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Leadership in Corruption and Corrupt Leadership: Revisiting Who's Afraid of Solarin by Femi Osofisan

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Abstract

Africa is one of the continents in the world that have leadership challenges from colonial masters to military dictators, although presently, democracy is being embraced by almost all African states. Interestingly, lots of aspersions have been cast by scholars attributing Africa's under-development and slow growth rate to 'corrupt leadership' which has perpetually kept the continent in economic chaos resulting in abject poverty of the region. In this paper, attention will be on leaders and leadership in corruption in a democratic era, especially in Nigeria. The point here is to revisit the play text, *Who's Afraid of Solarin?* by Femi Osofisan as a platform to open up discussions on corrupt leadership in Nigeria under democracy. This is with the intention of exploring the wave and spread, depth and extent of corruption among democratically elected leaders and the effect on the governed. These would be achieved by drawing copious instances of corrupt practices by leaders from the Nigerian society in relation to the play text to juxtapose past and present situations. Questions that yearn for answers will be posed as to what actually inhibits good leadership in Nigeria and why has it become a norm for leaders to be corrupt? The paper will further identify avenues for curbing this cankerworm, at least to the barest minimum, if not total eradication, for a rebirth of new leaders.

Key words: Leadership, leaders, democracy, corruption, governance.

Introduction

The call for good leaders is loud and clear in today's world. Africa, and Nigeria in particular, is bereft of visionary leaders who

can positively influence and move people towards the achievement of common goals. A leader must be mature, experienced, prepared and well equipped to shoulder the challenges and responsibilities of office. "A leader is simply seen as somebody whom people follow or as somebody who guides or directs others to achieve a common goal" (Oredein and Akinrinolu, 2014, p. 3). Dvir, Eden, Avolo and Shamir (2002) identify two perceived categories of behavioural traits in leaders to be, consideration and initiating structure. Consideration deals with improved and effective human relations while initiating revolves around the spiral actions of a leader targeted at task accomplishment. Leadership is the art of leading. Leadership is a critical skill developed over time as a competency to correct social, economic, education challenges the entire human race is facing. Leading is therefore a major function expected of a responsible leader.

Out of the many meanings and interpretations given the word 'leadership', Surji's captures the whole essence of this paper. He defines leadership based on the ten letters that form the word.

Leadership is a position to *Listen with Enthusiasm*, having an *Aspiring* mind, to be able to make a *Decisive* action, *Empower* and *Encourage* others in a *Responsible*, *Supportive* and *Humble* manner to *Inspire* them to achieve set goals as *Planned* (Surji, 2015, p.155).

In support, Hauk (2010) believes that poor leadership brought us to this point and only excellent leadership will bring us out. The universality of leadership has positioned it as crucial and fundamental to human existence. Incompetence in leadership is a true reflection of leadership culture, not just the problem of leaders. Nigeria has had her own share of bad leadership, where leaders are served instead of them serving.

Growing leaders with leadership skills and exceptional character is paramount and core to Nigeria's development (Adeyemi, 2017). Bad leadership in Nigeria has a crippling and rippling effect on lifestyle of the people in such a manner that corruption is almost a normal phenomenon. Corruption cuts

across all facets in the country. Nigerian leaders occupy positions that make them appear superior and unaccountable to their followers. On this account, the country is ruled by corruption bringing about bad governance, injustice, religious bias, ethnicity, poverty, unemployment and insecurity. Past and present regimes have had a fair share in perpetrating corruption (both military and democratically elected leaders) and have gradually eroded the fabrics of our existence as a nation. However, this paper will dwell on democratic governments in Nigeria, to assess their roles in breeding and grooming corruption to a monstrous stage, making it almost impossible to conquer. Femi Osofisan, a visionary playwright had earlier played out this situation at inception in this satirical drama, *Who's Afraid of Solarin?* The late Tai Solarin was Public Complaints Commissioner in the defunct Western state of Nigeria, was a highly principled and disciplined man who uphold honesty and integrity as noble virtues. This is the major character that the play revolves around to unveil corrupt practices of political leaders, shrouded in secrecy. Preceding sections will attempt conceptual clarifications of terms, in order to properly situate them within the context, study and scope of this paper.

