

State Institutions as Harvesting Rods: A Zimbabwean Experience

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On attaining political independence in 1980, Zimbabwe became one of the strongest Southern African states but at the turn of the new millennium it began to experience an unprecedented political and economic crises that stretched it to the very edge of the abyss of state failure. This paper advances the argument that apart from the imposing unprecedented economic and political instability, systemic predation greatly fuelled the degree and intensity of the crisis. Borrowing from Levi's (1981) conceptualization of predatory rule, the paper argues that pervasive discourses of power, injustice and exclusionary rent-seeking mechanisms across most sectors of the economy were not accidental but a manifestation of the state's "willingful blindness" or complicity to their perpetuation. State institutions such as the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ), law enforcement units and land resettlement offices were effectively reduced to "harvesting" rods or patronage dispensing instruments by the governing elites and their factional allies. The paper concludes that there was lack of political will to reverse the situation because governing groups were deriving spoils from the perpetuation of the crisis.

Keywords: *Complicity, Harvesting, Predation, State fragility, Zimbabwe.*

Introduction

Zimbabwe was once a strong Southern African state but at the turn of the new millennium it began to experience unprecedented levels of politically induced economic crises that stretched it to the very edge of the abyss of state failure. The year 2000 has been selected purposively as it was the time when the famous Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) was executed by the Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front) (ZANU PF) government attracting condemnation from the Western countries led by the United Kingdom and the United States of America. The land reform also resulted in an estimated 51% decline in food and export crop production between 2000 and 2007 (Kramarenko et al. 2010), threatening household food security (Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe 2009, Makocheke and Kwaramba 2009, Murisa 2010, Ruswa 2004). According to the Confederation of the Zimbabwe Industries (CZI) (2009) and Central Statistics Office (CSO) (2008), year on year inflation exceeded 1000% in 2006 and over 2 million% in July 2008. By the end of 2008 it had peaked to an unprecedented 231 million % (AfDB 2012, IMF 2010). The state through the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) introduced

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tight foreign exchange controls to reduce the budget deficit, restore price stability and arrest inflation, but this failed to reverse the situation (Besada and Moyo 2008). The unstable macroeconomic environment saw a severe depreciation of the national currency moving from Z\$35 000 to US\$1.00 in May 2007 to Z\$ 120 000 to US\$1.00 by June (Barungi and Davies 2010), leading to the erosion of disposable income of those people who were particularly on fixed income such as pensioners and civil servants (Zanamwe and Devillard 2009). High levels of poverty, unemployment, gross corruption, inequality and massive "survival" migration accompanied this melt-down (Betts and Kaytaz 2009, Betts 2010, Rotberg 2003).

By the year 2000 the level of predation across the civil service had reached unprecedented levels. The deterioration in basic service delivery across all sectors and the absence of integrity within many public institutions resulted in fragility in Zimbabwe (Sarkar 2008). The increasing cost of living due to the acute shortage of basic commodities was worsened by the institutionalized parallel or black market. The situation degenerated into a moral paralysis as business ethics no longer guided behavior. "Graft" or predation became the standard operating procedures.

The Zimbabwean situation fits well into most of the known constructs of fragility. According to the Development Aid Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD /DAC 2008) fragile states are defined as lacking the capacity and or willingness to perform the basic functions of the state including providing for the poor (Bird and Prowse 2009, Collier 2009, Guillaumont and Guillaumont-Jeanneney 2009, Marshall and Cole 2009, Vallings and Moreno-Torres 2005). The constructs of fragility include and are not limited to: the inability and/ or unwillingness to provide public security, rule of law, and basic social services; democracy, accountability and civil liberties; de-legitimization and criminalization of the state; decline in economic performance, and extensive interference by external actors (Jackson 2011, Menkhaus 2010). Empirical evidence on institutionalized corruption and its interface with state fragility in Africa in general (Atuobi 2007, Dix et al. 2012) and in Zimbabwe in particular (Masaka 2011, LeBas 2006, Sarkar 2008) is limited. The purpose of the paper is to examine in the light of the idea of state fragility how state institutions in Zimbabwe have been reduced to political and economic patronage dispensing instruments.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical lens for the analysis is inspired by Margaret Levi's (1981) Predatory Theory of Rule which advances that political leaders are principally motivated by the desire to achieve, retain and exercise power. Policies were an outcome of exchanges between ruling and other elites. The interests of political survival and legitimacy propelled political elites towards development (Meyns and Musamba 2010). Although the Predatory theory relies heavily on war as a catalyst for state-building activities, the political and economic crises that

