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**EROSION OF AFRICAN VALUE SYSTEM:
CAN YOUTHS REDEEM THE TREND?**

Delivered by

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14TH FOUNDATION DAY LECTURE

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UNDERSTANDING THE AFRICAN VALUE SYSTEM

PREAMBLE

Before the 15th century, history depicts Africans as naked; men with only a loincloth and women with a piece of bark cloth draped around their waists and breasts. From that, we could infer that the European historians found more than enough reason to label Africa a concert of savage naked tribes that have no moral incentive to cover their bodies from their bewildered European audience and hence the label ‘uncivilized’.

Besides the joke, the purpose of this preamble is not to go over one of the most clichéd mockeries of African civilization or construct arguments that question the links between the comparison of perceived civilization and the inadequate covering of the African body before the 15th century but rather an attempt to think of it differently. The historians must have had their intellectual freedoms to be curious about conduct and question human behaviour. Can one say they asked the wrong questions? Their questions could hardly explain much about our values than their harboured preconceived responses to diversity. The failure to question why women are clothed more than men and how that represented their gender relations in it is a problem. Because any value system is not necessarily how people behave and relate but the explanation for their relationship and behaviour.

Being uncomfortable about peculiar responses and behaviour in other human beings other than oneself is only natural. I would argue that questioning why they behaved that way instead of categorizing them to classes on the rigid basis of historical sentiment is unjustifiable. Has any attempt been made to deduce why a girl child is nurtured solely for marriage and the boys to hunt and become sole providers for their families? Why they worshipped deities in the form of natural endowments like the rivers and mountains? All these form a much better and logical understanding of the African Value Systems.

VALUE SYSTEMS BEFORE COLONISATION

DIVINITY

Africa as a continent is the root of her civilization. Its fundamental values, written or unwritten, are transferred orally from one bloodline of African generations to another. It governs the daily value of living society. The moral circuits of our value systems define the people that we are and the very people we aspire to be. These values have ruled and bound communities since the time of our fathers.

Spiritually, every being within the society was accountable to the gods for their every action, belief, and even conscience. They sought for their counsel when calamity struck and when they encounter several options. The gods had divine infallibility and invincibility. They never failed and neither wronged.

The belief in divine beings and their will over humanity replicated for the African kings and chiefs what the church is doing for the political arm of governance in the present day. The gods in African tradition accorded the reigning power legitimacy and helped establish social order. Their existence justified imperial decrees that were said to be in response to prophecies revealed to oracles about the future calamity or a regretful past, one whose anger demanded appeasement of sacrifice and other rituals to that effect.

The faith in the existence of a supreme divinity controls everything done on earth. It does not only informed the Africans of the possibility that their lives had been predetermined but also justified their existence and gave sense to their own story of creation. The gods were the answer to the many mysteries that the Africans in time past would have questioned. Surprisingly, and luckily, the gods were in their ambiguity a response adequate to complete their unsolved puzzles.

Some prophecies passed by the gods had a great significance on the African resistance towards colonial rule. The name Kinjikitile Ngwale and his famed prophecy of the giant snake are a blockbuster episode of East African history. Since these prophecies could have been authentic, there is likelihood that when circumstances demanded, the oracles on the intuition of the king

would manufacture a prophecy that would provide ground for an imperial order to satisfy the selfish interest of the king. To this effect, the royal shaman was many a time in close contact with the king.

The norms and customs of these beliefs formed part of what became the moral fabric of African society. Ceremonies organized to honour these occasions were an avenue to promote unity and encourage them into submission to a divine bestowed leadership. Platitudes such as leadership come from above have not been invented today. Such expression has metamorphosed through different eras and used by various regimes to exalt service and encourage subjects to endure the tyranny of authority with a proviso that it is divinely ordained.

However much of this influence has been both good and bad, the fact that it wheeled forth civilization movements, progress in trade and stable communities is worth noting. It is impossible to have an entirely good culture or belief for ourselves. It is because the convenience of these systems is only short-lived and not always in the best interest of all. Deities are, therefore, an indispensable part of our living and history. They are a reason that we continue to be what we are and person we aspire to be.

