THE STRUGGLE OF PHILIPPINE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

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Abstract

Indigenous people across the globe have engaged in a constant struggle to take control of natural resources and land against intrusion by external developers, state interest and commercial pressures brought up by practices such as mining and agribusiness (Meilasari-Sugiana, 2018). The main purpose of this research paper is to discuss how Thomas Pogge’s argument on the Global Justice applies to the case of indigenous people from the Philippines and their struggle to protect their natural resources. The paper will use a designed case study to demonstrate the enactment gap between the indigenous peoples’ rights in practice and law and the role of stakeholders insafeguarding the land belonging to the indigenous group. A case study of Higaonon indigenous tribe was selected for the study due to various mining and palm oil agribusiness activities in the region and the struggle to retain the land. The research methodology involved gathering information from tribal leaders’ representatives and members of the focus groups and researching previous informant interviews with governmental bodies and non-governmental organizations on the matter in question. The study results show conflicting interests among different government bodies; laws and mandate of various government bodies are contradicting resulting in poor coordination between them. It is also noted that there is a lack of political will and resources to implement the provisions in the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act. The indigenous peoples’ land tenure insecurity is also found to be a dysinity factor.

Introduction:

The land is one of the most controversial natural resources across the world, millions of people across the globe have lost their lives due to border conflicts, and the fight for the ancestral land. On numerous occasions, politics have played a central role in the land dispute. Besides land, people have been fighting over other natural resources such as water and air in a bid to control the resources (Shapiro et al., 2018). In the past years, the fight over natural resources has been associated with numerous conspiracies with some people accusing the western governments of meddling on the issues of other countries to take over the most valuable natural resources such as oil. Some people have also accused the western world of helping developing countries with a target of exploiting their natural resources. The fight over natural resources is power related and in most cases, the powerful group will always take control over the resources. Past research has shown that indigenous people are among the most affected group when it comes to the issue of land grabbing and struggle for natural resources. The indigenous people across the globe have been in a constant struggle to take charge of their resources (Magni, 2017). The increasing level of globalization has
been the driving factor to the conflicting interest between the state and the natural resource. The value of land and other natural resources have increased significantly over the years, piling pressure over the possession of such resources. The state and commercial agencies are putting pressure on the indigenous group of people in the bid to take their land and natural resources. The efforts by the indigenous people to safeguard land and natural resources often coincide with the need to preserve the culture and the tradition associated with the land. According to Thomas Pogge, a German philosopher, the western governments contributes to the severe poverty that is affecting the poor. He believes that inequality, global poverty, and global justice are controlled by the western governments and they have to some extent responsible for the high poverty level facing these groups of people (McGuire, 2018). According to the Philippine Indigenous Peoples Rights Act, the rights of the indigenous people to their ancestral lands are not recognized. The act also offers various methods of improving the security of the indigenous people’s land tenure.

With the increasing pressure on land use and natural resources, state and external development, and commercial agencies are slowly encroaching the land owned by this group of people; they are performing various agribusiness activities, mining, and logging into their customary lands. These activities have accelerated the exploitation of natural resources and deforestation of land that had previously been owned by their ancestors. The conflicting interest between the state and the indigenous people resulting in some people losing their land despite their struggle to retain the land. According to Thomas Pogge on global justice, removing indigenous people from their ancestral land refutes the people the right to identity and life and therefore, they have the right to fight for their land and their place in the society (Pogge, 2001). The indigenous peoples' battle to protect land natural resources should be viewed as the fight by the people to preserve their culture and traditions that are closely related to the land itself. As it has been witnessed in the past years, the fight over natural resources between the indigenous people and government has led to political, social and economic marginalization and in most cases, the indigenous people are most disadvantaged in the long run; they do have financial muscles and the power to take control over their resources. The dominant society is often the advantaged group, they take advantage of their numbers and popularity in the region to frustrate the indigenous people. Some of the challenges faced by the indigenous group are associated with factors such as education, housing, income, life expectancy, and health. To find a common law that could bring the group together has been a challenge because indigenous people are from different historical backgrounds with contradicting indigenous customary laws regarding land ownership. There have also been sharp differences in land and natural resource usage between the indigenous people and the dominant group.

