Debating
African Philosophy
Perspectives on Identity, Decolonial Ethics and Comparative Philosophy

Edited by George Hull
Debating African Philosophy

In African countries there has been a surge of intellectual interest in foregrounding ideas and thinkers of African origin—in philosophy as in other disciplines—that have been unjustly ignored or marginalized. African scholars have demonstrated that precolonial African cultures generated ideas and arguments which were at once truly philosophical and distinctively African, and several contemporary African thinkers are now established figures in the philosophical mainstream.

Yet, despite the universality of its themes, relevant contributions from African philosophy have rarely permeated global philosophical debates. Critical intellectual excavation has also tended to prioritize precolonial thought, overlooking more recent sources of home-grown philosophical thinking such as Africa's intellectually rich liberation movements.

This book demonstrates the potential for constructive interchange between currents of thought from African philosophy and other intellectual currents within philosophy. Chapters authored by leading and emerging scholars:

- recover philosophical thinkers and currents of ideas within Africa and about Africa, bringing them into dialogue with contemporary mainstream philosophy;
- foreground the relevance of African theorizing to contemporary debates in epistemology, philosophy of language, moral/political philosophy, philosophy of race, environmental ethics and the metaphysics of disability;
- make new interventions within on-going debates in African philosophy;
- consider ways in which philosophy can become epistemically inclusive, interrogating the contemporary call for ‘decolonization’ of philosophy.

Showing how foregrounding Africa—its ideas, thinkers and problems—can help with the project of renewing and improving the discipline of philosophy worldwide, this book will stimulate and challenge everyone with an interest in philosophy, and is essential reading for upper-level undergraduate students, postgraduate students and scholars of African and African philosophy.

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With a Foreword by Lungisile Ntsebeza
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3 A philosophy without memory cannot abolish slavery
On epistemic justice in South Africa
Mogobe Ramose

Introduction
I propose to write and speak freely from the religion called “science”. So far, this religion imposes discipline with regard to what may be asked, how that which can be said or written should be done, and why it should be done or said, as well as where and when things may be said. Although beneficial to some extent, the discipline of the religion of “science” permits the questionable disregard of some truths, and by so doing, encourages the avoidance of discerning connections within and among phenomena outside the sphere of the particular scientific discipline. The result is that it often allows the presentation of partial truths as whole truths. Obedience to this religion without protest is tantamount to slavery.

I propose to speak from the position of protest against a social morality which prescribes questionable rules that permit the concealment and suppression of truth. This protest is informed by King’s dual characterization of the twentieth century as the century “full of all kinds of insincerity, dishonesty, lies, hypocrisy” (King, 1968: 29), on the one hand, and a century displaying “a new feeling for straightforwardness, honesty, originality, genuineness, sincerity and truthfulness . . .”, on the other (King, 1968: 30). A social morality that prescribes evasiveness and prevarication is against truthfulness (King, 1968: 36). Truthfulness is the core of ethics and morality. By truthfulness I understand upholding the principle that it is necessary not to lie to oneself. Lying to oneself is like making the ludicrous claim that one can actually jump over one’s shadow. Surely, as one jumps, so too does the shadow. Through the wisdom of Polonius in his Hamlet, Shakespeare renders this core of ethics and morality thus: “to thine own self be true. And it must follow, as the night the day, Thou cannot then be false to any man”.

My dual protest against the religion of “science” and a social morality that is against truthfulness means that I am at war with epistemic and social slavery: a condition of injustice demanding the restoration of justice. I am well aware that the struggle for epistemic justice demands the recognition that:

Above all we must remember that science could not progress along certain lines without traversing vested interests and prejudices and without hurting the feelings of the community. To proceed in the face of such opposition has always required a great deal of intellectual courage. … In the whole sweep of history there is nothing more impressive than the spectacle of noble men who had the spirit to fight unreasonable and ignorance and who did not hesitate, not only to renounce material advantages, but even to jeopardize life and happiness in order to increase the amount of beauty, of justice, and of truth which is the essential part of our patrimony.