LEADERSHIP

The same would go for leadership where kings and chiefs were supreme authorities and custodians of order. The highlight of this situation is within the Kgotla system in Botswana. Policy formulation and decision-making regarding the political and development activities of their local societies emanate from the system. It is traditionally a means of meaningfully engaging every stakeholder in decision-making processes.

It is a wrong notion that a communal system of governance came to be in Africa only after the advent of imperialism. Communities in African settings have governed themselves based on their norms and culture. This fact is seldom acknowledged. The communal governing system is regarded as mere units of settlement for the convenience of their survival. Due to this assumption, many of the experiences of leadership, organization of people and their assigned roles as members of society are classified as myths, fables and tales that we have invented to explain our un-witnessed origins and progress to where we are today.

Before the influx of colonization, it is pertinent to state that African societies exist and were active. These societies would have continued to function if not for the disruption of the setting by the colonizers. They not only disrupt communal living but equally entrenched their foreign supremacy. Therefore, any attempts to make them any less significant than they are is not only indicative of insatiable hunger for power but the insecurity that comes with the knowledge that Africa civilization was not their making. 'NOT BECAUSE OF THEM'

Pre-existing political structures in Africa fall between the central and the dispersed. The two function on an ethnic basis. People belonging to different tribes mobilized each other under a consensus leadership. The centralized societies thrived under kings and chiefs that passed laws, imposed taxes, accorded their subjects land and property rights and resolved disputes. This order runs through an organized hierarchy of sub-chiefs at county, parish and several other levels. The benefits of the royalties include a collection of tributes, farm products, domestic animals, and women as wives. These are to appease the king.

These structures became renowned because of the allusion to divine power. A typical example is Mansa Musa of Mali and Sundiata Keita and Sonni Ali of the Songhai in West Africa and the hereditary privilege of the Ganda and Nyoro royalty in East Africa. These kept the ordinary men in Africa convinced that their insubordination to the royal authorities would amount to incurring heavenly punishments and also that leadership was a birthright of the royals they, therefore, distanced themselves from any likely motive of revolt. These people were happy, peaceful and patriotic. At puberty, their parents would send them to their assigned clusters in preparation for initiation into adulthood. It is clear that these systems being an integral part of African leadership must have been the perfect avenue to initiate collaborations and employ the divide and rule policy to gain influence over Africa.

EDUCATION AND CULTURE

The education and culture of the people, skills, customs, norms and means of livelihood were transmitted to different age clusters of youths as the males prepared for initiation into adulthood.

In the pre-colonial era, the African societies offered training to their members. The education in the African system fostered collaboration and cooperation amongst members of the community. The training intends to enhance skills in the people and enable them to play a magnificent role in building their societies.

Learning in prehistoric Africa was a communal activity. Individual family units allied with village heads and concerned elders to ensure that they raised a generation of children conscious of their purpose in life and most important duties towards the progress of their community. It was one of the several stages of the growth of a child, one in which the community took a keen interest, and the parents drew prestige.

IDENTITY

The life of an African child began with a name. It came with a sense of belonging to the closer kinship of family and the broader expanse of relations with the community. Identity was one aspect of society held in high regard. It was a cultural indicator and implied various social traits peculiar to a given community. Identity justifies how one speaks, conducts, relationships with peers, how elders and foreigners are treated and noting which social aspects of life is considered taboo. Through it, the importance of culture and deities to worship are known.

Transmitting these values to the upcoming generation is the responsibility of the community members. It is to guide against unwanted social behaviour, which was likely to threaten the peace and progress of the community. No wonder community policing was a widely accepted and used system of community governance.

Teaching the male child how to survive while hunting, self-defence, working as a blacksmith, defending societal sovereignty, are the responsibilities of the elders. A male child is trained on how to provide for his family in adulthood. They are trained in the mastery and maintenance of their tools for hunting and cultivation. These are parts of the initiation ritual, a culturally prestigious ceremony for the induction of young males into adulthood.

INITIATION RITE

Initiation rites take different forms among different cultures but, some similarities cut across them. The initiation rite serves as the passage of the male child from adolescence into adulthood.

