

Political Leadership in Nigeria: Our National Anthem and National Pledge

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Abstract

This paper examines Nigeria's political leadership in relation to her national anthem and national pledge using secondary sources within elite theory frame. The strongest factor standing against Nigeria's national vision is leadership. This paper argues that there is too much financial entitlement and benefit attached to public office in Nigeria. The depth of power and resources embedded in the central government has had trickle-down effect on sub-national unit (state government) and local government. Relying on narrative and interpretative lens, this paper recommends that: Federal Government should reduce the financial entitlement of political office holders, from the presidency downwards, coupled with a lean budget which must be the new 'catch word', i.e., cars and other public properties at public office holders' disposals should be scaled down. There should be a sovereign national conference on how more powers should be devolved to the state government and capital punishment for people who have been found wanting of corruption aside restitution. Although pro-human rights debates against the death penalty suggest a decline in global state executions, the philosophy of "it is better to be feared than to be loved" by Niccolo Machiavelli seems appropriate in societies such as Nigeria.

Keywords: Leadership, Political leadership, National Anthem, National Pledge

Introduction

Nigeria is a post-colonial political independent entity that has desired and striven for unity, peace, justice, self-reliance and multi-dimensional development and progress. This is expressed in her national anthem and national pledge. The country has embarked on several national development plans and public policies in the quest to achieve her dreams and aspiration since independence in 1960 till date. The second National development plan (1970-1974) outlined the following objectives: A united strong and self-reliant nation; a great and dynamic economy; a just and egalitarian society; a free and democratic society; and a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens (National Planning Office, 1975). All these laudable dreams, visions and objectives embedded in Nigeria's *National Anthem and National Pledge* have all worked in reversed order most times. The colonial imperialism of subjugation, enslavement and open plunder of our human and natural resources laterally compares to the underdevelopment bedeviling Nigeria since 1960 political independence with "Africans under developing Africans" rather than European underdevelopment of Africa. Soludo (2006:8) notes that about 17 million Nigerians live abroad struggling to earn a living as Walter Rodney posits. The Nigeria state has had competing demands seen in the Niger-Delta crisis, State-Local government administration, citizenship-identity-minority questions, Islamic insurgency and pastoral-cattle-farmers violence amongst other variables in the matrix of development.

Indeed, tracing the nature and causes of the depth of underdevelopment within the facets of the Nigerian society is an uphill task given the easy manipulations of visible and invisible forces of divisiveness and disintegration at work. The first attempt by civilian elected government to rule in 1960 revealed the inherent weaknesses in our political ideology and value system, which was easily eroded by personal, ethnic, geographical, religious and narrow socio-economic interests and the inheritance of the colonial (non-African) model of governance (and other forms of neo-colonialism). This was exacerbated further by Nigeria's military overthrow antecedent often done on the basis of awful conditions and corruption (Dawood, 2014:292). The issue of multi-facet corruption was so alarming in the 1960s that the military was left with no option than to remove the democratically elected leaders of Nigeria's 1st Republic from power.

The failure to tackle this menace has continued haunting us at all points to the path of great nation-states. Olusegun Obasanjo (1994) before his 'second coming' in a keynote address on Nigeria, the state of the Nation and the way forward" organized by Arewa House Kaduna quoted a foreign writer to amplify our condition thus:

Once Nigeria was considered the anchor and bellwether of a huge continent, blessed with clever and energetic peoples, favored with ample material resources (especially oil), and is Africa most populous country. But despite size and wealth, Nigeria lingers in the doldrums, perpetually a country of the future.

It is pertinent to note that, the mismanagement of resources coupled with the political instability in Nigeria which saw military intervention five times successfully and spanning 29 years showed off its multiplier effect on the long years of decline in the economic and social wellbeing of the majority of Nigerians. The foregoing is in contradiction to the Nigerian National Anthem which says, '*To serve our fatherland*' and the oath taken by political leaders to that effect.

The challenges before past, present and future Nigerian political leadership is examined in this paper within a cross examination of two national symbols, the National Anthem and the national pledge. In order to explore the way forward, the paper attempted to clarify some of the concepts used and useful comments made so as to enhance our understanding. The following are the objectives of the paper:

1. To interrogate the impact of Nigeria's political leadership governance within;
2. To determine the nexus of Nigeria's National Anthem and Pledge and national development outcomes.