Concept of Corruption

The term 'corruption' is derived from a Latin word 'corrupto' meaning to decompose or to disintegrate, to lose value, to become putrid and useless (Ochuler & Bassey, 2010). This implies to loose integrity, loyalty, honesty and legal behaviour. Igboin (2016) sees corruption as a problematic and elusive concept, implying that, though it negates moral and ethical ethos, it is difficult to come to terms with. "Corrupt practices are displayed through "extortion, embezzlement, favouritism, tribalism, nepotism, plagiarism ... (Omonia and Awofeko (2018, p. 48). Khan in Ajidahun (2013, p.112)) defines corruption as "an act which deviates from the formal rules of conduct governing the action of someone in a position of authority because of personal motives such as wealth, power or status" This definition strategically locates corruption within the political and economic structures, which are the bedrock of the society. Fortunately, this definition is apt and suits perfectly the context from which

corruption is approached in this paper. Therefore, corruption will be taken to mean gross abuse and misuse of power, office, status privileges and/or opportunities by a leader adjudged to be of higher personality or superior, thereby putting the less privileged at grave disadvantage. Corruption is a social menace that has done no good to the image of the country. The history of corruption in Nigeria is as old as the country itself. Ezeogidi (2019), account of the emergence of corruption in leadership gives an in-depth historical perspective on corruption in Nigeria and it is apt for this paper. According to him, corruption started rearing its ugly head shortly after the amalgamation (1914) of the Northern and Southern protectorates to birth a country, called Nigeria. Since then, many governments have come and gone portraying themselves as forces, fighting corruption while in actual fact they were busy fueling it. In a bid to kill this monster, many institutions have been created since 1960 and in recent times, such as, Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) and Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). However, leaderships in Nigeria have not been sincere to this cause as they only pay lip service in the fight against corruption and corrupt practices in the country. Eradicating corruption as a social menace has become almost impossible mainly because "corruption is embedded in the ethos, practices, conducts, beliefs, sayings, idiosyncrasies and cultural heritage of Nigeria" (Osunkoya & Ogunkoya, 2011, p. 14). Sadly, corrupt leaders cling on to power so as to continually shroud their activities under covers, knowing fully well that they cannot withstand the scrutiny of a transparent government. Ultimately there is ruthless repression and oppression of advocates for accountability, public probity and transparency. It is an understatement to say that the Nigerian nation needs to come to terms with the prevalence of corruption and its hydra effects on the society and people at large (Omonia & Awofeko, 2018).

Concept of Leadership

It has become evident that the concept of leadership is central to this discourse. Therefore, leadership will be holistically looked at within the perimeters of this paper.

Leadership is the glue that connects and holds people and communities together yet, like glue, it can be almost imperceptible to the naked eye. It is the thread that runs throughout and is more frequently revealed within subtle, incremental actions rather than dramatic transformational change (Bolden & Kirk, 2005, p. 13).

Also, Mohammed in Asaju, Arome and Mukaila (2014, p.119), defines leadership as "the ability of an individual to influence others to work beyond ordinary level to achieve goals within organisations, a community or society". Leadership here is "a very big challenge in Africa and Nigeria in particular" but are hopeful that purposeful leadership...is capable of turning its chorused great potentials into real economic and political power..." (p.117). Following this trend of thoughts, leadership in this context will be regarded as, a conscious effort made by an individual in a position of authority, to positively influence productivity of a set of people while aligning them to desired goals within the confines of the organizational structure. Leadership is a function of leaders. A lot of attributes have been ascribed to a leader. A leader is expected to be innovative, creative, responsible, accessible, accomplished, credible and so on. There is need to add that these qualities are never inborn, rather they are acquired through the process of culturization and or socialization.

The implication is that leaders are not born but raised (Folarin, 2010). A leader needs to be trained to discover and maximize these leadership traits. The question here is, are there people with true leadership traits in Nigeria? Yes, they exist but they are few and are apolitical. They do not have the means to come to power, or probably, they are denied opportunities by political Lords/Godfathers who dictate the tunes in political parties. Another germane question to be answered is, are there visionary leaders in Africa in general and Nigeria as an entity? Surely, the answer is also in the affirmative. There are many visions driven Nigerians involved in epoch making achievements in Diaspora especially in leadership positions in sectors like, health, education, politics, economy etc. It is worthy to note that Nigerians thrive and perform to the utmost in foreign climes

simply because they are in less toxic societies that give opportunities and recognise efforts of individuals in contributing to the development of the society. A most recent feat in this direction is the appointment of Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, the first female and first African Director General of World Trade Organisation (WTO), who incidentally is, a Nigerian.