Some societies considered the initiation a precursor to ceremonies like circumcision among Mandinkas in The Gambia, which defined adulthood. In other communities, the passing on of this kind of knowledge was essential in nurturing a communally aware conscience that would uphold the values and beliefs of the community and as well promote allegiance to the reigning authorities of a given social unit. The elders in Botswana taught songs, riddles, proverbs, fables, and folktales to their youths to secure their obedience, support, and honour for the king (Schylera 1938). This particular motive was also visible in colonial Kenya, where the Mau-Mau warriors were subjected to an oath of unwavering loyalty to the national cause of redeeming their sovereignty. It is thus clear that the responsibility to deliver a society to its posterity has been on the youths since prehistoric times. And as such, they have been assigned to socially significant roles and called to serve in critical political crises. Thus many of these initiates would later form a reserve army battalion for their kingdoms.

The views discussed above are vital in acknowledging that an African education centred on human experiences of the learner at every period in time. It is prudent for the elders and the community to see to the content of the knowledge, its passage, and the changing environment. They learned by living and doing (Nyerere, 1961). This account for why most of the skills and values acquiesced by the prehistoric scholar was of standing moral significance, socio-cultural, economic, and political importance to the community.

The sole aim of any education system is the quality of its products to ensure a good standard of living and desire a tangible change to the communal way of life. Though some of these changes may not be tangibly seen as attitudinal changes, they form an integral part of the good life of the people and create a sane community.

The essence of education is to make life convenient and easy for a man to control his environment. The learning objectives in any system of education must be structured on the basic needs of the community, its economic prospects, social priorities, and resource wealth.

APPRENTICESHIP

It is arguably the most effective means of a community-led civilization. Native Africans made their children apprentices to the fields of metallurgy. They teach them how to make spears out of iron and copper. They brewed beer out of bananas and grain, wove threads into fine cloth, made pots out of clay, and raised huts out of the mud. The notable thing about this approach of skilling is the utmost relevance of the acquired knowledge to the apparent need of the community. It explains the emergence of wealthy African empires that flourished way before the arrival of the colonial gospel.

VALUES SYSTEMS IN THE PRESENT REALITY

Today, these values have been eroded some of them diminished to barbaric, others deemed ancient, and Africa summed into a dark and hopeless continent. Spirituality is constricted into religion yet our religious affiliations do not necessarily uphold the African values of humanity and tolerance. Religion promises morals, discipline, respect, unity, justice, kindness, law and order, wealth, heaven, and hell, notwithstanding though where are the unity among the people? Are all these promises living realities in our daily lives?

GOVERNANCE IN AFRICA

Governance in Africa lately does not entail the aspirations of people. We are encouraged to follow principles of democracy, communism, and socialism without understanding the meaning behind these. Disappointedly, most of these civilization ideals are within the purview of the privileged, the well-connected and elitist intellectual cults. We rely on the scripts of these foreign systems while we were denied a right to self-governance and definition. The resultant effect was a shift of loyalty from the electorate to the parties. The disturbing outcome of this reality is unending conflicts, wars, and genocides. Did our fundamental values of leadership manifested in our leaders today? Do our leaders exude empathy, gritty, and passion for instilling sustainable change in communities? The lack of such values makes it difficult for young people to look up to these leaders. It is resoundingly visible that our communities now showcase infested celebrity

leaders that have a narcissistic personality disorder and are mostly self-centred whose power feeds the vulnerability and naivety of their political fandom.

CULTURE

What about culture? The ringing questions on globalization are insanely confusing. The intense campaign for a single global village is more about westernization that mainly focuses on the globalization of western ways. Our culture is de-throning by the ongoing campaign on the pressing need for global integration. Films, documentaries, fashion shows, and brands are used to cripple our indigenous industries in these areas and teach us to be less appreciative of our own and more likely to praise the western ways. We have lost our original values--as we have moulded into chasers of the foreign values over what we have within. We no longer care about the well-being of people as long as we are driving posh Range Rovers.

We are at a place of shame, embarrassed to look back, afraid of regret and responsibility in their raw and bitter form. Many of our cultural behaviours suffered relegation and were termed retrogressive to the developmental agenda. With the influence of kingdoms and chiefdoms labelled as a political threat to a stable and peaceful democracy, Africans have become a disgrace to their own. The contagious belief that the most pressing challenges of Africa are to be solved by a transformation of culture and customs could hold some truth. The question is, is modernization a means to the re-making of our culture with an inherent similarity to our colonial wardens? If so, then it ceases to be meaningful progress but rather an attempt to shroud the mass poverty, civil strife and disease into skins which the white man's eyes are familiar with. It is then not a developmental agenda but performance choreography to entertain foreign tastes.

