

Overseas Territories Review

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After Brexit And Catalonia, What Will Become Of The EU?



The future of the European Union is surely in doubt.

Brexit and [Catalonia](#) are the most glaring recent examples of the irrepressibly dynamic forces of nationalism that continue to exert powerful influence on the human psyche within European communities.

More importantly, the processes that led to the victory of the “Leave” campaign in the June 2016 and the eruption of Catalonia’s cessationist sentiment form part of the disintegrating tendencies under way in today’s global political economy. They add to the growing list of cases illustrating the limits of the idea of a united Europe.

The more likely future of Europe is a neoliberal superstate jointly run by Berlin and Brussels. The European elite has been working hard for a long time now to have power transferred from the national governments to a Brussels-based super bureaucracy, with Berlin acting as the political and economic hegemon.

But there is also an alternative – a United States of Europe (a Europe with total

integration and without nation states), which is a widely shared idea within certain European elites. Such a project can succeed only if the norms and values of democracy are applied at a transnational and global level (cosmopolitan democracy).

An imperial superstate

As a citizen of a European neoliberal superstate, your life will be determined by two entities: the Brussels-based bureaucracy and the unelected hegemon, Berlin. They will dictate the policymaking process, while nation states - especially those situated on the periphery of the Union - will be turned into "satellites".

We have already seen plenty of evidence that the EU is heading that way.

Economic cooperation among European member states has revolved around distinct Machiavellian principles and it is the interests of the strong and influential economic agents and of powerful state actors that drive public policy agenda.

The tradition of political cynicism also defines the actual foreign policy agenda of EU authorities and institutions as evidenced by their double-standard approach towards integration and secession. They opposed Catalonia's declaration for independence in late October 2017 because they don't wish to see Spain (an EU member state) split, but provided unanimous support in 2008 to Kosovo's independence.

As a matter of fact, the European Community (along with Washington) not only failed in the case of former Yugoslavia back in the early 1990s to guarantee the territorial integrity of European state frontiers, in clear violation of the 1975 Helsinki Accords Final Act, but individual European member states actually played a key role in the destruction of the Yugoslavian state.

But no one has ever charged the EU with being a democratic political entity. If anything, it acts as an imperial power by virtue of the very emergence of a neoliberal superstate, at least in regard to economic affairs. The manner in which the bailout programmes for Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, and Cyprus were handled during the euro crisis stands out as a glaring example of heavy-handed, anti-democratic tactics.

In Greece and Italy, democratically elected governments were forced to resign under pressure from EU authorities and replaced in turn by non-elected

technocratic governments.

In the case of Greece, Germany's finance minister and EU officials even refused to accept the outcome of a bailout referendum. They still maintain a financial stranglehold over the economy, securing the country's transformation into a debt colony as a result of brutal austerity measures and outright refusal to provide debt relief.

Speaking of sovereign debt, Germany's own debt was largely written off in 1953 with the London Debt Agreement. To add insult to injury, Europe's new hegemon refuses to give back to financially strangled Greece a loan that the country was forced to provide to its Nazi occupiers during World War II. The value of the loan is estimated today to be in the [tens of billions](#) of euros.

Cosmopolitan democracy

The emergence of a United States of Europe presupposes not merely the complete redesign of the current EU architecture and fiscal unity but also the development of a new level of political consciousness.

The different peoples of Europe will have to embrace a cosmopolitan version of democracy which may be not simply contradictory to their national political cultures but run also contrary to emotional community attachment.

All prevailing experience indicates that we have not yet reached a stage of extending our emotional attachments to any measurable and influential degree to individuals and settings beyond close proximity to our own existence.

In other words, we can identify with the values and experiences of our communities and our nations, but hardly with those of the world at large, although we can still believe and subscribe to something called universal principles.

Moreover, cosmopolitan democracy is a noble but fanciful attachment not to universal principles as such, but rather to imagined political communities organised in empty space which may literally require the transcendence of time, culture, and history.