Adeyemi (2003), situates corruption in neoliberal policies of Government, which boils down to leadership. Good governance remains "the most fundamental condition for political, social and economic development and national security" (Adesewo, 2018, p.37). Good governance creates a conducive environment for productivity, ensures reduction of corruption and the interest of minorities are protected. Greed, self-centeredness, discrimination, corruption, unpatriotic attitude, embezzlement and so on, are some major factors that prevent good governance. The success of leadership is contingent on due process of democratic institutions by fostering positive changes for the benefit of the majority. (Adesewo, 2018).

Play Analysis of Who's Afraid of Solarin by Femi osofisan

Osofisan, an apostle of change has consistently advocated for a new order in governance through many of his politically inclined plays. They include, *Yungba Yungba and the Dance Contest*, *Restless Run of Locusts*, *Midnight Hotel*, *Altine's Wrath*, *Morountodun* and many others. *Who's Afraid of Solarin?* was however, his first attempt at farcically extending his creative arms to explore many social vices plaguing the Nigerian society. In this anti-corruption play. The play, an adaptation of, *The Government Inspector* by Nikolai Gogol (1836) creates opportunities for Osofisan to identify similarities between imperial Russia and the Nigerian state and reflect these similarities to the fullest. In the five act play, centred on corruption and bad leadership, he presents democratically elected political leaders in the Local Government Council. The chairman, Chief Gbonmlayeloblojo summons a crucial meeting of other Councilors (Cooperative, Education, Magistrate, Health and Price control officer). The play highlights two major corrupt sectors of Nigerian policies, the Universal Primary Education (UPE) project and Operation Feed the Nation (OFN). Both are failed projects of the then military and

democratically elected governments just as the decadence in health, justice and commerce is not left out.

The play opens in the sitting room of Gbonmiayelobiojo, Council Chairman at a meeting with other councilors to find ways of forestalling the intended visit of the Public Complaints Commissioner, Tai Solarin. The sitting serves as an occasion to expose the various degrees of corruption, graft and fraudulent acts engaged in by the jittery councilors all eager to cover up their corrupt practices. These government officials have diverted public funds meant for welfare and development of the people into their personal pockets. They all make confessional statements bothering on their corrupt acts and their attempt to cover them up. Gbonmiayelobiojo already devised a means of ensuring secrecy from all his councilors in case the visit is a reality.

Chairman: I have called you here this morning to warn you. We must act fast to put our house in *under*. A war long predicted doesn't kill even the cripple, says the proverb. As soon as we finish with the oath, we must get to work. All relevant files must be sorted out, well dusted, and immediately disposed off!
(Who's Afraid of Solarin? 1978, p.12)

Osofisan did not spare religious hypocrisy as part of corrupt acts. Baba Fawomi, an Ifa priest is part of the conspiracy to conceal corrupt acts of the councilors. He also capitalizes on the situation by making ridiculous demands for sacrifice. The Councilors are oblivious of the fact that he is playing on their intelligence and does not have any divination powers as he claims.

Baba Fawomi: Ifa says, considering the gravity of the matter, you will each need five cows-
Chief Magistrate: Easy enough, five cows.
Baba fawomi: Will you let me finish! Plus ten goats, of the home-grown type, all black and fat-
Councilor for Cooperatives: (Groans). Ten fat goats.
Baba Fawomi: Ten other goats, of the brown variety-
Doctor: (Coughing). Ten other goats!

Baba Fawomi: Of the brown variety. I'll continue. You also need sixteen fowls
Price Control Officer: Sixteen fowls!
Baba Fawomi: Strong limbed, home-raised chickens! Not these lifeless ones From Government farm which do not allow your teeth sufficient Exercise. (WAOS, 1978, p.21).