The paper intends to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the roles of political leadership in Nigeria's national development?
2. Can the National Anthem and Pledge give meaning to Nigeria's collective interest?

The research methodology for this paper follows qualitative research method, using narrative and interpretive content analysis for this study.

Conceptual Clarifications

Leadership

Vroom and Yetton (1973:24) describe leadership as decision making. They assert that leadership is the responsibility of making decisions as to who gets what, when and how in the society. Darth (2001:16) sees it as an alignment between leaders and followers' ideas towards a good outcome. Darth holds that leadership is all about arriving at a conclusion based on the initiatives of the leaders and the followers. Thus, leadership is the art of leading a group of people for the purpose of providing the greater good for the greatest number of people.

Political Leadership

Political leadership is: i) democratically elected ii) representatives who iii) are vulnerable to des-election, and iv) operate within, as well as influence a constitutional and legal framework. Their source of authority is v) a mandate: ‘permission to govern granted by electorates . . . upon the decisive outcome of an election’ (*Chambers dictionary*, 1993 as cited in Morrell & Hartley, 2006). Political leaders are democratically elected representatives that rule within the framework of the constitution. This definition favours only political leaders who are elected, while excluding those appointed and leaders who must have emerged through coup, in the case of the military. This definition is narrow in as much as it confines political leadership to only elected representatives of the people.

However, Ogbeidi (2012:4) notes that political leadership as the ruling class bears the responsibility of managing the affairs and resources of a political entity by setting and influencing policy priorities affecting the territory through different decision-making structures and institutions created for the orderly development of the territory. Further, Ogbeidi believes that political leadership is the governing elite that manage the affairs and resources of a community, nation or country by making and implementing policies that bring about development. This definition is a broad one, as it reveals that political leadership entails the ruling elite whether they are elected or not, inasmuch as they bear the responsibility of managing the affairs and resources of an independent political entity.

National Anthem:

A National anthem is a generally patriotic musical composition that evokes and eulogizes the history, traditions and struggles of its people, recognized either by a nation’s government as the official national song, or by convention through use by the people (Bristow 2006). Furthermore, the national anthem is a self-identifying musical symbol of nation, country, nation-state, a people or an area with a self-identifying populace who regard themselves as a nation.

National Pledge:

The National Pledge is an oath of allegiance to a nation, nation-state, country, people or formal and informal nation. It is recited in schools during assemblies, Independence Day, and official government functions. A nation begins and is sustained with patriotism of the citizenry. As with when reading a love poem, the National Anthem and Pledge are well based to bind us together in unity (Leonard; H. 1996).

Theoretical Frame

The paper is hinged on elite theory. The theory was propounded in the 1930s, by the likes of Vilfredo Pareto (1935) and Gaetano Mosca (1939). The main thrust of elite theory is that elite controls and exploits the non-elite by the virtue of its position in the society. According to Pareto (1935), society is divided between lower stratum and higher stratum. The lower stratum is made up of the non-elite, while the higher stratum is made up of the elite. The elite class is further divided into governing elite and non-governing elite. The governing elite which are from the higher stratum dominate and occupy all important political appointments and influence major political decisions. Elites and non-elites are not stable, and they are subject to change. New elites rise and take old elite's place. This change is called the law of circulation of elites by Pareto. He says "elites" or aristocrats do not last. They live or take position in a certain time. "History", he says, "is a graveyard of aristocracies" (Pareto 1935). He went further to say that the elite class is usually the richest.

There is no doubt that there are two classes of people in every society – a class that rules and a class that is ruled. The former contains a few number of people and possess all political power and privileges whereas the latter consists of large number of people who are subjected to rule of the former and provide essential instruments for political organization (Mosca 1939). According to Mbah (2014):

Elite theory formed an essential part of the political doctrine which was critical of modern democracy and hostile to modern socialism. The elite are those people who have some qualities that differentiated them from the general mass of people. Hence, democratic systems must rely on the wisdom, loyalty and skill of their political leaders, not on the population at large.

