal failure of the political class in bringing about social and economic changes partly as a result of failure to change the system under which it operates in condoning oppression and exploitation stresses that,

The failure of Nigeria’s political leadership to work for social and economic transformation of the society in the immediate post-independence era is the most fundamental failure in our journey towards development. (Anya, 2008:14)

This monumental failure on the part of political leadership to reassess and redress the system to suit the cultural and political development of the people of Nigeria has thus, continued to weigh heavily on the emergent Nigerian political society. The continuation of the colonial system that was built on exploitation to favour a few has therefore, indirectly exacerbated the culture of corruption in Nigeria. The wholesale continuation of the colonial political economy built on exploitation meant that subsequently, politics and the achievement of political power would be hinged on winner-takes-all, giving no room for the losers. In such a situation, as was played in Nigeria political system after the First Republic which ended in 1964, the subsequent elections ended up with catastrophic consequences. Hence, Prof. Anya further opined that:

…given the material resources and the available human capital, it is difficult for an outside observer to understand the decrepit state of our roads, the collapse of our railway system …, the energy debacle in a tropical country with vast solar, hydro-electric and hydrocarbon capabilities and deposits (2008:15).

This was the ugly situation the nation found itself, even with the achievement of independence. Subsequently, as events began to unfold, it became clear that such a system built without the interest of the teeming population has no hope of success. The military that intervened in the coup of 15th January 1966, was emboldened to act in the manner they did because of the unacceptable manifestations in the nations polity. Obasanjo, for instance, who happened to be a junior army officer at the time of the coup, succinctly recorded in the book Nzeogwu, the general situation after the 1965 election that gave vent to the coup plotters to act. He said:

The election of that year was fought on regional loyalty, with a strong tribal bias. But the government that emerged was a coalition of two regionally – based parties leaving the third party, also regionally – based, out in the cold. With no patriotic feeling left and with selfishness, greed, corruption, sectionalism and tribalism being extolled, the third party embarked on ceaseless mischief to ensure that the unstable stool fell, no matter what happened to those sitting on it,
around it and under it. The cry and the attitude was “North for the Northerners, West for Westerners and East for Easterners.” Nobody seemed to care sufficiently for Nigeria as a nation. Those who were not directly involved in the politics of the day which were politics of hatred, division, victimization, destruction, unabashed graft, greed and ostentations were powerless to do anything about it. The nation was divided within itself. But obviously, the ship of the nation had drifted aimlessly for too long (Obasanjo, 1987:79).

Having done this exposé on the colonial legacy and its consequences however, it would amount to being ahistorical, naïve and overbearing to heap all the blame of corruption in Nigeria on our colonial history; after all 54 years of independence is sufficient enough to turn around a faulty foundation.

Thus, Ekpo Nta, acting Chairman of Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), sees the problem of corruption in Nigeria as having to do with what he called “a sub-culture that supports corruption”. He supported his views by giving instances of collapse in the family, the school systems where children are not given proper guidance and so everybody is on his own as a contributory factor. He further gave another instance of failure of the system to check wrong activities which invariably induces corruption. In a work place, it is expected that after the end of 35 years, you would get your pension without hassles. However, due to the uncertainty in the system in which one is not sure of what would happen after retirement, it creates a loophole for ways of amassing wealth to protect their future in terms of pension (Ekpo Nta, 2012: 44-45).

Okecha in his own view still point to the system we operate as amenable to corrupt practices. He highlights for instance, the large disparity between salary of teachers in higher institution where lecturers of professional cadres’ basic annual salary (as at 2008) was ₦753,549 compared to the president’s ₦3.5 million, Chief Justice of the Federation ₦3.4 million; supervisory councilor ₦809,300; special adviser to the chairman of a local government ₦760,076” over and above that of a professor is quite unacceptable (A Okecha, 2008:22). Thus, there could be a case of poor remuneration to the problem of corruption in Nigeria (though some changes had been made).

Therefore, the overall position of this essay is not to exempt the unscrupulous activities of the political class that have accentuated the culture of corruption. But, as the writer had argued elsewhere (2012: 219) that:

…most of the factors relating to low morality has (to be) …laid at the step of the negative influence which the West has exerted on our cultural values and behaviour …, this position is plausible since man as a social being require the interaction of others which invariably brings about either positive or negative influences. (However), …the fact that man is also a “self-conscious being” must not be discountenced. Thus, he fully takes responsibility for all his actions and decisions in life.

The fact of owing up to ones errors, thus create avenues for redress or solution to be applied, than to continue to look for escape goats. Therefore, the political class has a greater blame in the whole mess. Take for instance, the alleged cases of Nnamdi Azikiwe misappropriation of the defunct African Continental Bank (A.C.B.) bank fund and the flamboyant life-style of people like Okotie Eboh, the former finance minister in the First Republic among others (Madukwe, 2012: 214). This is also in addition to the records of monumental corruption currently being witnessed in Nigeria, among
the politicians, the government officials, the judiciary, the paramilitary organizations like Custom and Immigration Services and the Nigerian Police Force.