According to the government, the existing ancestral lands where customary land tenure arrangements are expected to be conducted are regarded as marginal, uncultivated, and idle. Therefore, such lands should be put under-investment, concessions, and development (Griffiths, 2017). Most governments have been in constant violation of international law that guards the indigenous people’s rights. To protect the indigenous people against exploitation by the government and the dominant society, there are indigenous rights legal concepts that have been highlighted in the international law to protect indigenous people’s rights and to ensure they are recognized. According to a study conducted by Keating (2019), the collective rights of the indigenous people to livelihood strategies and land have been discriminated against significantly in many countries across the world. Even though countries like Philippines, Colombia, and Malaysia have introduced legal provisions in their national legislation to protect the indigenous people against any form of discrimination and to protect their land and natural resources rights, Indigenous people are still faced by numerous problems because the governments have been so reluctant to implement the laws. There is a lack of political interest towards the enactment of such laws by the political class and as a result, the laws have not fully been realized.

The Philippines is one of the countries that have had a controversial story regarding indigenous people particularly in regards to their land rights. The fight for indigenous land rights in the Philippines has taken a completely different approach after it drew global attention. The increasing tension among the indigenous people and the dominant society have been brought by the ongoing armed conflicts and global land rush. This paper will capture some of the failures in the enactment of the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) as well as the enforcement failures that have been noted in the Philippines. The paper will also discuss the domestic legal framework that exists in protecting indigenous peoples' rights in the Philippines.

The objectives of the paper include exploring the roles of different stakeholders such as government agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and the indigenous communities in fighting in securing the ancestral domain titles. The second objective is to demonstrate the implementation gap between the indigenous peoples' rights in practice and
law and various delays in the titling of land under IPRA. The paper will put more focus on the land-related conflicts witnessed in the Philippines, particularly in the Opol municipality. One of the major controversial issues in the Philippines is the issue of oil palm plantation that started operating back in 2011. The subsequent section of the paper will focus on the problems facing the indigenous people in the Philippines and the legal framework that could be followed in solving the issue of land tenure, an elaborative literature review on mining and palm oil industries will be discussed as well its impact in the local communities particularly the indigenous group. The third section of this research paper will describe the methodology used in the study. The fourth and the fifth section presents the study results and discussion of the results respectively. The study result is based on the roles played by NGOs, states, and private businesses in promoting tribal unity and land alienation among the indigenous people.

Impacts of palm oil plantations and mining on indigenous people:
Over the past years, palm oil production has been one of the major widely grown mono-crop in the tropics. Various stakeholders including governments, private sector, and multilateral funding institutions have supported and promoted the large scale production of palm oils in the region. The palm oil industry in the Philippines has been growing at a high rate fuelled by the increasing demand for oil both locally and internationally. The oil palm has been instrumental in fulfilling the biofuel target of Philippine's government. The cultivation of oil palm has been found to harm the environment and the people living in the local communities (Padfield et al., 2019). Oil palm cultivation also comes with serious economic, social, and environmental costs. The forest dwellers and indigenous people have negatively been affected by the oil palm cultivation. Past research conducted in countries like Ghana and Colombia has shown that forest and land used by indigenous people are seized by either the government or the dominant society. The growth of oil palm involves the use of chemical based-inputs that pollute the environment thus affecting the people living in the region. The chemical-based inputs can also pollute the watersheds in indigenous peoples’ ancestral domain thus polluting the water supplies in the region particularly in the lowlands. Cases of deforestation have equally been on the rise in areas where oil palm is being practiced on a large scale; individuals in palm growing areas are more likely to cut down trees in the bid to set the land for growing the palm oil. Even though the oil palm promoters claim that oil palm plantation will reduce the unemployment rate and the poverty level among the indigenous people, such claims have not been proved. Furthermore, the claims have been contested by others owing to huge adverse environmental effects resulting from the cultivation of oil palm.

