

**A history of the threatened indigenous tomatoes (*solanum lycopersium*) and pepper (*capsicum annum*) in the communities of Ondo province of south-western Nigeria, 1900-1960.**

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**Abstract**

*Communities of the Ondo Province of Southwestern part of Nigeria engaged in self-sufficient farming, where emphasis was laid on the production of surplus food crops before the colonial agricultural scheme. There was surplus production of staple pepper and tomatoes for immediate consumption and the surplus was basically given out as gift. In the wake of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century was the introduction of colonial agricultural policy that purportedly undermined the pre-colonial feeding culture. The nature and structure of indigenous tomato and pepper cultivation gradually gave way to the adoption of exotic practices under the colonial agricultural scheme. In this case, pepper such as ata-wewe (small tiny indigenous pepper), Ata-gbooro-ibile (slim-long indigenous pepper), ata-rodo ibile (round-glossy indigenous pepper), indigenous tomatoes which were tomati weewe (small-round indigenous tomatoes tomatoes) and tomati- ibile elejo (snake-like tomatoes) were being undermined as a result of interface with the exotic varieties. This study made use of oral interview conducted on 100 respondents, who were farmers and foodstuff sellers located to Ondo, Ekiti, Akure, Akoko, Okitipupa and Owo farming communities of Southwestern Nigeria. Data collected were interpreted from historical perspective. Findings show that the indigenous pepper and tomatoes have been threatened into gradual extinction from the food economy of the people through the importation and consumption of species of unfamiliar sources. In conclusion, this study indicated that the indigenous farmers should reconsider the cultivation of the indigenous pepper and tomatoes as a major panacea to poverty alleviation and derivation of healthy nutritional values.*

**Keywords:** Ondo Province, threatened, unfamiliar, Indigenous, colonial agriculture, policy.

**Introduction**

Ondo Province comprised of Ondo, Ekiti, Akoko, Owo, Okitipupa Akure and their environs. Pre-colonial Ondo Province of Southwestern Nigeria witnessed the production of surplus food crops especially indigenous tomatoes and pepper. They were the main crops cultivated and consumed as ingredients of



soup and other delicacies. Despite the small size nature of the people's farmland<sup>1</sup>, food crops were sufficiently produced to feed the population and catered for external demand through intra community trade, prior to colonial influence<sup>2</sup>. Trade was a major factor that created strong links among Yoruba settlements in Southwestern Nigeria in the past because of their homogeneity and similar pattern of farming and food consumption<sup>3</sup>. Yoruba communities conducted long and short distance trades to facilitate the distribution of goods and services among neighbouring settlements and the external environments. Markets were sited especially around the King's palace, majorly to facilitate symbiotic sense of security. There were daily and periodic markets which served wider areas. Daily markets were located to the heart of the towns while periodic markets were located to the boundaries of the towns to facilitate wider patronage and relationship<sup>4</sup>. People found their ways from various farm locations in Southwestern Nigeria with their indigenous pepper and tomatoes for sale in the markets not too far from their farms, the perishable nature of pepper and tomatoes necessitated disposing them as soon as they were harvested. They were also mini traditional markets across Southwestern communities located to the family compound, (oja agbo-ile). The *agbo-ile* markets were created for easy access to food items especially indigenous pepper and tomatoes needed by members living around the location<sup>5</sup>. Buying and selling were predominant characteristics of any market, in pre-colonial Yoruba as elsewhere, and the channel of distribution was organized in a relay-race-system.

The producers (farmers) made their trade articles available to some professionals that were called *egbe alaroobo* (wholesalers), who in turn sold directly to the consumers or sub-*egbe alaroobo* (retailer) who transferred the goods to the general consumers<sup>6</sup>. The indigenous pepper and tomatoes produced and consumed in the pre-colonial Yorubaland began to face serious threats during the colonial agricultural regime<sup>7</sup>. The threatened indigenous pepper and tomatoes were identified as *ata-weewe* (small short tiny pepper), *ata-weewe tinrin gbooro* (long slim pepper), *atarodo* (round glossy pepper). Tomato of indigenous species were the *tomati weewe* (small round tomatoes), *tomati nla* (big round segmented tomatoes) and *tomati-elejo* (snake-like tomatoes)<sup>8</sup>. All these species were cultivated, marketed and consumed in large quantity prior to colonial agriculture.