All of these are manifestations of western values--individualism over communalism. The raging desires for fame by young people leave nothing to be revered. Our generation would rather look up to the Kim Kardashians, and abide by the trends set by the Hollywood recognized stars other than listening to their community leaders. These are the folks forming the global agendas and determining ways of life. In the words of my good friend, Wode Maya, we are running to Dubai for tourism instead of going to Namibia, Nigeria, The Gambia, Mauritius, or Rwanda. But we never ask why the Chinese, the Americans, and Europeans keep flying and seeking settlement in

Africa. What value do we have within us that we never recognize yet broadly admired by the rest of the world?

EDUCATION TODAY

Today schools are not schools anymore. The schools are no longer the avenues for people to learn about their identities. What their capabilities are and what they can do to redeem their societies. They are instead breeding grounds for the millions of African youths graduating into unemployment every other year--giving rise to a generation that not only is ignorant and indifferent towards their history but also in self-denial of their own identity. Education has become a tool of societal segregation, differentiating people into strata. It has become a tool for the definition of social power. Most notably, the poor remain deprived and ignorant while the wealthy ones continue to live, ensconced in privilege, luxury and greed.

Schools in the African continent have become "a shadow of what colonialists left behind." This kind of education creates nationalists colonizers replacing the former colonial masters. Is it not absurd that decades after independence, our educational system is tailored towards making us permanently apes of the democratic system that colonial masters tagged us? Established political parties are along the lines of colonial suppression and oppression. Sometimes it seems the transition from colonial rule to independence was a cautiously scripted episode of hope lifting anthems and patriotic declarations at the backdrop of a new breed of oppression.

However, the times have changed. The needs which the educational system seeks to provide for have also changed. Our world has evolved quite much from the colonial century. However great the knowledge and learning experiences of the colonial system could have been, they are not as relevant today as they were then. This reality goes along with the lifeless theory related lectures that students are taught. They are taught theoretical knowledge that cannot be translated into an ability to produce and be employers of labour. The national examinations have not done us any better, as the futures of many creative directors, art curators, and authors are determined by a grade attained in Physics or Chemistry. We have lauded universities for being centres of civilization, human progress, and a place that comes with the intellectual privilege of questioning even the very dynamics of change. Unfortunately, the same centres have failed to uphold the

principles they seem to profess, by forcing students into predetermined spaces of traditional careers. African parents have persisted with the notion that doctors, lawyers, and engineers are the only decent jobs that proper education can guarantee. Teachers have pre-notion that every bright child in class should become a doctor and as such, they are coerced into science classes while the arts subjects are left for the students scaled as average. The students are torn between what they want, pleasing their parents, and fitting into the normal. So we end up having much of have-baked doctors and quack engineers simply for the sake of a science majority population.

We tend to forget that school has ceased to be about the 3Rs--Respect, Responsibility, and Relationship. We are on the verge of a very radical revolution that seeks to overturn even the most firmly placed notions like religion, gender, power, and authority. The unique characteristic of this movement is the youths. The youth's political preferences were considered cheap, illegitimate, and consequent of ideological disorientation, those whose decisions were said to be short-sighted and whose voices matter not because they are youths. Those who cannot claim respect because of their age are the people leading this revolution. They are the group disrupting dictatorships, leading the campaigning for environmental protection, and exacting the rights of the people. Not only a privilege for a given class of autocratic and their political kit.

Our planning units as youths must begin to register these changes, create awareness on identity, responsibility, respect for diversity, and equipped them to be agents of meaningful global challenges.

Africa today is a mass of healed wounds, broken clans, lost grandchildren of a "once was" people who became the inevitable victims of unprecedented double exposure. Africa today is a remnant of what survived the touch of the western-baptized civilization and a product of the colonial settlement and ideological campaigns. After two significant contacts with the outside world, a lot changed for Africa. Wealth becomes minted coins and compressed rim of a note. Knowledge of the idea of family squeezed into the vacuum of the European "nuclear" formation. Outlook of an ideal marriage declared obscene. What is African was labelled ignorance while what they taught was named literacy. Their knowledge acquired p and authority over the rest. Trading took a twist with the new possibilities of shipping people and commodities back and forth across the sea. She got a new language which undermined her mother tongue and customs as evident symptoms of Stone Age behaviour. Her best option was to move on and embrace the new world.