For the sake of record, some corrupt practices would be mentioned at this point. According to Chuta (2012: 247), it was reported in the Daily Sun of July 2, 2008, that “₦ 6.9 billion fraud; Nyako, Deputy, others quizzes”. In the same year 2008, it was also reported in The Nation of August 19, of the arraignment of the suspended Chairman of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) Sam Edem of alleged appropriation of ₦800 million to contract a sorcerer for ritual purpose (Chuta, 2012:251).

During the regime of Alhaji Shehu Aliu Shagari for instance, which lasted from 1979 to 1983, it was widely reported that corruption, mismanagement and religious upheaval characterized it. The consequence was a … totaled nearly $15 billion, (of capital flight) … the foreign debt rose to $18 billion … (Karl Maier, 2000: 15 – 16).

Following the coups that took place in 1983 (by General Buhari) and in 1985, Generals Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida and Abacha his right-hand-man stepped in. The regimes subsequently, made a mince-meat (in corrupt practices), to whatever the Shagari era did as a child’s play. Accordingly, it was reported that (during Babangida and Abacha regimes), corruption reached all-time high, and Nigeria became so deeply involved in the international drug trade…” (Maier, 2000:16). The scandalous revelations that have emerged in recent times among political office holders are alarming. The Odua’s bullet-proof-cars scandal of ₦255 million naira; the missing unaccounted ₦20 billion dollars (from NNPC) and the pension scam of ₦12 billion naira (2011) involving the then head of the civil service of the federation and others are mind boggling. (Funsho Balogun, 2014:35, Oluokun Ayorinde, 2014:14, Dike Onwuamaeze, 2008:12). The list is innumerable that Chuta (2012: 254) concludes that,

The reality of the situation is that there are so many cases of corruption in Nigeria, involving both her top and low citizens, which if they should be fully documented, no single book volume would contain all the perpetrated mess…

A New Cultural Heritage for Enduring Political Institution

In tackling the problem of corruption in Nigeria, there is need to do a proper reassessment of the whole social, political and economic structures under which the system operates. This has become necessary and important, in view of the pervasive nature of corruption in the system. The need to put up structures that have elements of our cultural life-style; that are relevant to the present realities, cannot therefore be over-emphasized. This would go with a total over-haul of our present value system that tend to extol money and wealth above good character. It would also help to curb greed, which at times is at the root of corruption in Nigeria.

For instance, van Hoek and Bossuyt as quoted by Deegan, strongly believe that the poor performance of Africans in the area of politics (and by extension economic development) lies in:

The relative absence of a genuinely African discourse on democracy [political economy] and its related search for institutional arrangement which are rooted in African culture and society and relevant to present day realities…

In the same light, Asiegbu, drew attention to the danger inherent in continuing with a system which supports and encourages corruption, as we see in Nigeria. He thus said that:

…No nation ever survives when the twin influence of criminal wealth and social injustice is allowed such impunity and such free rein as in Nigeria. (2008:14).
On his own part, Prof. Anya proffers a way out of what he called “Nigerian conundrum,” as the establishment of:

…an acceptable code of values with sanctions and punishment clearly spelt out,
evolve as the guide post to our politics… (2008:14)

From these, it is all clear that the system in which we live and operate is not only corrupt but fraught with elements that encourage corruption. In overhauling the system, there is need to start from the family and the schools. This would involve a re-evaluation of the school curriculum to make room for relevant cultural ethics, which lays emphasis on communal well-being over exploitative personal life-style. Emphasis should also be on exposing the evils of corruption and teaching the students the virtues inherent in selfless behaviour and sacrifice. The home which is the foundation of the family is expected at the same time, to be in the fore-front in re-orienting the members of the family to shun all forms of evil. As Keyamo (2008:30), enthused,

…To include anti-corruption as part of the curriculum in primary and secondary schools in Nigeria, so that our children can grow up hating the menace by nature. They should be taught why it is wrong to bend the rules to favour those who do not deserve the favour and the effect on the overall society.

He further, suggested that for the anti-corruption agencies to be effective, the law establishing them must “insulate anti-corruption agencies from political control and influence”. (2008:20).

Summary and Conclusion
Part of the problem of corruption in Nigeria, as has been stated, stems from our inherited colonial history that attempts to demonize most of our cultural heritage and values as archaic and lacking civility. This had ugly consequences in the development of the nation as it helped to make our indigenous values to look inferior, in the eyes of the people. The elite subsequently began to disdain and to reject most of what their values and culture stand for. Thus, it would not be out of place to state that though we re-gained our political independence in 1960, culturally we remain defeated. The defeat had continued to manifest in different forms like in our tastes, dressing and so on. In the attempt to be like our erstwhile colonial masters, practices alien and subversive to the emergent nation began to manifest. It was not long before the consequences became glaring following the political upheaval of 1965; after the election of that year. The military in attempting to salvage the sinking boat got entangled in corruption and even surpassed the civilians in the art. Indeed, a lot of things have gone wrong in the Nigerian political system, that the only hope of survival would entail a drastic overhaul of the present system, which we operate. This would help to bring about sanity and enduring political structures. Attitudinal change that extols character formation over and above wealth must be part of the values essential in the new dispensation.

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