Indigenous peoples and local communities:
The Philippine government has been on the forefront fighting for the establishment of domestic and foreign investment in the mining sector. The government revised the mining act to encourage foreign investors, the permit requirements for the foreigners was significantly lowered down to promote foreign investment. For the successful operation of the mining industry, a huge area should be set aside for such activities. It is becoming extremely difficult to accommodate indigenous people in areas where the mining industry has been established. Mining has led to the relocation, physical displacement, and resettlement of indigenous people thus posing a serious risk to the lives of these people who are in most cases left without shelter or any form of accommodation. Research has shown that the majority of the indigenous people are displaced without following proper channels, some people were being relocated without prior warning and in some cases, the lands were acquired before obtaining Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) (Giupponi, 2018). Mining activities have negatively affected the indigenous people in several ways including their health, environment, and way of life. It has also been noted that mining has negative effects on the social infrastructure of the people living around the mining sites. The Philippines’ government is ready to go against the interest of its people at the expense of protecting foreign investors in the country. The Philippine government has not been keen on protecting the rights of indigenous people, it has circumvented the laws that protect human rights and the environment where the people live.

Evidence has also shown that government agencies that are responsible for protecting the affected communities are not doing their part; they have failed to apply the necessary laws citing limited resources to handle matters affecting indigenous people. Even though poverty rate is low in areas with high-level mining activities, evidence has shown a high level of inequality in mining districts as compared to non-mining districts; an indication that mining is creating more employment but at the same time promoting inequality which is one of the aspects of global injustice according to Thomas Pogge. Thomas states uncomfortable points in association with inequality, global poverty, and global justice. According to the philosopher, global trade adversely affect the poor, the governments prioritize foreign investors at the expense of its people (Van der Vossen and Brennan, 2018). In. The same scenario applies to the case of the Philippines where the government has focused on foreign investors at the expense of indigenous people living in the region. The government has done very little in protecting the people from health effects caused
by mining industries established in the region. Many companies have been committed to meeting environmental standards and maintaining a good working relationship with host communities. However, the companies have not fully effected their commitment, some companies have continued to violate human rights and environmental standards. A typical example is the case of indigenous people in the Philippines who have been affected by mining and oil palm production.

Research Methodology:-
A qualitatively designed case study is used to demonstrate the operation gap between the roles played various stakeholders in protecting indigenous people in the Philippines and the indigenous people’s rights in law and practice as well as social effects of mining and agribusiness industry on the indigenous people. The use of a descriptive case study has enabled the analysis of various factors that are likely to affect the process of negotiating and securing land tenure with government bodies as well as private companies.

Data Collection and Analysis:
Since the research is qualitative, data collection focused on discussion groups and interviews. The collected data were evaluated through content analysis. Based on the group discussion and interviews, the recurring subjects were identified and recorded to reflect on the repeated points and any emerging patterns. By employing a phenomenological approach, abductive reasoning was used to interpret the emerging patterns. The study applied primary data that were collected back in 2016 and other data collected in 2017 (Behfar and Okhuysen, 2018). The two sets of data were collected using different methods. Based on the collected data, the discussion groups were divided into two, the groups consisting of the local NGOs’ staff members and another one involving representatives from the tribal council. Engaging both indigenous people and the dominant society was crucial in making an inclusive decision. People who were interviewed local NGO workers, tribal leaders, and representatives from the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), representatives from provincial and nation Commission for Human Rights (CHR), and various representatives from provincial departmental offices. Through discussion among the focus group participants, the issues affecting the indigenous people were gathered (Drbohlav and Hejkrik, 2017). The discussion created an open forum where people could freely air their views regarding the challenges affecting the indigenous people in the Philippines. The methodology also involved the use of other relevant publicly available documents that provided relevant information about the state of inequality, poverty, and justice for the indigenous people in the Philippines. The study also made use of structured interviews with a special focus on representatives from the Philippine government and NGO workers. The interviews conducted between the years 2013 and 2017 were considered in the study. The interviews provided a better understanding of the rights of the indigenous people and information on agribusinesses, mining, and land issues in the Philippine. The main limitation of the study is the fact that it relied too much on the information obtained from the indigenous people, the locals, and the NGOs thus increasing the possibility of biasness in the information provided. To counter the challenge, several structured interviews were considered for the study including information extracted from social media sites, web pages, and annual reports published by the Philippine government and relevant non-governmental organizations.