(Sartre, 1927: 20-21)

This is epistemic love. It is desiring the good and certainly the best for each other “without first demanding a proof that some great purpose will be furthered by obtaining … good things” (Russell, 2010: 29). Thus epistemic love ought to “take us beyond Self without effort” (Russell, 2010: 34). Since the practice of this love happens in a political context, epistemic love is indissolubly connected to political love (Sobrino, 1988). By different names, the two kinds of love share the same substance, namely, the readiness to die in order to increase truth, justice and peace among the living.

The struggle against epistemic slavery also includes the question whether or not “philosophy” even as a “scientific” discipline may have only one meaning, that is, the dominant meaning derived from the Western history of thought. This essay is part of the struggle against epistemic slavery. It is a deliberate exercise in contesting the one and dominant meaning of “philosophy” (Ramose, 2017, 161–168). It does so by subjecting the “non-philosophical”, that is, the actual living experience of the continual interaction between the conquered and the conqueror, oppressed and oppressor, exploited and exploiter to a sustained and critical philosophical analysis.

In waging this war, I do not propose “a season of amnesia” (Soyinka, 1988), nor do I plead for “Morals must fall” (Ngubane, 2016: 3). I am waging a war, but a war with rules allowing me to speak freely “on wearing skirts without underwear” (Althusser-Reid, 1999), and asking if the Christian “God” is contemplating to ever forgive Lucifer. Slavery is a condition of human relations in which the one side has conquered the other, compelling the defeated to submit to the will of the conqueror in word and deed. Conquest in this situation may be by means of either physical or psychological force. This is a condition of epistemic and social injustice because it violates the human dignity of the defeated and annuls the principle of equality – in the sense of the right to exist (Gutierrez, 1983: 90) – among human beings. My argument against this condition is that a people having a philosophy without memory cannot abolish slavery. “In me memoriam facieus” – do this in memory of me – is pronounced precisely at the pinnacle of the celebration of the Roman Catholic holy mass. It is translated into practice, among others, through the dominance of the Christian calendar in South Africa and the West and, indeed, across the globe. For example, world money markets are virtually inactive over the Christmas period, especially on Christmas day. Thus “in me memoriam facieus” shows the importance of memory in the conduct of human relations.
**Approach**

I have already described my approach as intelligent, but with rules. I will begin by a challenge to "history" as a scientific discipline. Then I will present a statement on the reason and meaning of the ethical necessity for a philosophy of memory for Africa, including South Africa, just in case there are those who imagine that South Africa is not part of Africa, at least, geographically. Hence, I will present a series of excerpts, including music, for critical analysis intended to show how the struggle for memorialisation and de-memorialisation is unfolding in South Africa. In both cases, "memory is the weapon" (Matutu, 2009). The basic analytic categories will be the conquered and the conqueror.

The categories of conquered and conqueror rest on the memory that Africa is the mother of humanity. The inscription in the National Museum of Ethiopia in Addis Ababa reminds us that "the world became African" precisely through the exodus (Pockell et al., 2014 and Strieger and McKee, 1999) from the cradle to other parts of the planet Earth. Referring to the Acheulian period, the inscription states: "For the first time the same way of producing tools was shared by people across a huge territory including Africa, Asia and Europe. In a sense, it's the first globalized culture".

That Africa is the mother of humanity is also supported by the inscription from the National Museum of Hungary in Budapest. It reads thus: "If one considers the 4.5 billion year long history of the Earth to be equal to one year, Humankind's time on earth would be no more than a few seconds. Approximately one-one and a half million years ago, the first humans, already producing simple tools, began a journey from Africa faced to populate the world".

The scientific view that Africa is the mother of humanity means that accidental geographic separation as well as language, cultural, skin and hair differences do not eliminate the basic point that all human beings are the children of one mother. On this basis, the deeper ethical argument advanced here is that sharpened and deepened consciousness of the originality and continuing oneness of humanity ought to be cultivated and maintained for the sake of justice and peace among all human beings.

"History" is his-story, it is yet to be our story.