<sup>1</sup>P.C. Lloyd, "Yoruba Land Law". Oxford London. (1962)

<sup>2</sup> C.F. Beer, "The Politics of Peasant Groups in Western Nigeria". Ibadan. University Press.(1976)

<sup>3</sup> B.W. Hodder, "Markets in Yorubaland" in B.W Hodder and U.I Ukwu (eds) *Markets in West Africa*. Ibadan, University Press.(1969)

<sup>4</sup> C.O. Ilorin (ed), "Price formation and profit margin in the traditional food markets in Western Nigeria" in African Urban Notes (5) (n.d)

<sup>5</sup> Hodder, Markets in Yorubaland, (1969)

<sup>6</sup> W.I. Ofonagoro, "Trade and Politics in Southern Nigeria, 1881-1929" New York. (1979)

<sup>7</sup> D. Agbedana, "Introduction to Colonial Agriculture in Ado-Ekiti" Ado-Ekiti: Abiye Press. (1970)

<sup>8</sup> R.O. Adu-Peters, "Threatened Indigenous Food Items in Ondo Province of Southwestern Nigeria 1850-1960" An Unpublished Thesis Dissertation submitted to the Postgraduate College, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. (2016)

Very fundamental to this study was the gradual disappearance of the identified indigenous food crop species with the emergence of the exotic varieties. In recent times, the farming population in Southwestern Nigeria depends on the hybrid pepper and tomatoes of unfamiliar sources, largely cultivated with the application of fertilizer by the northern farmers. This development has endangered the indigenous food crop production of the farming communities of Southwestern Nigeria. Thereby creating a wide gap between the consumption of cheap, surplus and healthy pepper and tomatoes and the farming communities of Southwestern Nigeria.

### Colonial Agricultural Policy

Colonial Intelligence report emphasised that contact with the British and foreign food producing companies have significantly introduced a change in production and consumption pattern to the farming communities of Southwestern Nigeria from the 1900 to late in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Since this period, consumption pattern among the people has been geared towards high and uncontrollable demand for the hybridized pepper and tomatoes cultivated from the Northern part of Nigeria through colonial methods of farming. The implications of this for southwestern farmers was the gradual disappearance of the indigenous pepper and tomatoes from the staple meals of the people, leaving the entire economy dependent on the Northern farmers who determine the prices of the items at the local markets<sup>9</sup>.

Clarke explicates the horrendous influence of the colonial economic policy on food crop farming in the Southwestern Nigeria. A tenacious objective, well calculated against the fulcrum of the fledging economy of the communities of southwestern Nigeria.<sup>10</sup> More challenging about the colonial scheme was the overhaul of the structure of the indigenous farming and total eradication of food crops which they perceived non-profitable to their conceived objectives of exploration for exploitation. Hence, there was total consolidation of their master plan by removing what they considered as "subsistence and non-market oriented"<sup>11</sup>. As soon as the imperialists implemented the new economic policies, the indigenous land tenure system was modified to cater for foreign agricultural influences introduced by propagating cash and mixed cropping which soon short-lived the relevance of food crops in the indigenous economy<sup>12</sup>. In the first four years of growing cocoa in Southwestern Nigeria, food crops were grown among the tender cocoa trees as soon as the canopy formed, the farm was too shady for food crops especially indigenous tomatoes and pepper which were considered insignificant to the policy of the colonial regime. Most of the indigenous pepper and tomatoes planted alongside cocoa trees were mal-nourished with effects of stunted growth and low harvest compared with the situation in pre-colonial Ondo Province.