The imposed education system uprooted the traditional value system and promoted individual consciousness. The young Africans recruited into these schools were taught that their loyalty to the white man and his God would translate into personal rewards that elevate them above others. Their contacts and benefits accrued thereof with the colonialists charmed them and made them undermined their understanding of the meaning of community and family. Our exposure to education today should teach us about our history, civilization, and culture. It should elicit patriotism from us and endear us to problem-solving skills. It should be a centre of learning where sources of problems of society are identified and solved.

WHAT IS WRONG WITH THE CURRENT SYSTEM?

Today, the effects of the eroded values continue to thrive and widen the influence on our day-to-day lives. The imposed governing systems have failed; democracy seemingly yields more conflicts than the peace and economic thrive that it has promised. Several countries in Africa since independence have been shrouded in protracted or recurrent civil conflicts. Some countries have even degenerated due to the different electoral violence.

Against the broad background, there is a generic crackdown on the democratic systems in several African countries. They thrive in the 'big man syndrome' that has seen several countries run into conflict. It starts in Nigeria as end SARS protest against Police force brutality. It manifests itself in Ethiopia as tribal conflict, reappears in Mali as a coup d'état, South Africa as xenophobia, Cameroon as 'big man syndrome', and wreaked havoc daily in the East and West Cameroonians. This situation is the same in Namibia, Somalia, Burkina Faso, Gabon, South Sudan, and many other countries. Conflict continues to manifest, affecting our day-to-day means of livelihood.

With the erosion of the African value systems, we have been left divided and more disunited. Mission envoys are deployed to establish peace in Africa. A typical example is the United States of America mission in Congo. But these missions do not seem to end. The amount invested to end the wars and conflicts in the Congo should have sent the rebels packing. But what we see is more of the guise of exploitation of natural resources that leaves Congo more impoverished. Jeffrey Sachs (2021) opines in his article, Blood in the Sand, that 'almost every USA military intervention in the developing world has come to rot.' And indeed, less has been done for the

people wallowing in profound poverty in the vast Congo. We see future generations walking barefooted to school on lands rich in minerals. They are not conscious that the land they walked on housed minerals that could change their lives. They were taught the history of King Leopold II; taught stenography other than being exposed to means they can utilize to process the gold in their soils into products that can compete on the global market. Rather than investing in maternal health, schools, safe water, nutrition, and the like, sacks are the order of the day. Doing the needful could forestall future wars.

With incorrigible corruption eating up our governance systems, global corporations like Apple can come into Africa to subject millions of young people to forced labour while massively exploiting minerals to make billions of dollars for themselves. China comes into Africa, claim property, and bid to run construction projects as though we do not have our qualified hands. Weapons of mass destruction are sold to youths in Somalia, South Sudan, and all-around and, they are trigger happy to put these to use.

What about our females forced into modern-day slavery in foreign lands? Young women who graduated from university served as Janitors, Toilet Cleaners in the Middle East or the West, condoning torture while being paid peanuts. A young man was killed in France by Armenians. He is one of the few captured on camera. How many were murdered behind the curtains? Who even cares about us? Our nations are prototyping centres where young talent is diminished and exported as cheap labour to the Western world. Why can we not realize the value we have within?

In Africa, the world ploughed us because of our natural resources. Yet we suffer narratives in the Western media as the Dark Continent or labelled and globally as developing Africa. Our skills and energies are explored and exploited to build the Western world into what they are today. Yet, we are perceived as children of a lesser god. They reap more from our marginalization and utter poverty. They say we are developing nations, so we have to look up to them, aspire to be like them.

Unfortunately, the leaders we trust are trapped in this endless chase, trying to appeal to the western world rather than resolving the African challenges. They have promised us development,

employment, and a future filled with hope. But every day, our hopes are shattered by their actions. They have turned Africa into a begging continent, yet what we have within accords us the prowess to leap Africa and the world forward.