The elite class is the richest and the most successful in every sphere of life; the elite controls and exploits the non-elite by the virtue of its position in the society. Governing elite, which is the first in the class of two in the elite class, establishes its control over the subject class by using force and providing great wealth. Bargaining, concessions, and deceit are the kind of policies used by the political leadership. Economic prosperity not only keeps the ruling class in power and makes it easier to govern society than periods of depression, but also affects the type of political regimes (Pareto 1935).

It is a truism to say that political leadership in Nigeria, which is the governing group of the elite, exploits the people (masses) they are supposed to serve, as the *Nigeria National Anthem* implies. Again, it is equally worthy of note to say that the oath taken by political leadership of Nigeria, the pledge *to build a nation where peace and justice shall reign*, is far from being followed; rather, it is only the elite that get justice at the detriment of the people (masses).

Relevance of Elite Theory to the Study

The extent of success or failure of any human society or organization has its root in leadership at all levels. Great empires, kingdoms, nation-states and organizations have risen and fallen due to effective or ineffective leadership. People have been enslaved and liberated due to leadership. The influence of Othman Danfodio's Jihad conquest and leadership has transcended generations and still subsists today in modern day Nigeria and Africa south of the Sahara, thus expanding the frontiers of Islamic civilization.

The unity and integration for greater progress that political leadership ought to exhibit is far from it. Mandela sought to prove a point in unity and integration for greater progress, observes, "I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities" (Mandela, 1964). Harmony and equal opportunities can be attained in a nation with effective leadership. To this end, the extent of any society's political, economic and social development will be anchored on leadership tied to followership in every ramification. This is further corroborated by Ogbogbo C. (2009):

Discounting the problems and tendencies created by colonial rule, perhaps no other factor is as implicated in the human condition and the generally deplorable state of affairs in postcolonial Nigeria as the failure, or indeed the lack, of leadership - by comparison countries like Malaysia and Singapore, through the vision and hard work of their leaders, and against all odds, have transformed their countries. India, another country in Asia, which was subject to colonial rule like Nigeria, has similarly recorded major achievements in the face of overwhelming challenges, including runaway population. Even in Africa, Botswana, Ghana and Senegal, among former colonies are, making significant progress in nation building. What, then, is the problem with the Nigerian Political Leadership?

Ghana in the late 1970s and early 1980s was brought to her knees economically and politically, making her citizens 'hewer of woods and fetchers of water' even in Nigeria and beyond due to the negative actions of her political leaders. However, the decisions, actions and legacies of former President Jerry Rawlings saved Ghana from the brink of total collapse, and today it's a haven for investors and a political mentor to other nations especially a 'stone throw away' Nigeria.

In the words of Thompsell (2017), the reason Flight Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings and other officers gave for taking power just weeks before national election of 1979 was that the Union Government would be no more stable or effective than previous government. They were not stopping the election themselves, but they did execute several members of the military government, including the former leader, General Acheampong.

They also purged the higher ranks of the military. Rawling was a military man with the passion to right the wrong of his country that was nothing to write home about as a result of the socio-economic problem that his country was facing by that period.

Thus, after the National Election of 1979, the new President, Dr. Hilla Liman, forced Rawlings and his co-officers into retirement. However, when the government was unable to fix the economy and corruption continued, Rawlings launched a second coup. On December 31, 1981 he, several other officers and some civilians seized power again. Rawlings remained Ghana's head of state for the next twenty years (Thompson, 2017). Leadership is all about service to humanity, which makes people better off. Rawlings was a young military officer that launched himself into fame as a result of the passion to make his people better off. About Mao Tse Tung of China, Lai (1995:155) rightly observed thus:

The leader if he is worth his salt - must be ready to risk everything, even his life. Perhaps the greatest example of leadership borne in suffering is epitomized in Mao Tse Tung. In the worst of circumstances he led 90,000 Chinese followers through an uncharted 6,000 miles of country strewn with wild animals, dangerous rivers, and inhospitable weather from south-east China to the north-west. On arrival at their destination they took a roll, 20,000 people had successfully made the journey. They were as many as 70,000 who could not make it. Many of them exceedingly tired out found new homes for themselves along the route. Many drowned in the rapids of the rivers they crossed.