<sup>9</sup> R. O. Adu-Peters, "Threatened Indigenous Food Items in Ondo Province of Southwestern Nigeria, 1850-1960" An Unpublished Thesis Dissertation submitted to the Postgraduate College, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. (2016)

<sup>10</sup> Clarke, R.J.M. 'Agricultural Production in a Rural Yoruba Community', Ph.D. dissertation University of London, (London, 1979)

<sup>11</sup> G. K. Helleiner, "Peasant Agriculture, Government and Economic Growth in Nigeria" Homewood, pp551-557 (1966)

<sup>12</sup> S. A. Akintoye, "The Ondo Road Eastward of Lagos" Lagos, University Press. (1969)

Mechanized farming was introduced to achieve the preconceived plan of large scale production of specific food crops such as yellow maize and wheat at the expense of white maize, beans, tomatoes and pepper (indigenous). The ancient small-holding system which sustained the population prior to contact with the colonial agricultural policy was ruptured to contain the colonial land tenure system, mainly and genuinely to alienate land use to the indigenous farmers. The colonial agricultural policies introduced were against the peaceful co-existence enjoyed by the indigenous farmers in the pre-colonial Ondo Province and across the whole of Southwestern Nigeria, in respect to the usage of land for indigenous pepper and tomato cultivation<sup>13</sup>. Colonial tenure system ushered endless land related problems that introduced hostile relationship which affected food crop production adversely. Falese clarifies that the indigenous farmers began opting for cash crop production on government reserved land with incentives and money benefits. Resultantly, leading to shortage and importation of food crops while cash crops production was receiving maximum attention of the farmers.<sup>14</sup> All types of food items were imported into the Province<sup>15</sup>. Most of the acres of land cultivated for indigenous pepper, tomatoes and other food items were redistributed to government farmers for the production of cash crops.<sup>16</sup> This resulted in a little change in rural attitudes to agricultural development<sup>17</sup>. The effect of this on food crops, including indigenous pepper and tomatoes was their gradual disappearance from the Ondo Province of Southwestern Nigeria.<sup>18</sup>

#### **Influence of Cash Crop on Food Crop (tomatoes and pepper) Cultivation.**

Preponderance of cash to food crops between 1930s and 1940s was scuttled by internal land crises and inertia in the colonial agricultural policy imbibed by the local farmers. Cocoa growing was a veritable instance of autonomous peasant response to external market opportunities.<sup>19</sup> In this period, cocoa provided cash income and became the important source of demand for locally produced cash crop for export from the Ondo Province. Cocoa cultivation also accounted for between 23% and 47% of the regional government's revenue and up to 61% of total finances in the 1950s and 1960s<sup>20</sup>. Findings showed that the above has encouraged a neglect of food crop production, especially indigenous tomatoes and pepper in all the farming communities of Ondo Province. Aladejube, Berry and Asogbon assert that by 1978, more acres of land was redistributed to cocoa cultivation than to the cultivation of indigenous pepper and tomatoes, thereby, making them susceptible to gradual extinction from the food basket of the

<sup>13</sup> Alice Olaleye, (Mrs) (75 yrs), foodstuff seller, Oja Oba Akure, 16/9/18

<sup>14</sup> Idowu Falese (Mrs) (51 yrs), Foodstuff seller, Ugele market, Ondo, 27/1/18

<sup>15</sup> M. S. Adeleye (73yrs) food crop farmer Odo farm, Ado Ekiti, 10/7/18

<sup>16</sup> Fabunmi, Oyinlola (65 yrs), foodcrop farmer, Odo Ado-Ekiti 10/7/18

<sup>17</sup> S. Berry, "Cocoa and Economic Development in Western Nigeria" in Carl Eicher (ed), *The Growth and Development in Nigeria's Economy East Lansing*. (1970)

<sup>18</sup> Omojofodun Mesegan, (Mr.) (88 yrs), food crop Farmer, Okitipupa, 16/5/18

<sup>19</sup> G. K. Helleiner, "Peasant Agriculture, Government and Economic Growth in Nigeria" Homewood, pp551-557.(1966)

<sup>20</sup> Helleiner, Peasant Agriculture, Government and Economic Growth in Nigeria. pp551-557

people.<sup>21</sup> The place of food basket for the nation or any society could be viewed in light of World Health Organisation's clamour for intensification of the cultivation of indigenous food items as reports;"

...more herbal ingredients create possibilities for the local cultivation of medicinal and aromatic food crops as well as for the regulated and sustainable harvest of wild plant. Such endeavours could help raise rural employment in the developing countries, boost commerce around the world and perhaps contribute to the health of millions.<sup>22</sup>

Interviews with a good number of the food crop farmers and sellers, such as Yusuf, Ologunoyan, Akindojutimi and Olagundoye affirmed that the wealth derived from cash crops further constituted a great threat to the production of food crop in Ondo and Ekiti districts.<sup>23</sup> Along the same vein, the position of Clarke (1979) further accentuates the findings that many farmers concentrated almost entirely on cash crops and neglected food crops. In the Province, farmers engaged the most fertile land in cocoa cultivation while lip-service was paid to food crop production, thereby endangering the sustainability of the indigenous economy of the communities of Ondo Province.