Results And Discussion:-
Based on the analysis of the discussion by the focus group and the tribal leaders as well as the non-governmental organization workers’ interviews, a joint claim for the indigenous people in the study region was successfully developed in 2006 after the first Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT) claim that was established in 2001. The joint claim for CADT was found to be effective as compared to the one previously used in 2001. The Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title was effective in the application processes but could not match some of the traditional mechanisms used in managing the indigenous people in the Philippines (O’Donovan et al., 2020). The strategy is also ineffective in fostering community equity, resource management, and social justice. The indigenous people in the Philippines are in the process of developing a protection plan and the Ancestral Domain Sustainable Development plan. The establishment of CADT has not been effective to date because the issuance of CADT requires an appropriate Ancestral Domain Sustainable Development and Protection Plan.

According to the result obtained from the NCIP representative interviews and focus group discussion with the local and the tribal leaders, the planning for the Domain title was scheduled for 2017 where the tribal leaders and NCIP were expected to present a draft plan before the indigenous communities to seek its effectiveness and how best it can address the challenges that were facing the indigenous people in Philippines. During the discussion in the groups, the tribal leaders raised concerns over the mistreatment of indigenous people that had been witnessed before
including displacement from the ancestral land, negative environmental and health heath effect brought by the oil palm and mining industries and exploitation of the ancestral land which they believed to be sacred; the land should only be owned by individual or community and not government as it had been witnessed before. The tribal leaders also cited their hopes in the NCIP which they believed would survey the land to mark the distinctive boundary between the ancestral land domain and the best part of the land.

A section of NGO representatives was convinced that the Philippine government might never fulfill its promise to the indigenous people as claimed by the representative from the government. They argued that the fight over ancestral land by the indigenous people and the Philippine government has been an issue of concern for years and no proper action has been taken for years even though the government has remained steadfast in fighting for their rights. The NGO representatives believed that the government was prioritizing economic development at the expense of the indigenous people in the country. The representatives also claimed that the Philippine government was ready to do all it takes to keep the foreign investors in place, even if it translates to the indigenous people losing their ancestral land. The Philippine president, Rodrigo Duterte who was sworn in June 2016 had made several promises regarding the struggle of the indigenous people in the country but one year in office, nothing had been done. The NGO representatives believed that the president must take personal commitment and initiative in ensuring that challenges faced by the indigenous people in the Philippines are encountered. Otherwise, the government will keep giving false hopes as the people continue to suffer. As stated in one of the focus group discussions, "unless the President fulfills his election campaign promise of allocating additional resources to NCIP to be capable of fast-tracking the processing and approval of applications for CADTs. NCIP does not have sufficient capacities and resources to conduct land surveys of these large areas claimed." (Drbohlav and Hejkrlik, 2017). In February 2017, the NCIP informant claimed that the plan is to conduct the land survey, delineation, and award CADT for Dulangan within the next six months. The president’s commitment to ending the struggle cannot however be underestimated, he had been piling pressure on the government officials to speed up the CADT case to have the issue addressed. In addition to that, the president was committed to improving the budget allocation to NCIP to ensure that activities in the sector run smoothly well.

The presidency has a massive influence on a country’s political decisions as well as the global investment activities taking place in a country. According to Thomas Pogge, the two factors, the global economy, and political decisions are the key determinant of poverty and inequality level in a country. Even though Congress has the power to turn down the decision made by the president, his interest is still the top priority in various government sectors. Any move by the President to protect the disabled would be felt. Alternatively, when the President is against the indigenous people in the Philippines, they are likely to suffer more. This is an implication that the argument by the NGO representatives holds water, the president must give the issue of Indigenous people special attention to make a change in their lives and to change the face of the country. The poverty and struggles among the indigenous people in the Philippines are believed to be originating from land invasion by the government and global economic activities that have resulted in the huge displacement of the people as well as the negative environmental and health impact of such activities. According to Thomas Pogge, extreme inequality and poverty are not predetermined by any supernatural or manmade laws. He argues that poverty is not economically, socially, or politically inevitable because the poor are not always with us as it is suggested by erroneous maxim. Instead, inequality and poverty are a result of political decisions and global economic decisions (Pogge, 2003). Therefore, policies and choices made by the government, global corporations, and economic institutions are a key determinant of the level of poverty, inequality, and global justice in a country. Precisely, Thomas Pogge urges the people to remain steadfast in the fight to eradicate poverty and inequality in the country, it requires the technical know-how and the goodwill from the government to be able to control it effectively. In addition to that, the citizens ought to remain positive and act in a way the support global institutional transformation; they should act ethically as global citizens rather than acting as local citizens (Dressler et al., 2020).