The above sub-heading conveys the gist of my argument in this context. In general, the historian need not have been actually present during the events she or he is conveying as the history of those events. The method of history concedes this since it considers that the task of the historian is to reconstruct those events (Krishna, 2005: 183). History, then, is an exercise in reconstruction according to the standard canons of the discipline without eliminating totally the subjective preferences of the historian. In this sense, history is his-story. No wonder that feminist epistemologists are continuing to question the hallowed criterion of "objectivity" in science on the ground that for centuries, history has not paid any or serious attention to "her-story". Add to this the colonised whose humanity was, and continues to be, called into question, discounting them as part of history. Despite decolonisation and rampant human rights discourse, doubt about the humanity of the colonised-decolonised persists. The question of the yet-tobe-firmly-established "her-story" as legitimate and applies also to the colonised-decolonised. It means that "history" is yet to become "our story". It is conceivable that if and when that point is reached, even the concept of "history" as hisstory understood as a scientific discipline will have to be replaced with one appropriate to and consistent with "our story". I wish to make two observations relevant to my argument. One is that, even if I will rely on his-story, I will do so making provision that his-story may be questioned. Part of the proviso for questioning is that to the extent the historian relies on time as a linear succession, in that much there is a tendency to erect strict boundaries between the past and the present. The assumption that the past of history is closed is not necessarily true as the past can live in the present. After all, the past is the parent of the present and the bond between them does not necessarily die because the historian has erected a scientific boundary between them (Krishna, 2005: 28).

My second observation pertains to the recognition that his-story can and does leave out known details of the past if these reveal guilt that induces shame and tarnishes the individual or group consciousness. By contrast, his-story tends to eulogise the achievements of the past, turning them into virtues that deserve a place in the present. On this basis, "Civilizations may in fact be characterized in terms of the dominant defense mechanisms that they use to suppress the memory of an inconvenient past and the guilty conscience they suffer because of having done what a new value apprehension tells them that they ought not to have done in the past... The whole task of colonization, for example, or of the "immodesty" of conquest and war, of the enslavement of peoples other than one's own which are such a dominant feature of contemporary consciousness have radically transformed the perception of their past on the part of many of the contemporary cultures and civilizations" (Krishna, 2005: 29-30). This potential for the concealment of guilt and shame in preference to the revelation of achievements that enhance one's image is indeed a psychological problem. It is, however, at the fundamental level a challenge to truthfulness.

The challenge of truthfulness recognises the weaknesses of "his-story" identified above. It further acknowledges that "her-story" does, however, serve the important function of being a repository of memory. Accordingly, the memorialism that will be discussed below will be drawn from "his-story".

The ethical necessity for a philosophy of memory for Africa

The ethical necessity for a philosophy of memory for Africa arises from the lived experience of the past and the living experience of today. Using his-story, I suggest that for more than three centuries, inclusive of the present, the majority of the conquered peoples of South Africa have been and are still suffering from historical, structural, systemic and systematic material and intellectual poverty, hunger
and death (Durban Resolution A/CONF.189/12(2001) and Thesse and Curr, 2012: 162). In the light of this lived experience, Bujo argues against a “memoryless” theology. I use the substance of his argument and extend it to philosophy.

According to Bujo, “The present generation must not shun its responsibility by forgetfulness. The solidarity of guilt with their forebears should sharpen their awareness that their well-being is tied, in large part, to the oppressed, the defeated peoples, ... The memoria passionis et resurrectionis Jesu Christi cannot be banalistic: it must include the entire history, to which the victims of colonization in Latin America, Asia and Africa equally belong. The suffering of so many American Indians and blacks, who were robbed of their cultural heritage, and the expropriation of sub-Saharan Africa, all this has become an apocalyptic thorn in the flesh. As long as this is not clearly perceived, we are continuing with a theology devoid of memory” (Bujo, 1998: 140–141).

Thus, an African philosophy of and with memory is a philosophy that re-members pre-colonial Africa as a significant dimension of the contemporary community of the peoples of Africa and the peoples of Africa in the diaspora. That “the world became African” is a crucial aspect of this re-membering. Furthermore, an African philosophy of and with memory is a philosophy that takes the trans-Atlantic slave trade and colonization seriously as a means to recognize and respect the martyrs of freedom for the African peoples, on the one hand, and to interrogate the meaning of that freedom in the present existential conditions on the other.