### **Influence of the World Wars on the Cultivation of Indigenous Tomatoes and Pepper**

The 19<sup>th</sup> Century Yoruba wars spelt the earlier doom for the cultivation and consumption of the indigenous food crops. There was acute food shortage across the whole of Southwestern Nigeria. Ondo Province suffered a great set back under the superior influence of Ibadan warlords<sup>24</sup>. Another disastrous epoch were the World wars (1914-1945), cultivation of food crops including indigenous pepper and tomatoes were greatly undermined. All efforts made by the colonial agents to re-invigorate food production in Ondo Province was bogged down with impunity by the world powers and their economic agents (Britain and the Expatriate companies). There was food shortage and indigenous food items including indigenous pepper and tomatoes were already at low level of production and the repercussions of this were felt in the districts. "Grow more food" campaign was carried out by the Agricultural staff, and the farmers responded<sup>25</sup>. By 1940, attention has shifted from food crop production to taking care of war exigencies and British economic recession attracted by

<sup>21</sup> Adeyeye Aladejube (50 yrs), Food crop farmer, Odo Fram Ado Ekiti, 10/7/18., S. Berry, "Cocoa and Economic Development in Western Nigeria" in Carl Eicher (ed.), *The Growth and Development in Nigeria's Economy* (East Lansing, 1970) and Asogbon, (Chief), (88 yrs), food crop farmer, 10/7/18

<sup>22</sup> B. Aderinola, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Human Development Report, (New York: Oxford University Press 1994).

<sup>23</sup> Sadiat Yusuf, (Madam), (72 yrs), Owo/Akoko, 16/5/18, Elizabeth Ologunoyan, (56 yrs), foodstuff seller, Owo/Akoko farm 16/5/18 and Folasade Akindojutimi (Madam), (91 yrs), foodstuff seller, Okitipupa Market, 16/5/18

<sup>24</sup> B. Adediran, "The Frontier States of Western Yorubaland, circa 1600-1889" Ibadan, French Institute for Research in Africa. (1994)

<sup>25</sup> National Archive Ibadan, CSO 26/1/29734 Intelligence Report on Ado-Ekiti District. (1925)

shortage in its foreign exchange<sup>26</sup>As a result, efforts were made to raise the productivity of existing farms to encourage food crop production on intense. Food stuffs were exported from Ondo Province into the major cities of Yorubaland as early as the 1920s, particularly Lagos, Ibadan and Osogbo. Ondo province became a chief supplier of foodstuffs to these major areas as noted in the circular written by J.B Balogun, dated 17<sup>th</sup> Oct.,1950; which states; "this is to notify that the foodstuffs of Akure and its environs are always carried to many towns and villages to sell. This will bring to the locality; shortage of food as in many towns like Oyo, Ife, Ilesha and many others, they do not allow anybody to sell foodstuffs to the foreigners"<sup>27</sup>

### Influence of Farm Settlement

Starting from 1940s, especially at the peak of the World war II when there was global food crisis, attempt were made at improving on food crops, including indigenous pepper and tomatoes by introducing modern method of farming to induce surplus yields. The methodical process was found alien to the indigenous species of crops and led to the influx of foreign species of food crops, forcefully adapted to the nature and texture of the land, thereby, affecting food crop production. Farm settlement was designed to intensify colonial economic policy of crop specification. It was ultimately formulated and implemented to induce large production of cash crops and colonial favourite crops (yellow maize, plantain, banana, pineapple, avocados and spices). Indigenous pepper and tomatoes as well as white maize, yam and other veritable indigenous food crops were deliberately distorted from the scheme.<sup>28</sup>The policy objective facilitated agricultural extension method, encouraged the growth and development of the rural areas, mainly for cash crops production. There was also the mitigation of barrier against the strict tenure system of free access by colonial government for intending land users, experimentation of modern farming system among others.