In other words, for cosmopolitan democracy to work, what is required is the application of a set of norms, practices, and values in a borderless world deprived of national cultures and distinct historical experiences - a borderless world that is located "outside" history and culture.

Cosmopolitan democracy requires the transcendence of all arbitrary limitations. In this sense, ontologically speaking, of course, cosmopolitan democracy as global governance comes close to resembling pantheism.

Unfortunately, the EU is not going that way. It will continue to accumulate political power at the expense of the democratic nation state in order to extend the tyranny of the neoliberal market for the benefit of European capital.

This is what the EU economic and political project has become all about, and the notion of a united Europe serves literally more as a political guide towards the establishment of a superstate rather than the remaking of Europe's political landscape along the lines of a federal democratic polity.

Previously published: <http://www.aljazeera.com//brexit-catalonia-eu>

A Conversation With Joseph Sassoon Semah



On Friendship / (Collateral Damage)
The Guardians of the Door | Art
performance by Joseph Semah
(Amsterdam) and György Dragomán |
Millenáris, Building B | Photo by
Oliver Sin

Joseph Sassoon Semah: Before we begin, there is something important I would

like to mention. You see that I have changed my name to Joseph Sassoon Semah.*

Zsuzsanna Szegedy-Maszák: And why is that?

□□JSS: Beginning on the 20th of October, my name will be Joseph Sassoon Semah as a reflection of the third exile project. I was born in Bagdad. As a family, we were displaced to the State of Israel, and now I am a guest in the West. My grandfather was the chief rabbi of the Babylonian Jews who lived in Bagdad. So I thought that instead of explaining my background every time I would just add the family name Sassoon so people will understand.

□□ZsSz-M: You often talk about being in a state of self-imposed exile, or rather as a guest. How does your art reflect this?

□□JSS: I read to the idea of the guest through my mother tongue. For me the guest is not just a friendly person who comes and you let him stay in your home for five days. The guest is someone who stays and works for the good of the whole world. Remember, in Hebrew, we don't have the word exile. To begin with, גלות, or GaLUT, is not Exile, nor is it Diaspora or an existing place; GaLUT is simply a disciplined activity, an intensive vision, and it is what GaLUT does - it transforms each and every temporary מקום, MaKOM or place of shelter, into a perpetual search for a Hand Full of Soil.

□□ZsSz-M: You mentioned that your mother tongue is Hebrew, and in a previous interview you mentioned that visual art is in fact a second language for you.

□□JSS: The Hebrew language is my home. Where can I dwell? In language itself.

□□□□ZsSz-M: The manner in which you approach art seems very textual to me. You speak about reading artworks through the Hebrew language. You regard artworks as 'footnotes'. You recite or read texts aloud during your performances. What is your relationship to literature or to texts? Do you approach visual art from this textual stance? And a follow up question: do you regard music in a similar, textual manner?

□□JSS: The first time I used a musical score in my art was during my inquiry into a very important moment in history: the meeting between Paul Celan and Heidegger in the Black Forest village of Todtnauberg on July 25th 1967. I placed the two images on a Wagner score, so I used it in an intellectual way. Music to me

is textual. I am not an artist of a gallery. I cannot reproduce an image on demand. I call my artworks 'footnotes' to a text, but in fact they are part of the text.

ZsSz-M: You dismiss modernist aestheticism and claim that every form has symbolic meaning. Who can be your audience? Does your audience need to be well informed?

□□JSS: I will tell you a secret now. I made a decision early on, when I was still living in Berlin. I decided that the form I will use as a footnote, the artwork, will always be beautiful. If you don't look properly, you see a beautiful drawing, but if you look closely, it's an aggressive letter I wrote to Albert Dürer exhibited here in the Lena and Roselli Gallery stand. I had a very good friend who always used to say to me: "Look, I don't understand what you're saying, but I find it so beautiful." My public can be someone who reads it or who will read it eventually. The text is always there, but the footnote is aesthetically always charming.

□□□□ZsSz-M: There are some recurring motives in your performances and installations, eggs and candles for instance, and you also have recurring numbers. Can you tell me more about their symbolism?