While the journey lasted, Chairman Mao was the last to accept to eat his own ration of food. He made sure that every other person ate first. The long march has been the longest one ever undertaken by any one man exposing himself to the cruelest test of human endurance, personal discipline and human sufferance. It has no parallel in history. That is why, today chairman Mao is regarded the world over as the greatest leader of the Chinese. No matter what happens to Chinese communism in the future, Chairman Mao will remain in human history, immortal.

Great leaders do all they can to make sure that welfare of the people are improved, and these kinds of leaders do not amass the wealth of the nation they are supposed to oversee. Another good example of exemplary leadership who was worthy of emulation is late Nelson Mandela of South Africa. Nelson Mandela was elected as the first 'black' President of a democratic South Africa in 1994. He stepped down in 1999 after one term as President, even when the people of South Africa pressurized him to seek for re-election (<http://news.colombia.edu/content/1524> "Reflections on Nelson Mandela's Legacy").

However, it is a paradox that Nigeria, a country endowed with many resources, still has more than 70 percent of its population living below the poverty line as a result of corruption and economic mismanagement. Pathetically, the logic of the Nigerian political leadership class has been that of self-service as some of the leaders are mired in the pursuit of selfish and personal goals at the expense of broader national interests (Ogbeidi, 2012:3). Personal interest is when a political leader wants to die in public office even when his people don't want him or her. From observation, ex-President Olusegun Obasanjo seems to have fell into the category of political leaders that are selfish, in as much as he wanted to go for third term in office even when the constitution is clear.

In the words of Lai (1995:155), although Nigeria attained independence in 1960, she had never been lucky to produce a national leader capable of steering the ship of Nigeria in a way that it could metamorphose into a real nation. The observation by Lai that Nigeria has not had a national leader capable of steering the ship of Nigeria is not true. From observation, Nigerians have been lucky to have the likes of late General Murtala Muhammed (1975-1976) and late President Musa Yar 'Adua (2007-2009). For example, the late President Yar 'Adua is known to have upheld the rule of law that saw some of his political party men losing election cases in the Court of Appeal (ex-Governor Osubor of the People Democratic Party in Edo lost to ex-Governor Adams Oshioh mole of the Action Congress of Nigeria around 2008, while late Governor Olusegun Agagu of the People Democratic Party in Ondo State lost to ex-Governor Olusegun Mimiko of Labour Party).

However, the ideal of accountability that could engender development has not been embraced by most political leaders in Nigeria. Tukur best captures it when he observes

The idea of accountability is yet to take root in the thinking of Nigeria elites. It seems that an effort to develop a coherent body of norms, code of behavior and institutions or instill discipline which is its bedrock was rekindled and followed up with actions only by a small segment of the leadership groups (Tukur, 1999:392).

If accountability has not been embraced by political leadership in Nigeria, it therefore means that participatory democracy is yet to take root in the country. In a mature democratic society where participation of the majorities is the password, accountability becomes a necessity between the political leadership and the people.

Discussion

For almost every Nigerian who has gone through school on Nigerian soil, the national anthem is second after the recital of prayers by the two dominant religions in our secular state.

The Nigeria National Anthem

*Arise, O compatriots
Nigeria's call obey,
To serve our fatherland
With love and strength and faith,
The labour of our heroes past
Shall never be in vain,
To serve with heart and might
One nation bound in freedom
Peace and Unity.*

*O God of Creation, direct our noble cause,
Guide our leaders' right,
Help our youth the truth to know:
In love and honesty to grow,
And live in just and true,
Great lofty heights attain,
To build a nation where peace
And justice shall reign* (Source: Gombe State Government, Diary: 2010)

The first four lines of Nigeria's National anthem calls on all citizens, especially the political leadership of Nigeria to heed a call to serve our fatherland. Indeed the ingredients of a true patriot portrays: loyalty without double standards, in which your nation comes first passionately. The story of Nigeria since 1960-2017 depicts age long contradictions in our actions and inaction as leaders and followers. We live in cleavages and cliques of ethnic groups just as the 'white men' met us. All the differences they met are refined and confined to suit the quota system and political exigencies of the ruling interest. When Nigerians feel no safety within and cannot derive all the benefits of the opportunities that abound, then we are not compatriots.