prevailed in Zimbabwe at the turn of the new millennium stretched it to the very edge of the abyss of state failure attracting responses, from both the state and citizens, that were similar to those of a country at war. Under predatory power relations, states use coercion and material inducement threatening the institutional foundations of both the state and economy at large (Bratton and Masunungure 2011). In order to maintain their power and legitimacy in the light of fragility, public powers trade rents to pressure groups in exchange for political support. Thus the autonomous state is both a guardian and predator (Cartier-Bresson 2004) in that its leaders can pursue their own objectives without being subjected to pressure from any opposition. The other condition can be that of becoming a factional state (either democratic or authoritarian). It has a choice of engaging in collective processes with the same pressure groups as a way of spreading the risk of fragility. The democratic faction state limits predation, but often leads to state paralysis. I argue that the Zimbabwean state is characterized by a combination of factional, guardian and predatory features. Predation or systemic corruption is an incentive for a government that has lost its legitimacy to remain in power (Cartier-Bresson 2004). Given the general high level of corruptibility of the system, relaxing rule enforcements served as an incentive to buy loyalty from agents.

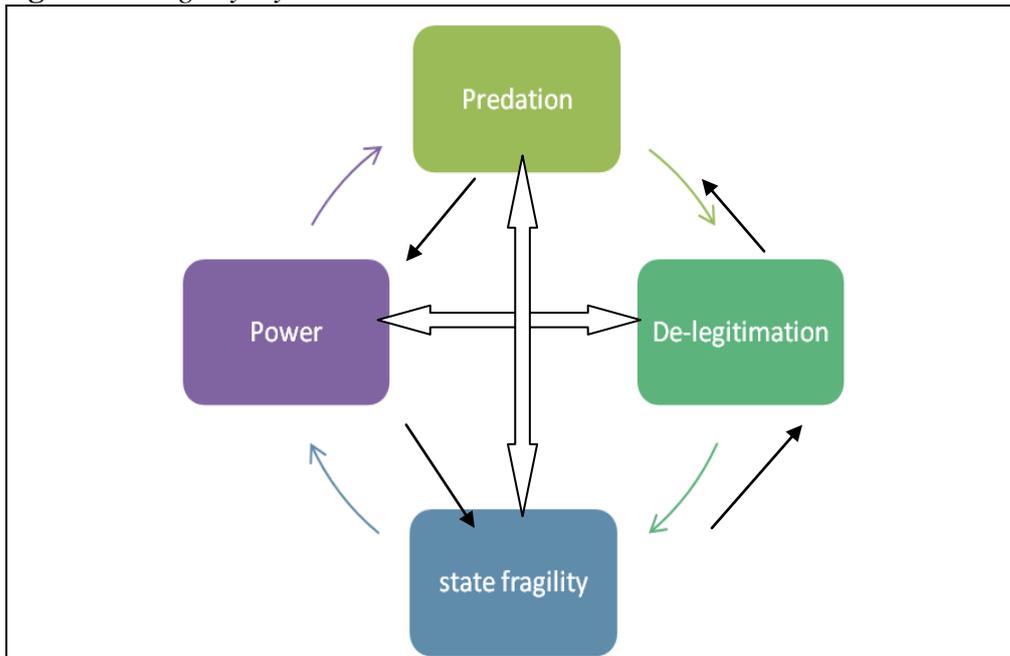
The aim of this paper is to demonstrate how state fragility has reduced public institutions to patronizing instruments. In Zimbabwe, state fragility is both a cause and effect of state predation or institutionalized corruption. As Worster (2009) argued, the state was both a bundle of rights and power, and a source of legitimacy. Thus while predation in the form of collusive or institutionalized corruption further reduces state capacity and legitimacy, it also sustains and crystallizes power. When the rulers are perceived to be working for themselves and their kin and not for the state, their legitimacy, and the state's legitimacy, plummet (Rotberg 2003: 9).