Pastor Nebuchadnezzar is not spared as the embezzlement of church funds is exposed when he equally becomes victim at the arrival of crafty Ishola Oriebora who takes advantage of the confusion of mistaken identity to deceive Pastor and his daughter (Cecelia) as an impersonated Solarin. His sudden and coincidental arrival tilts the play to another angle of humour as the chairman and his team are outsmarted and swindled as they make frantic efforts to avoid being probed. He succeeds in collecting so much money, makes a fake promise of marrying Cecelia and absconds before the truth is discovered.

Isola: (Who has been coughing).
Fifteen...sixteen...twenty envelopes! And all Filled with new notes! I'll write my report straight away! What a wonderful Town! What high moral standards! Such devoted and hard-working Officials! It's non-pareil! The Federal cabinet will be reshuffled without delay to include such patriotic citizens! I promise you, you'll hear from Lagos very soon. Good night,
(The Councilors bow out) (WAOS, 1978, p.76)

The play reaches a climax when the real Public Complaint Commissioner arrives all the same despite all frantic efforts made by the politicians after their stupidity has been fully played out. Lamidi and Lamomu in their clownish nature announces his arrival.

Lamidi: Excellencies, there's a visitor outside.
Lamomu: A gentleman in brown Khaki shorts-

Lamidi: And khaki shirt!

Chairman: What!

Lamomu: The gentleman claims he's been round the town looking for the Chairman (Baba Fawomi slips out).

Lamomu:... He's here, ladies and gentlemen! He's arrived!

Lamidi: Yes, the real Public Complaints Commissioner has arrived!

(WAOS, 1978, p. 86)

This ending, gives room for hope that corrupt leaders will certainly be brought to book and that there is no escape route. This is a strong statement indicating a better society where corruption will not go unchecked.

Osofisan pursues the issue of 'bribery and corruption, kickbacks and ten percent, which has in recent times skyrocketed to forty percent, Osofisan, in this play further reveals the alarming rate of corruption at all levels of governance in Nigeria. He also employs it as a valid weapon in the hands of leaders to buy loyalty of followers/supporters and also enrich themselves. One can in summary, leaders in the political class has mastered the art of corruption and their tactics are unexhausted as they always evolve new strategies for their nefarious acts to fulfill their craving for wealth, greed, power and oppression of the poor (Ajidahun, 2013).

Osofisan employs blown up humour of equivalents of his characters in Nigerian politicians, through caricature, malapropism, ridicule, jest, wrong use of English words and satiric situations. Osofisan is certainly not well disposed to corruption, injustice and oppression of the masses. He is, and has always been, a strong advocate for the masses to ensure justice, equality and fairness for the masses. Consequently, he presents a role model in the person of Tai Solarin (former Public Complaint Commissioner), an astute and upright man who in his lifetime lived by the rules and shunned all forms of vices. Just at the mention of the name of Solarin, intrigues and intricacies are played out, confusion and tension erupts like a volcano and confessions of perpetuated crimes are made by Councilors. Who's

Afraid...? is a socio-political statement on the insincerity of Nigerian government and their policies. The play, "...can thus be read as a critique of the Nigerian government and leaders of the time considering the way the play tackles the dual issues of corruption and unqualified leadership with precision" (Owoeye, 2011, p. 190).

Juxtaposing *Who's Afraid of Solarin* with Corrupt Leaders in Nigeria

Osofisan situates the play *Who's Afraid of Solarin*, in the Local Government system, which can be taken as a representation of what transpires at all tiers of Government, amidst a subtle sense of humour, inducing rib cracking laughter, through malapropism, (Gbonmiayelobiojo), misinterpretation, (Gbonmiayelobiojo and Tolu), mistaken identity (Isola Oriebora), mannerism (Doki) and so on. An example is the constant and incessant entrance of Tolu, Gbonmiayelobiojo's wife who makes her appearance at crucial moments to hawk her wares which aggravates her husband's temperament.