The call '*to serve with love and strength and faith*' is channeled to narrow self-interest as conflicts abound to amass the collective resources and wealth of the nation. This is the norm rather than the exception. Corroborating, Ramon (2017) states that Justice Belgore collected 45 million naira from the sum of 115 million dollars, which a former Minister of Petroleum Resources, Mrs. Diezani Alison-Madueke, allegedly doled out to compromise the 2015 General Election. It is a truism to say that public office holders in Nigeria do not serve their country with love, not to talk of strength and faith. In fact, political office holders do not have faith in the growth of Nigeria, but for the faith of looting her resources. Serving Nigeria as a country should be to make her better off and not to make it worse off. The first four lines of the Nigerian National Anthem has now changed to:

I pledge to loot Nigeria my country, to be unfaithful, disloyal and dishonest to serve Nigeria, with none of my strength...

Some former chief executives of the states who served as governors of States in the Nigerian federation were being tried for corrupt practices and some women (definitely not elites) danced half-naked in full public glare at one of such trials in protest against the trial of one of such governors in Kaduna town. Ehusani (2001:64) affirmed the failure of our value system when he stated the obvious thus: “Our political landscape remains dominated by primitive greed, hatred, bitterness, resentment, violence and crime”, with their ramifications.

The labour of our pseudo heroes has been the masses being manipulated advertently or inadvertently to serve the ruling political leadership with heart and might to their own end. To state that Nigeria’s National Pledge is a contradiction to the crop of leadership Nigeria has as a country is the fact. Ramon (2017) quotes a human rights advocacy group, Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP), saying it had submitted a petition to the Independent Corrupt Practices and other related offence Commission (ICPC) against the Governor of Imo State, Owelle Rochas Okorocha. The group said it wanted Okorocha probed for abuse of office on account of his erection of statues for the South African and Liberian Presidents, Jacob Zuma and Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf respectively in his state.

SERAP said both statues might have cost 1 billion naira, adding that it was concerned that they might have been funded with Public funds. The group also questioned the legality of the governor’s involvement in Rochas Okorocha Foundation while holding public office as Imo State Governor. This is coupled with the fact that the governor owes teachers in the state the salary of up to three months (Ishiekwene, 2017). Modern Nigerian government as it borders the legislative and executive arms of government displays public wealth, opulence and the grandeur of political and institutional powers.

Late General Murtala R. Muhammed’s (Nigeria’s Head of State, July 1975-February 1976) historical accounts tell us of the Commander-in-chief who drove to work with little ceremony in a second-hand Mercedes 230. He drew up a political programme without pressure and even in death his lieutenants did not deviate from it. Further, in governance, he instituted accountability, low profile, and complete reorientation, making service to the people the first priority, in order to give purpose to Government (Aminu, 2006:55). On the contrary today our senators, House of Representative members, Executive Governors, Commissioners, State house of Assembly members, Local government chairmen, bureaucrats and technocrats amongst others make the labour of late General Murtala Muhammed and other true heroes to be in vain! In the government and out of office, the fleet of exotic cars, posh hotel lodges, houses owned, foreign trips and juicy allowances of Nigeria’s political leadership speaks volume and is contrary to our national pledge.

Indeed, the Nigeria National Anthem has not in any way had a positive influence on development in Nigeria. No wonder some people have made caricature of our national pledge in the past.

There is no doubt Nigeria's political leadership are members of the elite class. This group of people is supposed to be guided by the rule of law and the oath of office to which they have sworn to. Whether the political leadership is living up to expectations, as regarding the country's national pledge is what is doubtful. The Nigerian National Pledge is as follow:

*I pledge to Nigeria my country
To be faithful loyal and honest
To serve Nigeria with all my strength,
To defend her unity,
And uphold her honour and glory
So help me God.* (Gombe State Government, Diary: 2010)

The first and second lines of the Nigerian National Pledge end thus:

*I pledge to Nigeria my country
To be faithful loyal and honest*

The Christian Holy Scripture says, let your 'yes' be 'yes' and your 'no' be no. The foregoing simply implies that one should be a man or woman of his or her words. Going to The second line of the National Pledge states, *to be faithful, loyal and honest*. There is a general notion that a faithful and honest person doesn't covet or take another person's belonging unlawfully. If the above scenario holds, looting of state treasury is a negation to the oath taken by political leadership in Nigeria.