Consistent with the Predatory Theory of Rule/State, the weakening capacity of state institutions to constrain predation or corruption leads to deteriorating economic and social outcomes for the majority of the citizens. This further leads to a downward spiral through which the state weakness turns may into failure and eventually into collapse and de-legitimation of power and authority (Dixit 2006, Dix et al. 2012). However the same process can also provide rulers and their agents the opportunity to retain power. A permanent position in power may help maintain "patronage and corruption" reputations and relations. It is difficult to reverse collusive and extortive corruption (Pellegrini 2011), if the overall institutional environment is weak and as in the Zimbabwean case, this would naturally be at odds with embedded routines and vested interests. Predatory rulers are less willing to part with such rents; therefore they tolerate more downward distortion in the provision of public goods to reduce the required rent-sharing (Dixit 2006). Those who have vested interests in the current state of affairs will use their power to arrest any institutional change (grand corruption) and enforcement at the lower level by civil servants will be ineffective (petty corruption) (Pellegrini 2011: 125). The determinants of fragility are often strong enough to overwhelm any efforts to

reverse the situation. There is a symbiotic relationship between desire for power, predation, fragility and de-legitimation. Fragility is a result of a dynamic interplay between these factors. Linking them gives a multiplier-effect to numerous causal relations, which in their negative form interlock to trap the system in further fragility cycle.

The following diagram (Figure 1) shows the sequence of the theoretical connections between power, predation, fragility and de-legitimation.

Figure 1. *Fragility Cycle*



Source: Author's construction.

Methodology

Data used in this article was gathered through a triangulation of qualitative data collection and analytical techniques that include the content analysis of media reports, both official and independent documentation and literature, and the author's lived experiences. The article goes on to thematically analyze the discursive data from these diverse sources while exploring the connections between narrative, positions and identity, through an understanding of social practices which goes beyond units of text (Hewitt 2009, Pederson 2009, Fairclough 2003).

Results

This section focuses on selected activities that include the RBZ quasi-fiscal operations, land allocations under the 2000 Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP), illegal diamond mining and the role played by state security agents. It also illustrates how each of the institutions or their combinations has been used by the state as political and patronage dispensing instruments.

The Central Bank (RBZ) as a Harvesting Rod

In a society with a long history of state and elite predation the use of public institutions such as the Central Bank has been associated with gaining and maintaining economic, political and social power (Batalla 2000). The politics of patronage was most evident in the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ)'s quasi-fiscal operations. For example, the bank acted as an agent of fiscal policy by procuring agricultural equipment and providing it directly to farmers. These activities were ostensibly designed to cushion farmers and distressed industries against the effects of the economic meltdown. However this only managed to buttress regime survival in the interests of a few political elites connected to the ruling party (The Zimbabwe Independent 26 March 2009). Instead of concentrating on its core functions of controlling inflation and stabilizing financial markets, the RBZ was transformed into a "harvesting rod"; a metaphor that presents the institution as an instrument to facilitate one's easy access to a resource by the more powerful or dominant groups. This literally means by using a rod one effectively increases the chances of easily picking the fruit from a tree. These quasi-fiscal operations were created to foster loyalty through patronage (Charap and Harm 1999). Complaints by the opposition against the abuse of the RBZ as a vote buying instrument ahead of 2008 general elections was reported in both public media (The Herald 19 March 2008) and non-state media (The Zimbabwe Independent 21 March 2008).

The RBZ undertook quasi-fiscal schemes such as the Basic Commodity Supply Side Intervention (BACOSI), and the Farm Mechanisation Programme and the Agricultural Support Enhancement Facility. Under BACOSI, the government accessed funds from the RBZ to pay producers of basic commodities in foreign currency. The goods were then sold in the form of food hampers to the public mostly in rural areas and civil servants at affordable prices in local currency when the Zimbabwean dollar had effectively become valueless. Under the Farm Mechanisation and the Agricultural Support Enhancement Facility, farm equipments were bought by RBZ and distributed to newly resettled farmers for free. These quasi-fiscal activities led the RBZ to experience loss estimated to be about 75% of the gross domestic product (GDP) in 2006 (Besada and Moyo 2008, Muñoz 2007). This led to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank to revoke the country's voting rights. As reported in the Herald of 12 June 2007 and Sunday

Mail of 23 March 2008, the then RBZ Governor, confirmed that the main beneficiaries of farm equipment included newly farmers, traditional chiefs, parliamentarians and war veterans. At grassroots levels, this would effectively instrumentalize local chiefs and other traditional leaders to reinforce state control (Boege et al. 2010).