The establishment of farm settlement was principally to induce the export base of the colonial economy since fiscal dividends to government from the food sub-sector remained low<sup>29</sup>. Machineries were then set in motion between 1955 and 1960 to promote a strong "commodity economy" to effectively run the colonial economic fiscal policy for its effective administration. Colonial agricultural scheme encouraged mixed cropping with the use of organic manure between 1930s and 1950s when trainings were organized to educate the farmers on how to deploy incentives to producing maximum crop yields in various farms<sup>30</sup>. Results of colonial education on food crop production failed to yield meaningful outcome partly because of the shifted attention to cash crop cultivation and largely due to strange agricultural methods adopted.<sup>31</sup> Low production of

<sup>26</sup> C. F. Beer, *"The Politics of Peasant Groups in Western Nigeria"*. Ibadan. University Press (1976)

<sup>27</sup> National Archive Ibadan, AK NA 415/ Intelligence Report on Land use in Akure. (1951)

<sup>28</sup> Bolodeoku Ojagbula (Mr) (63 yrs), food crop farmer, Okitipupa, 25/1/18

<sup>29</sup> A. C. C. Swayne, "National Archive Ibadan CSO 26 Ref No 31042 "Colonial Intelligence Report on Agriculture and Food Production in Ondo Province". (1952)

<sup>30</sup> C. F. Beer, *"The Politics of Peasant Groups in Western Nigeria"*. Ibadan. University Press. (1976)

<sup>31</sup> Dokun Olufemi (Mr), (77 yrs), food crop farmer, Akure, 9/4/18

indigenous food crops, including tomatoes and pepper precipitated the importation of the foreign species from the northern part of Nigeria since the 1950s. For instance, communities of the Ondo Province since the 1950s had sufficiently produced cash crops, especially cocoa for capital flow while the indigenous food crops served as supplementary crops under the colonial agriculture. Food crop cultivation was undermined majorly, due to their inability to attract capital flow to the farmers who had invested their wealth in production of cash crops, hoping to accrue maximum benefits from it in the long run<sup>32</sup>

Exotic species of pepper and tomatoes introduced to replace the indigenous varieties included *sombo* (chili pepper), *tatase* (bell pepper), *rodo*-hausa (habanero) and *tomati*-hausa. These exotic varieties were propagated under the colonial scheme in the northern part of Nigeria. The scheme became successful because of the availability of expanse of land with no recourse to tenure system. A system that rendered the scheme absolutely unsuccessful in the Ondo Province of Southwestern Nigeria. Hence, exotic tomatoes and pepper were cultivated in large quantity, alien farm practices including fertilizer application and irrigation system were purportedly launched to induce large quantity for commercial purpose. British agricultural policies tenaciously exacerbated strong drive for capital economy other than a system of sufficient supply of healthy food items for sustainable development. Thus, it should be emphasized that the communities of Ondo Province of Southwestern Nigeria have grown out of tastes for indigenous pepper and tomatoes. The younger population among the consumers claimed ignorance of the indigenous pepper and tomatoes while the older people, who were familiar with them no longer desire eating them. In recent times, some farmers who tried to cultivate some of the indigenous pepper and tomatoes faced poor harvest due to loss of soil natural nutrients, emanating from constant cultivation of other crops or misuse of fertilizers by the postcolonial disoriented farmers<sup>33</sup>. Loss of soil nutrients has ushered serious threats into the production of indigenous pepper and tomatoes in Southwestern Nigeria.

### Conclusion

This study has established that the colonial agricultural scheme introduced to the communities of Ondo Province as well as other communities in Southwestern Nigeria has greatly strangled the healthy process of farm practices and crop cultivation which sustained the population prior to colonial experience. Emphasis on cash crops production created an unending wave of food for the population. Food crop farmers have lost the identity of protecting the immediate and extended food baskets of the fast growing population for capital acquisition and fame at the corridor of endless power and wealth accumulation. The local markets of the communities of Ondo Province and southwestern Nigeria as a whole, became the dumping grounds for the sales of exotic pepper and tomatoes from the northern part of the country. This study

<sup>32</sup> D. Agbedana, "Introduction to Colonial Agriculture in Ado-Ekiti". Ado Ekiti: Abiye Press. (1970)