Having recognized that some African leaders benefited and continue to benefit from the injustice of colonization, Bujo argues that from the point of view of ethics, the former colonizers owe Africa reparations and that Africa’s foreign debt ought to be cancelled precisely at the point of decolonization (Bujo, 1998: 176–177). By this, Bujo reaffirms the Nyerere clean slate doctrine. The doctrine holds that the concession by the colonialist to political independence for Africa without at the same time accepting that such independence is a matter of state succession is empty because it continues to hold Africa in economic bondage: a slavery with deleterious epistemic and social effects (Ramoso, 2003: 468–487). This is one example of interrogating the present in the light of the past. It also shows that the internal struggle in South Africa for epistemic and social justice is intricately linked to international politics since the erstwhile colonizer continues to retain economic power in the country. I now turn to the memorabilia.

Re-member this

Van Riebeeck’s vow

The Khoikhoi sued for peace, and tried to regain rights to their pastures. Standing upon it that we (the Dutch) had gradually been taking more and more of their land, which had been theirs since the beginning of time. Asking also, whether, if they came to Holland, they would be permitted to do like. The Commander argued that if their lands were restored there would not be enough grazing for both nations. The Khoikhoi replied “Have we then

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no cause to prevent you from getting more cattle? The more you have the more land you acquire. And to say the land is not big enough for both, who should give way, the rightful owner or the invader?” Van Riebeeck made it clear “that they had now lost the land in war and therefore could only expect to be henceforth deprived of it ... The country had fallen to our lot, being pitch in defensive warfare and ... it was our intention to retain it”.

(Troup, 1973: 55)

By his affirmation of conquest, Van Riebeeck established two identities in South Africa, namely the conqueror and the conquered. If indeed the war were “defensive”, then the Khoikhoi would hardly have had to regard him as an “invader”. Moreover, the war waged against the Khoikhoi is unjustified in terms of the just war doctrine developed in Western moral philosophy. No doubt from the point of view of Western legal philosophy, conquest conferred upon the conqueror the ethically questionable “right of conquest.” According to this doctrine, the conquerer may impose their will upon the conquered with respect to the meaning of experience, knowledge and truth. Thus, the questionable “right of conquest” was the inauguration of epistemic and social injustice in the relations between the conquered and the conqueror.

Van Riebeeck vowed that the land would be “retained” and his successors in title have ensured its survival to date. The retention means in practice that the unjustly acquired wealth of the conqueror continues to be their possession, protected by the constitution of South Africa, Act 108 of 1998. From the point of view of the conquered, this injustice ought to be redressed. Furthermore, the retention of the land means that sovereign title to territory is yet to revert to the conquered peoples of South Africa, the “rightful” owners of the land “since the beginning of time”. By opting for governmental succession, the new South Africa failed to respond to this ethical exigency of history. It is logistically absurd to justify this failure by the frivolous argument that the restoration of sovereignty to territory to the rightful owners is impossible since not every one of them can be allocated a piece of land.

When he left his native Holland, Van Riebeeck was already infected and affected by a killer disease already widespread in Holland and the kin cultures known as Western civilization. The killer disease is virtually intransmissible because it moves faster than the speed of light. It kills directly or indirectly human beings, animals, the fish of the ocean, the plants, the air we breathe and the water we drink; in short, all that lives, including planet Earth. “Market mania” (Sandal, 2013: 164) is the name of the disease. It manifests itself as pecuniomania; the insane love of money driven primarily by the decisive motive to make profit, whatever the cost. Pecuniomania has brought humanity and all that lives to the living MAD (mutual assured destruction) situation: the madness of the existing annihilation strategic nuclear weapons. These weapons are capable of committing genocide. Their existence appears to have placed humans on par with “god”, however conceived, instead as the question of life or death on planet Earth is concerned.
2 The pink and black divide, and militarism

Peculiarities enabled the successors in title to Van Riebeeck to add another identity to that of conquered and conqueror. They enforced the identity of rich and poor. The rich was and remains the conqueror and the poor are the conquered. The mechanism of enforcement included race predicated on the fallacy that pink skin colour, mistakenly referred to as white, actually symbolized the reality of a human being ontologically distinct and superior to the conquered, painted with one brush as black.