The predatory hierarchy was established based on a system conveniently set up without any checks and balances or insulated from public scrutiny. The scheme generated institutionalized networks of organized corruption at both the upper and lower political and economic levels. War "veterans" and "collaborators" emerged successfully in their adaptations to the game of anarchy and sought to usurp each other in a quest for hegemonic rule.

The RBZ quasi-fiscal activities also represented a form of state capture (Economakis et al. 2010) where individuals manipulated the state by shaping policies and regulations to their own advantage. The Zimbabwean state has failed to create a strong core of state institutions without being "captured" by particular interests and detached from the influence of powerful rent-seeking groups. In a system without law or property rights, rulers may minimize the probability of opposition from their citizens by creating a system of patronage and loyalty through a corrupt bureaucracy (Charap and Harm 1999). The weak institutions severely undermine the legitimacy of the state thus further deepening fragility. Weak and captured states governed in the interests of particular groups are not likely to be good regulators.

"Illegal" Diamond Mining

To illustrate the extent of mineral "harvesting", I use the case of Marange diamond fields (popularly known as Chiadzwa) in the Marange District of Manicaland province in Zimbabwe. Although diamonds had historically represented a relatively small proportion of mineral exports, they have recently become topical in Zimbabwean polity. The diamond rush that began in 2006 following the government's takeover of the production and subsequently the government's failure to purchase diamonds due to financial constraints were compounded by a thriving black market and smuggling of the mineral. According to the Partnership Africa Canada (PAC) (2009: 2) report on the Chiadzwa diamond, "the diamonds were produced from mines that benefit political and military gangsters and were smuggled out of the country by bucketload". Conflict between the security agents and illegal miners ensued and only ended when the army used force to remove all illegal miners (PAC 2009). There had been more than 500 illegal diamond syndicates and an estimated 15000 illegal miners working in very small plots in the Marange diamond fields (Human Rights Watch 2009, PAC 2009, RBZ 2009). The state of lawlessness was illustrated by a case in which the mining company that had been issued with the Kimberly Process certificate approached a local court to contest the seizure of the fields but even after the court had ruled in its favour, state police and security agents still defied the court order and stopped it from mining (Bird and Prowse 2009). This indifferent state response to the

smuggling of diamonds showed the state's lack of willingness to enforce property rights (Collier 2009, USAID 2006, IMF 2010, PAC 2009, Richardson 2005). The mining company was not involved in the smuggling as it had been granted the right to process and sell the diamonds. Since the state had not challenged the court order, it should have protected the mining company. The illegal diamond trading and its laundering into the international system propped up the fragile state. The large diamond resource base estimated to be over 16.5 million tonnes (RBZ 2009) significantly worked as a mechanism to bolster the fragile state. The political disengagement by key international aid donors and a series of restrictive measures that included travel bans on ZANU (PF) leadership meant that there was a need to look for other options for survival (Horsey and Myint 2011). Thus sanctions may reinforce authoritarian governments by strengthening the power of patronage systems in situations of general scarcity. Furthermore, they limit opportunities for engagement of the country with international community and cause leaders to manipulate patriotic sentiments against outsiders and blame them for all the nation's ills. The Zimbabwean state had historically attributed the economic crisis to Western imposed sanctions. The state seemed both unable and unwilling to halt the pillaging of diamonds because this worked as a survival mechanism for a state in crisis. Revenues accrued from the sale of illegal diamonds insulated the state against the economic challenges such as the shortage of foreign currency to purchase fuel. Any institutional mechanism aimed at reducing the state or the ruling elites' predation was frustrated.