The military government of 1970s, 1980s and 1990s worked in sharp contradiction to the Nigerian National Pledge. According to Afolabi, the Belgore Commission of Inquiry was established to investigate the "Cement Armada." The Commission indicted the Gowon government for inflating contracts for cement on behalf of the Ministry of Defence for private profit at a great cost to the government. In its Report, the Commission noted that the Ministry of Defence needed only 2.9 million tons of cement at a cost of N52 million as against the 16 million metric tons of cement it order at a cost of N557 million (Afolabi, 1993 as cited in Ogbeyidi, 2012). The level of looting state treasury by the military was an alarming one that contradicted the Nigeria National Pledge and the oath they have taken. Likewise the military governments of Generals Babangida (1985-1993), Abacha (1993-1998) and Abdulsalam (1998-1999).

The third line of the Nigerian National Pledge ends thus: *To serve Nigeria with all my strength*. It is germane to say that the youth of every country is her strength. If the above observation stands, how then do the political leadership serve Nigeria with all his strength when her symbol of strength; the youths, are wasting away in cities and towns and villages trying to get jobs that either don't exist or are reserved for children of the ruling class? When the youths see no future and live without options of healthcare, better education or better display of inherent worth, talents are buried most times before the world acknowledges them. The foregoing are what the action or inaction of the political leadership of Nigeria put her citizens through.

Corroborating further, Nseyen (2017) notes about the 26 Nigerian women migrants that died while crossing the Mediterranean Sea to Italy. The Nigerian political leadership wastes the strength of this country through wastage of resources that leave nothing for an average citizen to benefit from, hence the need for Nigerians to move out of the country by illegitimate means in search of greener pastures. In the words of Mandela, "our freedom can never be complete or our democracy stable unless the basic needs of our people are met" (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2014). Provision of basic amenities and better enabling environment to Nigerians remain the key functions of the Political leadership in Nigeria if the Nigerian National Pledge must stand the test of time.

Indeed, the political leadership of Nigeria is using power to his own advantage, rather than that of the people (masses). In a classical study on Honour, Ethics and Accountability, Shafritz J.M. et al (2007:176) highlight Machiavelli's set of axioms and ideas about obtaining power, holding on to power, and using power to advantage thus:

Men should be either treated generously or destroyed, because they take revenge for slight injuries - for heavy ones they cannot. Potential organizational or political rivals should be either made part of your team or "destroyed" fired or killed-because if left in place, they will, like a snake, bite you in the rear when you least expect it.

The elite class can do everything to be in power and even to remain in power. Hence, whenever it is time to have a change of government, the change is usually a shift from one elite group to another. This is because of the advantageous position they occupy.

General Murtala Muhammed's military government set up commissions of inquiry in the 1970s to probe the corrupt allegations against the Gowon government, which resulted in the immediate dismissal of several corrupt officials, many of who were in turn ordered to refund the money they had stolen. General Murtala was assassinated after only six months in office (Ogbeide, 2012:8). The killing of General Murtala is a setback to national development. One may want to ask if political leadership in Nigeria will ever be sincere with their oath of being *faithful and honest* to the Nigerian State.

The fourth line of the Nigerian National Pledge says, “*To defend her unity*”. In the face of a high level of corruption, favoritism and nepotism, no one except the rich (elites) want the unity of Nigeria and revile in the false honor and glory. ‘So help us God’ is a collective expression of the average Nigerian’s aspiration though most times the interplay of our collective human-made circumstances have driven us to dishonor that Great God. In fact, if the political leadership contending for the soul of this great country called Nigeria had their way, the last line of the National Pledge would read thus: *So help me god!* The political, economic, social and military godfathers in Nigeria would want it so, to represent them. They erroneously and selfishly believe that without them, nothing good, fair and just would come the way of the people (masses).

Conclusion

The paper concludes that the only factor standing between Nigeria and greatness is leadership. Findings reveal that there is too much of financial entitlements and other benefits in public office than one can imagine. Further, it was also discovered that too much power and resources are embedded in the central government than other component units (state government). It was observed that corruption is almost the second name of political office holders in Nigeria; it also discovered that the ruling political party at the federal level has been placed at an advantaged position to influence election outcomes, except for the last 2015 general elections.

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