It was Julius Cæsar, and not Julius Malema, who, after satisfaction at a job well done, declared in celebration of his triumph: Veni, vidi, vici. I came, I saw, I conquered. All three acts were completed and belonged to the past, as the three verbs testify. But the successors in title to Van Riebeeck preferred a different position, namely, Christus vincit, Christus regnat, Christus imperat: ab omni

3 The divine gift of the land

Peculiarities also inspired the successors in title to Van Riebeeck to add some spice to the fallacy that the conquest of the Khoi-Khoi was justified by the just war doctrine. The spice that turned the sweet lie into a delicacy is that the land was given to them by "God". Thus a new doctrine was enunciated, namely, the doctrine of the divine gift of land. For affirmation, we turn to the constitution of the 1961: Republiek van Suid-Afrika Constitution Act 32 of 1961.

Having declared their submission to their "God" of Jesus Christ, the successors in title to Van Riebeeck state in the preamble to the 1961 constitution that this "Almighty God gathered our forebears together from many lands and gave them this their own". Thus the doctrine of the divine gift of land was born. It solidified into a belief and conviction that the land indeed belongs to the successors in title to Van Riebeeck. This conviction is crystallised in Article 6 of the constitution, which provides in commanding terms that "The National Anthem of the Republic shall be "Die Stem van Suid-Afrika". The levy and triumphalism of the song does not detach from the underlying militarism as well as the solemnity of the song resolve to reaffirm and defend Van Riebeeck's vow to "retain" the land. Alliance with and loyalty to the royal house of Orange is also unmistakable. The high point of the renewal of the vow is that the successors in title to the pink "invader" declared their resolve to offer whatever South Africa asks from them, even to die for her: "Ons sal stome - ons wil jou, Suid-Afrika."

The 1961 constitution was the conquest-only constitution. It upheld the heritage of Van Riebeeck with all the subsequent constitutional refinements intensifying epistemic and social injustice. For the conquered, race was the bitter pill for the normalization of this condition. This was of course resisted and the resistance intensified, so were epistemic and social injustices forcibly maintained. The struggle continued with peculiarities moving at full speed. In the end, during a lucid moment, Peculiarities constructed the apostles of racism, advising them that there were many roads to the retention and continuation of the categories of conquered and conqueror, rich and poor. Thus the "new" South Africa was born under Act 108
of 1996. The Act proved pecuniaria correct, especially with reference to the property clauses which recognized, respected and offered protection to unjustly acquired property for more than three centuries of the slavery and economic exploitation of the conquered. This condition is buttressed by the transition from Parliamentary to constitutional supremacy.

4 Die Voortrekker Monument

It is no exaggeration to suggest that Die Voortrekker Monument was the Mecca of Afrikaner spirituality. It probably still is. The building is majestic. It is a structure of solid granite standing for the declaration of the eternity of the edifice and the immortality of Afrikaner spirituality. In some respects its architecture resembles that of the Egyptian pyramids: the symbols of immortality and eternity. The picture of the “great task” history on the inside walls are somewhat reminiscent of the Christian concept of the “stations of the cross”. A walk through the “stations” ultimately leads to salvation, the gateway to eternity and immortality. And this idea strengthened the resolve of the pink “invader” to preserve and perpetuate the vow of van Riebeeck: “ons sal sterven — ons sal jou, Suid-Afrika”.

It is interesting to note that in the “secret talks” about the new South Africa, the question of symbols such as Die Voortrekker Monument did cross the mind of some of the interlocutors. “It made up my mind to ask Mbeki what he thought of Afrikaner monuments such as the Voortrekker Monument, and what the thinking of a black majority government would be with regard to Afrikaners’ symbols and statues and the names they had given to towns and streets. But I neglected to ask him these questions” (Esterhuysen, 2012: 172). Perhaps it needed an Englishman among the interlocutors to think like Esterhuysse and ask similar questions about the statue of Cecil John Rhodes.

According to Esterhuysse, “Fikile Bam came up to me where I stood at the memorial stones. He said: ‘I think I’m beginning to understand you. You’re standing at the graves of your ancestors. Maybe one day in the future you can build a church. You should gather the bones of our ancestors in foreign countries, …, and bury them at the Voortrekker Monument. Then we can call it the ‘Freedom Monument’. We walked away pensively, in silence” (Esterhuysen, 2012: 186). Does the meditative silence perhaps mean that it is better not to talk about the defilement of Afrikaner spirituality? Is habitation possible between the ancestors of Fikile Bam and those of Willie Esterhuysse? How can Fikile Bam be re-membered by the ancestors of Willie Esterhuysse, and vice versa? Matters of the spirit, it is said by some, are not to be entangled in politics. The two domains should be kept apart. Yet, the spirituality of liberation argues against this separation. It maintains that the political domain is pregnant with the reality of political holiness if one takes politics seriously as a matter of life and death in the service of giving life both to oneself and to the other and being prepared to give up one’s own life in the cause of this service (Sobrino, 1988: 81).