Chairman: (As Tolu enters). Confound it, Tolu! How many times must I warn you not to disturb us? Oh, Gbonmiayelobiojo, control yourself, especially in the presence of Ifa. Tolu, please I'm begging you- (But unable to control himself, he shouts at her)... you're a non-Skull! Your father is a zer-skull! Your mother is a minus-skull! And all your wretched family are minus-minus-skull! Get out! Go and find other clients for your saucepans!... (WAOS, 1978, p.20)

Irrespective of its genre, Osofisan clearly makes his points by accentuating all facets of governance involved in corruption, even as far back as 1978 when the play was first published. *Who's Afraid...?* raises a vital issue about leadership in Nigeria especially on the incongruous placement of unqualified personnel in positions of authority. The Council Chairman, Chief Gbonmiayelobiojo, is uncultured, unfit and lacking in exemplary leadership qualities. Mrs. Abeni Mailo is a replica of a half-

illiterate Nigerian woman who brags about her family heritage and attainments and religious piety. Doki, an irony of a medical practitioner, is a chain smoker with a chronic cough yet he heads the Health sector. The Chief Magistrate is profane and immoral despite the fact that he is expected to be the most upright and law keeping ambassador. Other Characters like, Baba Fawomi, a caricature of an Ifa priest, the dual of Lemomu and Lamidi, Isola and Tolu are all queer and absurd characters, driven by greed, gratification and selfishness (Owoeye, 2011). This posits *Who's Afraid...?* as a critique of Nigerian leaders in Government. Till date, ill-trained, unprepared and unqualified men and women are made to lead. This explains the incompetence and lack of productivity on the part of these unqualified leaders, who actually leave their positions worse than they met it. Furthermore, is the exposition of hypocrisy, deceit and presence displayed by all council characters. This is extensively played out in religious hypocrisy in the characters of Baba Fawomi (an Ifa Priest) who ends up swindling the councillors while promising them to use spiritual powers which he lacks, to prevent the visit of Solarin. Ishola Oriebora, capitalizes on his mistaken identity as Solarin to plunder, swindle and deceive so much that he promises Cecilia marriage before the truth comes to limelight. The Councillors are also afraid of the consequences if Solarin discovers their insincerity, misappropriation, embezzlement and mismanagement of funds in their purview and are determined to prevent this. It is at the meeting in Gbomlayelobiojo's sitting room that all their antics and intrigues are discovered. More so, they had perfected plans to cover up their tracks, including arson, before resolution of conflicts in the play.

Councillor for Education: It can't be done. The whole office's in a mess. It will take ages to find the right filkes for eating- er, I mean Burning.

Chairman: God, what a brain! They're all bent on wrecking me. Can't you Set the entire office on fire! It's your whole future that's in *Jeopardy*, man, and would you rather save the office!...

(WAOS, 1978, p. 12)

Characters in this play are consumed with greed and gratification, a typical condition of present Nigeria where leaders in government have become shylocks in their offices. It increases the number of impoverished persons and unemployment in the society and has snowballed into the 'get rich quick syndrome' especially among youths, who seek easy access to acquisition of wealth. This is part of the reasons for involvement and increase in criminal activities such as Internet fraud, also known as Yahoo, which has now migrated to Yahoo plus; characterized by killing and murder all in the name of rituals and sacrifices to make money. Most youths are now laid back, lackadaisical, and indolent, since they can always make money through bribery and other unethical means. Unfortunately, political leaders engage these youths by equipping them financially as thugs for killings, maiming and assassination of rivals in opposing camps/parties. There is a gradual erosion of morals, virtues and values in the society following corrupt leadership in Nigeria. Not quite long ago, a governor in one of the Northern states had been granting amnesty to bandits and terrorists while some innocent citizens were languishing in detention or even killed in cold blood by security officials just like the ENDSARS peaceful protest on October 2020.

Another important aspect in the play, which reflects the true nature of corruption in Nigeria, is the art of policy making. Policies made are not followed to the letter to yield results. Policies are often made with good intentions for the populace but leaders lack the good intention to see it to fruition. So, some of these policies never see the light of day while some are misinterpreted thereby leading to improper execution. An example is cited in the play by Councillor for Cooperatives as a question for Councillor for Education, in reference to Universal Primary Education (UPE), a laudable policy that was intended to outlive generations but could not be sustained.

Councillor for Education: How mean can you get? You know very well that the plans of those school buildings are already in my office. You saw the beautiful designs, the pride of any artist in the world.

Councilor for Cooperatives: So it's inside the plans that the children will learn to Read and write? School's resuming next week. (WAOS, 1978, p.9).