The NGO representatives also believed that issuing land titles within the ancestral domain would help in transforming the land survey system in the affected districts and the entire Philippines. Issuance of the titles with the ancestral domain would also help in the implementation of agrarian reforms which was one of the factors delaying the processing of CADT. NGOs informants also blamed the poor relationship between various administrative offices as the possible cause of CADT processing delay. The leaders from the indigenous communities were not been given equal opportunity to sit in the councils and have their concerns addressed. Deny people from the tribe a chance to express their grievance the council was a big loophole that needed to be corrected in the attempt to have the issue of alleged mistreatment addressed appropriately. The tribal leaders also mentioned the conflict between NCIP and the
leaders from the indigenous communities that had been witnessed in the past; that is between the tribe and the NCIP. One focus group discussion stated, "We used to have arguments with them; they even refused to recognize our tribal council and wanted to establish another one by themselves. But now NCIP understands their function and role and our relationship has significantly improved." (Bertrand, 2011). It is an implication that there used to be a heated argument between the tribe and the NCIP. However, a lot has changed and the two groups have started to develop a mutual understanding between them as ways of promoting peace and unity. Having such disagreements at the local level is very dangerous especially when it comes to resource distribution. The government can be committed to promoting equality among all its people, but if there is disagreement among the leaders at the local level, the intended equitable resource allocation might not be effective. Therefore, as much as more effort has been diverted to the impact of global investment activities on the people, it is also important to consider the local leadership and the relationship between the affected group and the non-affected. Numerous land disputes between the indigenous people and the dominant communities have been noted over the past years and in most cases, the indigenous people are the ones who end up suffering most because they lack government support and at the same time they are in low numbers.

The non-governmental organizations also raised concerns over the failure by NCIP to recognize their efforts in addressing the complaint aired by the indigenous people. Just like the tribal leaders had cited, the relationship between NCIP and NGOs was becoming and the two bodies could no longer come into terms in an attempt to solve the problem faced by the people. Based on the concerns raised by the NCIP representatives and NGOs representative, there was an emerging blame game between the two groups. NCIP representatives had indicated their commitment to working with various non-governmental organizations in eliminating the challenges. On the other hand, the NGOs have cited a lack of cooperation for NCIP. To solve the problem facing the indigenous people in the Philippine, such division should never exist. All the stakeholders should come together and establish a common work plan that serves the interest of all everyone, this will not only help solve the problem of inequality and poverty among the indigenous people, but it will also promote peace and unity. The key stakeholders include the indigenous people, the tribal leaders, the government, non-governmental organizations, representatives from the dominant communities particularly the ones at the borders, and both local and foreign investors.

Land Grabbing Narrative by NGO Activists:
According to narratives by NGOs’ activists’ campaign and international fact-finding mission, there were cases of land grabbing from some indigenous farmers. To protect their land from grabbers, the farmers decided to form an association to fight land grabbing as a group. An example of such association in the Philippine includes SarahagonBagocboc Farmers Association (SBFA) (Borras and Franco, 2013). The farmers’ association was focused on taking back the land that had been grabbed. The association farmed and resettled the land that had been grabbed from the indigenous people. The farmers’ association files numerous petitions in an attempt to have all the indigenous land regained. The indigenous people had also complained of not being involved in the initial meeting held in the preparation of the oil palm plantations. During the community meeting held by the oil palm plantation development committee, only a few community members were picked to attend the meeting. Moreover, the community leaders were not involved in the decision-making process. When the oil palm plantation agreement was being signed, the investor only single few people to participate in the process, the larger members of the indigenous communities were left out the agreement. After the agreement had been signed, the international investors began to plant palms in fields belonging to local farmers as well as the ancestral sites. It was also unfortunate that sacred areas that been left unused were finally used in the construction of roads for the company. Oil palm was also planted in ritual areas like Bagonsilbo; such areas were regarded as discretion by the tribal elders. Trees in the areas preserved for burial and ritual performance were also cut down by the company (Obidzinski et al., 2012). Based on the resulting outcome, it is clear that the establishment of the oil palm plantation largely affected the social realignment of the indigenous people in the Philippine, areas which the people believed to be sacred were invaded and used for other company activities such as plantation and construction of roads. Failure to give local leaders an avenue to participate in the decision-making process at the initial stage was one of the reasons for project failure. To consider all social factors, it is important to have a collective decision-making process to have all the matter addressed before the project is started.