Like other ANC visitors, Zuma was taken on a sightseeing trip through Pretoria by car. Among other attractions, Smuts took Zuma to the Voortrekker Monument.
The problem with these discourses is that they reveal the tendency to forget that state capture was particularly contemporaneous with the discovery of diamonds and gold in South Africa. It is not certain if Anglo-American is merely a name that thrills enthusiastic newspaper readers.

6 Race

Forty-four years ago, a statement was released from the University of the Witwatersrand on why there ought to be talk about race in South Africa. The statement was true then as it is today. It is that: "We conclude that, from the dawn of man in Pliocene-Pleistocene geological epoch, to the present day, there is no trace of a pure human race. Racial purity is a mythical concept. Man himself has created racial categories; he has made a classification of races to try to bring order to his understanding of the variations of man. His racial categories are arbitrary—that is why different scientists recognize different numbers of races, although all are striving to reflect the natural relationships of populations of human beings. ... Scientifically, it is impossible therefore to classify each individual or even single population into a particular racial category. Especially is this true where the area of vague and blurred overlap between racial groups has been greatly enlarged by extensive intermarriage, as in South African history. If there is one subject or group of subjects on which every thinking South African should try to inform himself, it is the true meaning and implications of race ... the term 'race' ... is heavily charged emotionally and politically and full of unsound and even dangerous meanings. It is in the name of race that millions of people have been murdered and millions of others are being held in degradation. That is why you cannot afford to remain ignorant about race" (Tobias, 1972: 31 and 38, emphasis in the text). The lived experience in South Africa today testifies to the veracity of this observation in the unfolding struggle for epistemic and social justice.

Race in South Africa today is the determinant of whether or not one belongs to the category of the poor or the rich. A sprinkling of the newly rich out of the category of the conquered hardly obliterates this observation. Race today determines which school or university one shall attend. It is the arbiter on access to opportunities for educational and economic advancement. Race is the daily violator of the principle that the health of the people is the supreme law because multitudes die of preventable and curable diseases just because they do not have medical insurance to cover the costs of living in good health.

The memorabilia identified above are by no means exhaustive. They serve, however, to show that it is an ethical necessity to have a philosophy of memory in order to pursue an effective struggle for epistemic and social justice. They show that a memorial philosophy is not abstract. On the contrary, it is an appeal to concrete but knowledgeable and understanding action.

Conclusion

I have argued that a philosophy without memory cannot abolish epistemic and social injustice. I have given examples of items to be remembered if the goal of social and epistemic justice is to be achieved. The achievement of the goal is an ethical imperative. It requires an ethical revolution as a matter of urgency in the leadership of Africa, especially in the political and educational domains (Masai, 2010: 23). Such leadership shall have the courage to declare that "waiting for Godot" was not spoken of the imperative for transformation leading to epistemic and social justice. Why wait for Godot when "A famous statistic is that the whole of sub-Saharan Africa has an economy about the size of Belgium’s" (Collier, 2008: 164). This observation was made fifty-one years after the political independence of the first sub-Saharan African country. How can Africa permit that a country almost the size of the Kruger National Park in territory, and with a population almost equal to that of Zimbabwe, should have an economy virtually the same as the whole of sub-Saharan Africa? It is not only time that is "out of joint", but it would appear that reason and ethics have also yielded to the deadly power of pecuniamania. Are we waiting for transformation or trans-substantiation? Four weeks before his death, Fanon is reported to have written a letter to his friend, Roger Tailly, He stated that: "We are nothing on earth if we are not in the first place slaves of a cause, the cause of the peoples, the cause of justice and liberty" (Zahar, 1974: xx).

Note

1. We take the view, like Wole Soyinka, (1999: 32) that the "convention that capitalizes this [Christian, Christian]" and other so called world religions is justified only when the same principle is applied to other religions, among them, the Orixas.

References


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