<sup>33</sup> S. Berry, "Cocoa and Economic Growth in Western Nigeria" in Carl Eicher (ed), *The Growth and Development in Nigeria's Economy East Lansing*. (1970)



further reiterates that the indigenous farmers should begin to look inward for resuscitating the cultivation and consumption of the indigenous pepper and tomatoes, basically for healthy living, because they were grown on natural soil. Individuals should redefine their feeding pattern towards consuming more of indigenous food items to the reduction of chemical-based food crops. Also, cultivation of indigenous pepper and tomatoes was not capital-intensive, they thrived in common soil and could be grown in the house farm and garden. Cultivation of indigenous pepper and tomatoes would enhance more market values for healthy living and sustainable development.

### Bibliography

#### Oral Interviews

NAME	TITLE	AGE	OCCUPATION	ADDRESS	DATE
Adeleye M.S	Chief	73 yrs	Food crop farmer	Ado Ekiti	10/7/18
Adepoju J.	Mrs	50 yrs	Food-stuff seller	Oja Akure	16/9/18
Akindojutimi Folasade	Mrs	91 yrs	Food crop farmer	Opa	16/5/18
Akinmade Comfort	Mrs	62 yrs	Food-stuff seller	Ondo	27/1/18
Aladejube Adeyeye	Mr	50 yrs	Food crop farmer	Ado Ekiti	10/7/18
Arowosegbe Saidat	Mrs	62 yrs	Food stuff seller	Owo/Akok o	16/5/18
Ayeligba Temitope	Mr	63 yrs	Food-stuff seller	Ado Ekiti	10/7/18
Asogbon	Chief	88 yrs	Food crop farmer	Ado Ekiti	10/7/18
Ayoola	Mrs	62 yrs	Food-stuff seller	Akure	09/4/18
Balogun	Mrs	64 yrs	Food-stuff seller	Opa	25/1/18
Daniel	Mrs	47 yrs	Food-stuff seller	Akure	09/4/18
Daniel Grace	Mrs	53 yrs	Food crop farmer	Owo/Akok o	16/5/18
Daramola Ibijoke	Mr	54 yrs	Food-stuff seller	Ado Ekiti	10/7/18
Dokun Olufemi	Mr	77 yrs	Food crop farmer	Akure	09/4/18
Erelu	Chief	54 yrs	Food stuff seller	Akure	09/4/18
Fabunmi Oyinlola	Mr	65 yrs	Food crop Farmer	Ado Ekiti	10/7/18
Falese Idowu	Mrs	51 yrs	Food-stuff seller	Ondo	27/1/18
Gbolagun Esther	Mrs	70 yrs	Food-stuff seller	Ondo	27/1/18



Ibrahim Bola	Mrs	63 yrs	Food stuff seller	Akure	09/4/18
Iseabaje Beatrice	Mrs	81 yrs	Food-stuff seller	Ondo	27/1/18
Kajola Ibironke	Mrs	74 yrs	Food stuff seller	Ado Ekiti	10/7/18
Ogunleye Florence	Mrs	60 yrs	Food-stuff seller	Oja Akure	16/9/18
Ojagbula Bolodeoku	Mr	63 yrs	Food crop farmer	Opa	25/1/18
Ojo Bukunmi	Mrs	56 yrs	Food stuff seller	Akure	09/4/18
Olagundoye Ajigbore	Chief	78 yrs	Food crop farmer	Opa	16/5/18
Olaleye Alice	Mrs	75 yrs	Food-stuff seller	Oja Akure	16/9/18
Olatunji Ige	Madam	84 yrs	Food-stuff seller	Ado Ekiti	10/7/18
Ologunoyan Elizabeth	Mrs	56 yrs	food-stuff seller	Owo/Akoko	16/5/18
Omojofodun Mesegan	Mr	88 yrs	Food crop farmer	Opa	16/5/18
OmotosoAbigail	Madam	80 yrs	Food-stuff seller	Oja Akure	16/9/18
Rufus Bukola	Mrs	39 yrs	Foodstuff seller	Oja Akure	16/9/18
Sanni Dorcas	Madam	73 yrs	Food-stuff seller	Oja Akure	16/9/18
Yusuf Sidiat	Madam	72 yrs	Food-stuff seller	Owo/Akoko	16/5/18

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