The "Fast Track" Land Reform Programme (FTLRP)

Land ownership patterns play a critical role in the politics of development for post-colonial Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular. In the year 2000, the Zimbabwe government launched the Accelerated Land Reform and Resettlement Programme commonly known as the "Fast Track" Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) (Mushimbo 2005, Ruswa 2005, Zikhali 2008) ostensibly to redress colonial land ownership imbalances. The land reform was largely both a reaction to pressures for land reform and a political instrument used by the ruling ZANU (PF) to retain power. Its main objective was to accelerate both compulsory land acquisition and redistribution (Zikhali 2008). More than 4500 farms were expropriated by the state for redistribution (Richardson 2005). The programme was a strike back by the ruling party against what was believed as collusion between white farmers and the opposition parties during the 2000 constitutional referendum which ZANU (PF) lost (Bratton and Masunungure 2011). The FTRLRP programme was marred by legal controversies, lack of transparency and contagious land invasions across the country. The country went through a regime of rent capitalism (Batalla 2000) as public offices such as the land allocation offices in the provinces were used as patronage and power dispensing instruments. Since most beneficiaries were selected on a partisan basis, the programme was expected to boost the party's support base. This illustrates how predatory rulers can design policies meant to

maximize their personal power and wealth and thus effectively becoming an instrument of coercion and material inducement. Such practices degrade the institutional foundations of both the state and economy (Lewis 1996). Under the FTLRP, was also the VIP Resettlement scheme that targeted senior politicians mostly ministers of government and security chiefs and businessmen for the large scale commercial farms. There were numerous cases of individual senior politicians being allocated commercial farms as large as 500 to 1000 hectares while ordinary powerless villagers were restricted to 6 hectare plots. Furthermore, cases of multiple land ownership and illegal land sales by local elites, land officers and party leaders were rampant.

State Security and Law Enforcement Agents as "Gate-keepers and Brokers"

The role played by state security and law enforcement agents in the above "harvesting" activities needs consideration. A problem in most African countries is that state security particularly the military goes beyond the responsibilities of protection and the defense of national frontiers becoming tools or instruments for the advancement of sectoral political interests (Houngnikpo 2010). State security under a fragile state authority is far from being autonomous and competent (Menkhaus 2010). In Zimbabwe the police and military pervade the economy (in state institutions, parastatals and also the private sector) playing a dominant role in the development of national policy (through their prominent role in the Joint Operations Command (JOC) and in enforcing policies particularly price controls (Ndlela 2008). During the 2008 run-off for the Presidential Elections, Army and security personnel were deployed in both urban and rural areas to mobilize ZANU (PF) support (Besada and Moyo 2008, Cawthra 2010). The looting of the large diamond deposits in the Chiadzwa area is another case in point that has added another dimension to the militarization of the state, the terror of the population and the crude accumulation of the military elite (Raftopoulos 2010). The security forces engaged in lucrative predatory activities across the country which included monitoring price controls and the distribution of basic commodities such as fuel. They engaged in diamond and gold mining and trading for some time and were unlikely to relinquish this practice since it was a lucrative source of revenue for them. The military and law enforcement agents operated as both "gate-keepers" and brokers for the smuggling of minerals (Human Rights Watch 2009, PAC 2009). The Zimbabwean state has effectively become a predatory one and the military was acting as "gate keepers". Both the military and police were also used in the close monitoring of the implementation of "wholesale" price controls and the distribution of basic commodities under the BACOSI scheme.