Social cohesion and Community disagreements:
During the campaign conducted by non-governmental organizations, numerous cases of violence, intimidation, and harassment were noted. Some incidents of house burning, crop destructions, and death threats were documented as well. The social injustices did not stop at the beginning of the company establishment, the indigenous people
continued to suffer even during the company operation. The worst continue to happen as the plantations operate in the region. Indigenous people were discriminated in many ways, their rights were abused and they had no say despite being relocated from their land. The locals had formed a resistance group to help them fight for their rights. The resistance group fought against the invaders until it reached a point when a leader of one of the resistance groups, Gilbert Paborada was killed. According to the Paboroda family and the locals, the killing of Paborada was directly associated with his role as the leader of the resistance movement (Dentith et al., 2013). Despite public outcry for justice, the case against A. Brown Company (the company that was alleged to have plotted the killing of Paboroda) has remained unresolved for years now. A report about the killing of the leader had been submitted to the House of Representatives was considered incomplete and therefore could not be used as enough evidence to determine a person who killed Paboroda. The government was not taking a keen interest in sentencing the perpetrators of the alleged conflict between the oil palm industries and indigenous people. Based on the study outcome, the Philippine government has not put much effort into protecting the indigenous people in the country. Several cases of mistreatment and discrimination against the indigenous people have been witnessed but the government has not come out strong to defend the people neither has the government been serious in punishing the people who are accused of mistreating the indigenous people in their land. The indigenous people have continued to suffer in the hands of the international, the sufferings that indigenous people undergo have affected their ways of life resulting in an increasing level of poverty. The Philippine governments have not been keen on enhancing global justice for the indigenous people in the country. Despite the public outcry by the indigenous people in the country, the government has continued to promote global trade which is believed to be one of the key contributing factors. The increased level of global trade in various countries has triggered the need for more land for industrial expansion thus worsening the situation. Therefore, the current state of indigenous people in the Philippine is a true reflection of the Thomas Pogge Global Justice argument.

Conclusion:
In conclusion, the indigenous communities in the Philippines and across the world are faced with difficult situations in coexisting with locals. In most cases, the communities are at longer heads with the local communities and the government over the possession of ancestral. According to the indigenous people, ancestral land is sacred and should preserve for the community usage only. However, the Philippine government has allowed global investors to encroach the land and natural resources belonging to the indigenous people in the country. The main challenges facing the indigenous people in Philippine have been triggered by the government efforts to promote mining and agribusiness activities in the country particularly in areas occupied by the indigenous people. Even though the people captured a section of indigenous people in the Philippine, the study outcome is a reflection of what happens across the country and the world at large. Global trade is becoming a new threat to the indigenous communities across the world, many governments seizing back the land owned by the indigenous people to create space for foreign investors. Most of the foreign investors require massive acres of land that have proved difficult to get thus pushing the government to displace thousands of people to create room for industrial establishment. Therefore, the existence of global investors is viewed as the primary cause of the problems that are currently facing indigenous people. Besides the grabbing of their land and natural resources, the established industries have been the source of environmental pollution in the regions thus causing various health effects to the people. In this study, the oil palm plantations in the Philippine have been found to have a huge negative impact on the people living in the region. The paper has indicated the significance of land to indigenous people in the Philippine and how the people perceived their ancestral land. Based on the study outcome, there have been challenges in the IPRA implementation especially in regards to the issuance of CADT. The Philippine government has not been keen on handling cases filed by the indigenous people on the alleged land grabbing and displacement of people. These are some of the specific challenges facing indigenous people in the Philippine. According to the study findings, it is clear that global investment has a direct impact on the lives of the indigenous people living in different parts of the world. Through global investment-related activities, there have been increasing cases of inequality, poverty, and injustices among the indigenous people thus proving Thomas Pogge’s argument on global justice.

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