□□JSS: Yes, for example the 36 eggs refer to the flame and to Duchamp's bicycle wheel. I do have some questions concerning Duchamp's explanation of the idea of readymades; for instance, in one of his last interviews he said when he spins the wheel in his studio he sees a flame. To my astonishment, bicycle wheels to this day always have 36 spokes. A bicycle has two wheels, so together they have 72 spokes which corresponds to the 72 Names of God. The wheel with flames is called the ophanim. Of course one could ask why there are always 36 spokes, who decided this? Maybe the Freemasons? Another example is the shape of the knot in men's ties, which is the same as the inner section of the Star of David. So when I watch the news and I see all these important men I see the Star of David. Our task as guests is to read these forms which are symbolic for a certain group. 36 refers to the 36 secret, righteous persons in the Jewish tradition. But no one knows who they are, they themselves don't know. I correlated this to the wheel and to Duchamp's readymade.

ZsSz-M: How do you view the issue of politics in your works? Does your work become political in the course of its creation, even before it's exhibited?

□□JSS: My work is always political. Most of my work is specific to my so-called home town, to Israel. Yet most of my work I cannot show in Israel. For instance, the work which analyzed the Tefillin (the box worn by observant Jews during weekday morning prayers) and its concealed texts was formed with meat. The meat was a mix of pork and beef, and it offended even secular Jews. Even those who said it was beautiful said they couldn't look at it once I told them. A priori, one should not do it. It was political before it became an artwork. I am less and less fearful. At an earlier time, I was so fearful that my texts were very complex, but now they are less complex.

□□ZsSz-M: Does your condition as a guest allow you to be less fearful, or protect you from being less fearful?

□□JSS: I never thought of it that way. I am not an outsider. At first, they called me the Jewish artist from Amsterdam, but after I complained, they began to refer to me as a Dutch artist. I have been accepted now as a higher guest, although I do not know how they will react after the Stedelijk Museum performances.

ZsSz-M: *The Guardians of the Door reflects on Martin Luther. Were there other historical figures who interested you in a similar manner?*

□□JSS: *The Guardians of the Door* is an artwork the length of which is about 1.8 meters. In the Jewish tradition, God, the divine force, the text is the guardian of the doors. When you enter the house of a faithful Jew, they have a symbolic object, the mezuzah, above the door. I changed it, because now we the artists are the guardians of the Door of the institute. And Margriet Schavemaker of Stedelijk Museum understood this perfectly, and she wrote about the meaning of the Guardians of the Door in our book. Until now, the artist has been the person who waited until someone came to their door and said I like your work. Now there is a new kind of artist, who says "Look, what you're doing is not correct." I guard everything.

□□ZsSz-M: While I was watching the performance yesterday, it seemed very structured, the end tied up with the beginning, there were identifiable acts, the audience was continually engaged, always on its feet. It seemed very theatrical. Do you have a background in theatre?

□□JSS: Linda Bouws, (ref., Metropool Internationale Kunst Projecten/Studio Meritis MaKOM) has a background in theatre. Many friends of mine came from a

background in theatre. Theatre in the good sense, in the sense of the evocation of a text. The performance was not really structured, because in a way everybody was free to improvise, they knew the point of departure and when they were supposed to end. The guy on the bicycle who led the group timed his stay in our environment and his walk around the building, and his return was timed, but otherwise he was free.

ZsSz-M: You and György Dragomán read texts aloud. Dragomán read from his own book *The White King*. What were you reading?

JSS: He was reading the chapter on Africa, a section in which an eleven-year old boy plays chess with a black man, who turns out to be a robot. While they play, he hears his mother screaming for help. I read the poem I wrote when my father died. I was in the corridor of the hospital and I reflected on the death of my father as a metaphor for my separation from my country, from Israel. I was reading to him and he was reading to me. The text was in Hungarian, my text was in my language, and it wasn't important to understand them, the important thing was the emotion. And of course we were playing chess in the meantime. He played chess the way he wrote his novel. Simultaneously, the violinist improvised on Bach, unfortunately there was no microphone next to the sewing machine, so you couldn't hear it well enough. It wasn't easy to sit here in Hungary and read a text in Hebrew and criticize Luther without you knowing, but as a guest I am always protected.