Discussion

The RBZ quasi-fiscal operations, land allocations and mineral resource looting were both complementary and contagious. The strategies applied by different state institutions tended to follow similar patterns. However what is central to the connections is the state's transcendental influence through its deployment of the military and police. The predicament associated with fragile states; clientelism and corruption, was common (Sarkar 2008). The connections between desire for power, predation, de-legitimation and fragility are mutually reinforcing. For example, the land reform did not only function as a political survival strategy in the light of the state legitimation and fragility crises but as an instrument for the accumulation of more political power. It was also predatory in nature. The FTLRP land allocation process grounded on politics of patronage was patently crafted to exclusively benefit ZANU (PF) supporters. This would bolster the ruling party's support in the light of the growing political opposition led by the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) (newly formed labour driven opposition party). Given the imposed international isolation and targeted sanctions against the government and ZANU (PF) leadership and the concomitant shortage of foreign currency and the collapse of the local currency, the official smuggling of minerals such as diamonds at Chiadzwa became an institutionalized and viable survival strategy for the fragile state. Institutions were further undermined as they fell open to abuse by the dominant interests due to limited checks and balances or bureaucratic insulation (Evans 1992, 1995, Raftopoulos 2010). The state elites had a greater degree of freedom to pursue their parochial interests (Sarkar 2008). The immoral practices accompanying the activities and the role played by the military with the support of the party officials undermined the foundations of the legitimacy of the state institutions. The state machinery becomes an instrument of aggrandizement by the leaders who often take differential treatment of certain groups. There is evidence of state complicity in the perpetuation of fragility in the pursuit of parochial economic and political interests (Cawthra 2010). The patent politicization of strategic institutions like the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) and the military (Houngnikpo 2010) was not coincidental but systematic, creating more opportunities for institutionalized corruption and the diversion of state resources for the personal gains of the few (Cartier-Bresson 2004, de Soysa 2002).

Actors conceptualize a crisis differently according to their concerns and goals (Cammack et al. 2006). The Zimbabwean crisis could have been a wicked problem which leaders sought to promote and perpetuate for political survival. State fragility takes the form of a discourse and an idiom of political and capital accumulation. It may be seen by key local actors as an acceptable or even optimal solution, not a problem to be solved (Menkhaus 2010). As immoral practices are conditions elites may actively seek to promote and perpetuate, so too can the problem of state failure constitute a desired-or at least a "good enough"-outcome for some leaders (Menkhaus 2010). The difficulties facing the country were products of an economic crisis and

invariably reinforced and exacerbated by institutionalized corruption. As Osaghae (2007) observed corruption was one of the characteristics or variables of a fragile state which results in a plethora of problems namely poor resources, patrimonialism, food insecurity, brain drain and bad governance. Where institutions are weak, personalities often dominate and predation unchecked by institutional constraints thrives and ruins the economy (Rotberg 2004). The willingful blindness of the state to illegal activities such as military involvement in the smuggling of diamonds and the moral paralysis in state institutions operated as a buffer inventory that insulates the state against an unfavorable macro-economic environment. Once the state's capacity to secure itself or perform in an expected manner recedes, and once the little that remains is devoted almost exclusively to the fortunes of a few or to a favored community through an institutionalized corruption there is reduced loyalty and subsequently fragility. Without institutions to restrain predation, the environment was left in a state of no less than a jungle of "wild fruits" where only the more powerful claimed harvesting rights.

Conclusions

The central argument of this paper is that although there are external shocks and exogenous sources to fragility there is evidence of state complicity in the perpetuation of predation. The Zimbabwean state cannot be absolved of the blame of facilitating both fragility and institutionalized corruption. The Zimbabwean experience of state fragility is not only a problem of lack of political will, capacities, functions, institutions and powers of enforcement and implementation, but also a problem of expectations, perceptions and legitimacy. The paper explored how state institutions were reduced to "harvesting" rods as benefits generated by state-led development were turned into rents for small elites and clientelistic networks that had almost "captured" the state.

The more fragile the state becomes the more the opportunities available for institutionalized corruption (Cartier-Bresson 2004). The political elites are also reluctant to reverse or arrest institutionalized corruption because they are deriving spoils from its perpetuation. Any fight against corruption will not find meaningful support as it will be in conflict with their mode of domination. "State failure is a condition that the leadership can live with and knows best" (Menkhaus 2010: 97). State fragility or failure is no longer a problem to be solved but a condition to be exploited. It has not only become a communicative act and social practice, but an idiom of accumulation. Institutionalized "harvesting" mechanisms that were highlighted in this paper are both complementary and invariably interwoven. Mechanisms of institutionalized or "state-crafted corruption" have inadvertently operated as the "fragile" state's survival and "buffer" strategies to insulate it against both exogenous and endogenous shocks. State institutions created for the public good and protection have been reduced to "harvesting rods" or patronage dispensing

instruments for the benefit of the more powerful and dominant individuals and groups.

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