Why should a certified engineer work as a security guard in the United Arab Emirates, yet we need their skills to improve our dilapidated infrastructure? Why should a seasoned doctor escape to France to babysit as though we have enough doctors to support our healthcare systems?

These young people swimming to Spain are part of the generation supposed to redeem Africa. Condoning these, we are bound to lose the big picture of creating the Africa we want.

CAN THE YOUTHS REDEEM THE TREND? YES!

Young people play active roles as agents of positive and constructive change. They are adept, prolific, empathetic leaders, problem solvers with prototyping mindsets, and risk-takers with disruptive ideas. To put it bluntly, young people have enormous potential to drive growth. They are the activists, innovators, leaders, and workers of the future. But as young people, we need not rest, not be comfortable. We need to see the good in ourselves, our practices, and our possessions as Africans. Africa has for years produced men and women of honour, prolific and self-sacrificing leaders, whose bravery outshines that of any other people. We as young people must inspire a new narrative and foster a doctrine, unapologetically, free of any influence of the outside powers. We are Africans and, we have all it takes. Africa did not start with slavery, not colonialism. We existed before all these, so we must be ready to shape a new narrative, inclusive and cognizance of our historical realities.

However hard it may seem, it is not impossible, not yet. The age in which we live has brought us up in the culture of challenging norms and questioning the validity of their esteemed convenience and significance to human progress. That culture has birthed movements and given voices to suppressed sentiments. Sentiments that the black man only become more blacken when he meets the white man has become a mirage. It is painful even when it is bearable. But it is not different. The bias and privileges that come with light-skinned foreigners in Africa must stop.

In a world where women are domestic tools without any value has seized to exist. The violence against black people has come to the fore the more. American democracy faced threats of

collapse. The present world has seen the facade of American democracy. People openly protest against inhuman treatments and resist oppression. To harvest meaningful changes, Africans need to muster the courage to speak about their existence, appreciate and uphold their values. I like to make my suggestions using one of the most overused political punch lines of the 21st century. 'The youths are the leaders of tomorrow'. This statement testifies to countless and unfulfilled promises by government and opposition parties. They made the statement only to quell the anger, rage, and frustration the youth's exhibit against their poor and unproductive leadership. These leaders reign not for leadership potentials but because they too will be let into the eating circle "tomorrow"-- an "eat and let eat" kind of attitude. Millions of youths are captives of the biases that accrue from the misconstrued identity of being youths. And as such, they live their entire lives in the guilt of unemployment.

THE FUTURE

'Tomorrow' is used figuratively to indicate the future, 10 or 50 years from now. In an article, I read recently on the significance of youths in building a foundation for the future of Africa the writer had this to say of the heavy burden of uncertainty around a youth-led future, "I believe in the future, broken or wrecked, sustained or stained.." I want to believe in the same future with the hope that you too do the same. The time is now when the youths speak up and voice their concerns on world challenges and channel their rage about the abuse of their identities. They become advocate for a change in the treatment of women and children despite class, race, and history. Youths in Kenya in 2007 and others in Cote d'Ivoire in 2010 took to the streets protesting against what they believed was an abortion of democracy. Those voices stand a higher chance of proving if the future will indeed be broken or wrecked. Let the youth be that voice. Let them bear the regret for their indifference and negligence. They should shoulder the pride of the decisions of their past. To regret or not to, let the youths make that choice.

As young people, we have an individual role to play. We have to recognize that our values as Africans represent our worth. We must equip ourselves with fundamental values of empathy, grit, driven passion, positive change, trustworthiness, and values that make us leaders of merit. It is necessary to do this before we can seek occupation of the decision-making spaces.

We need to pick interest in our national affairs, rise to question the systems in place, peacefully lobby for spaces for our meaningful engagements in decision-making processes on issues that concern us and affect us. It is essential that lobbying is done for an intergenerational governing system where young people are considered critical partners and stakeholders in decision-making processes other than being viewed as mere beneficiaries. Once this is achieved, reforming the educational systems, attaining civil rights, combating and defeating injustices, distributing resources fairly and equitably to eradicate poverty, and finally creating the Africa we dreamt of. By doing so, we can save not all the pieces of the eroded values systems, but a huge chunk that can restore dignity for us all and a self-defining Africa.

THANK YOU, FOR LISTENING.

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