The good intention of the then Military Government to make Universal Primary Education basic, free and compulsory for all hit the rocks due to allegations of corruption. Some leaders snuff life out of policies and deprive their followers the right of enjoying the dividends of good leadership.

Conclusion

Leadership has been elusive since the inception of the country and its failure has become a major challenge in Nigeria. Leadership deficit led to the emergence of the endemic and dangerous nature of corruption from a microscopic point, till it became an albatross hanging on the neck of the nation, weakening all structures to almost a state of total collapse. Femi Osofisan's crusade against corruption is succinctly explored in his play, *Who's Afraid of Solarin?* This play is the basis for discussion in addressing the depth and extent of corruption as well as its attendant effects on the Nigerian nation. Internationally, it is evident that corrupt leadership has done more harm than good to the image of the country giving rise to untold hardship for citizens. Now that the situation indicates that leaders have failed in their responsibility, the war against corruption is to be orchestrated from grassroots and constituents instead of 'Waiting for Godot'. This is the best time for the emergence of a crop of new generation leaders to rise up to the challenge, salvage the situation and reduce corruption to the barest minimum. It is indeed a concerted, conscious and joint effort of all that can make this effort possible. There should be increased, awareness, information, enlightenment and education of the populace for the need to develop apathy for corruption in leadership by charting a new course in Nigerian history. Just like Osofisan, playwrights, dramatists, performers and entertainers in general, must lend their voices as advocates of good leadership and become more relevant than ever, through their arts at this crucial point in the existence of Nigeria. There is a Tai Solarin in

each and every one waiting to be awakened, waiting to be rebirthed, for sincerity of purpose and action, to resuscitate a beaten, battered and defeated nation.

Recommendations for overcoming corrupt Leadership in Nigeria

Well-meaning citizens of African nations decry the evil effect of corruption. This is a strong indication that a larger percentage are against corruption. Why then has this call not yielded good fruits? What factors are truncating the disdain for corruption and its actual situation in the society? A major discovery is the need for attitudinal change by governments, organisations and individuals. This is perhaps a good starting point to address this social menace. This will come from deliberate reorientation, paradigm shift and a conscious effort to live above corrupt practices and leaders should be in the forefront of this rebirth.

Leadership is the responsibility of all if there is going to be any transformational change in the country. A good starting point for this is the grassroots, that is, the family unit, which is the bedrock of the society but unfortunately is also among the failed institutions in Nigeria. The family must retrace its steps to its major functions and responsibilities. Parents, guardians and elders, must re-assume their role in inculcating values and morals in the new generation to effect drastic societal changes. There must be sincerity and passion by all stakeholders in the family, to reduce corruption to the barest minimum in Nigeria.

There is a clarion call for the Nigerian political class, government officials, Heads of Commission and parastatals and people in positions of authority to embrace a psychological paradigm shift by training and retraining themselves formally and informally in leadership education. This is to properly position them to face the challenges of leadership in current times. This exposure and experience will be an antidote for corruption in governance. It appears that most of their strategies, approaches and techniques are archaic, obsolete and outdated for the 21st Century. It is high time they imbibed positive governance and administrative styles by other countries that are yielding results and making progress leading to positive impacts in the lives of their citizens.

There should be stiff penalties for leaders convicted of corruption, irrespective of their status. An incorruptible system of law must be encouraged and made to take its full course, bringing an end to lip service. Most indicted office holders in Nigeria are let off the hook after being charged with evidences on offences based on corruption, without any form of punishments that would serve as deterrents to others. Certainly, this is a wrong signal and will go a long way in furtherance of corruption. A way of reducing corruption among leaders is by enforcing asset declaration as a prerequisite before and after tenure in office to reduce leadership quest for wanton acquisition of wealth. They should also give periodic reports of their stewardship to the governed for critique that will enhance their performance.

Followers also have a vital role to play. They should see themselves as part of governance and reduce their nonchalant and careless attitude. Nigerian youths are presently rising up to this challenge by "speaking up" (Soro Soke), a new slogan symbolizing agitation against all forms of oppression, despite efforts to repress their voices. This task should not be left to the youths alone. It should be a joint responsibility until all voices are heard and leaders live up to expectation. As a follow up, leaders must begin to see themselves as answerable and accountable to their followers. This will guard their actions and inactions, especially in the delivery of good governance.

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