ZsSz-M: From your interaction with the author it seemed that the performance was about trust and friendship. Who suggested inviting Dragomán? Did you know him before the performance?

JSS: György Konrád is a very close friend of ours, but he was unable to participate in this performance yesterday. Then Lena immediately suggested Dragomán to us, and although he didn't know me before he immediately said he would do it. I told him that as part of the performance we would play chess, but not simply chess, but chess which relates to the whole issue of faith and unfaith, to city and guest. He gave me a section from his book, and when I read it I almost cried, he writes so beautifully. I immediately thought it was very similar to a poem I wrote in 1979.

ZsSz-M: So you decided to read your poem from 1979 after his text was selected?

□□JSS: Yes. As a guest, one has to be very open to the sound of one's hosts. In a way, the two texts are very similar. I also speak about the king and the queen on the chess board while I played with father and how he did not want to play anymore when he was dying. This was a memory from my childhood, which I related to a soldier coming back from the war, because I also had to spend time in two wars.

□□ZsSz-M: How come Dragomán didn't have a box on his head?

□□JSS: He wasn't offended, but he did ask me "Where's my box?"

□□ZsSz-M: And the candles?

□□JSS: There are ten candles, and their placement on the box follows the architectural plan of the Temple of King Salomon.

□□ZsSz-M: Do you often collaborate with other people?

□□JSS: I don't like the word collaborate. I invite my friends, I never invite actors, this is not a theatre production. For me it's collateral damage. It's happened before that someone stops speaking, because it's always emotional, because they are not actors.

ZsSz-M: When you read these works of art by Duchamp, Malevich, Beuys or when you make references to Martin Luther and Dürer, you're summoning, reviving tradition. Can contemporary art do that? Should it?

□□JSS: We were just discussing that this morning. This concerns the question of the artist's task. Should it be to enlarge the happiness of the middle class? In the same way, I am not a producer of replicable forms of artworks, that's why I call it footnotes.

ZsSz-M: How long have you worked with Lena?

□□JSS: We met fourteen years ago. She was present at the opening of my exhibition *Ich bin, der ich bin: EHYeH ASheR EHYeH* at the Museum Gerhard Marcks Haus in Bremen. Three months ago, she contacted us, but apparently she had always wanted to collaborate. We love her without even knowing her.

□□ZsSz-M: Thank you very much for taking time out of your day to talk to me.

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Noam Chomsky And Robert Pollin: Breaking Through The Political Barriers To Free Education



Robert Pollin - Photo: UMass
Amherst

In an increasingly unequal country, the stakes are high for debates over student debt and the prospect of free higher education. Driven by neoliberal politics, our current educational system is both a product of and a driver of deep social inequities. In this interview, world-renowned public intellectuals Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin take on the question of who should pay for education — and how a radical reshaping of our educational system could be undertaken in the US.

This is the third part of a wide-ranging interview series with world-renowned public intellectuals Noam Chomsky and Robert Pollin. Read part one [here](#) and part two [here](#).

C.J. Polychroniou: Noam, higher education in the US is a terribly expensive affair,

and hundreds of billions are owed in student loans. First, do you think that a system of free higher education can coexist alongside tuition-charging universities? Secondly, what could and should be done about student debt?



Noam Chomsky ~ Photo:
en.wikipedia.org

Noam Chomsky: The educational system was a highly predictable victim of the neoliberal reaction, guided by the maxim of “private affluence and public squalor.” Funding for public education has sharply declined. Tuition has exploded, leading to a plague of unpayable student debt. As higher education is driven to a business model in accord with neoliberal doctrine, administrative bureaucracy has sharply increased at the expense of faculty and students, developments reviewed well by sociologist Benjamin Ginsburg. Cost-cutting dictated by the revered market principles naturally leads to hyper-exploitation of the more vulnerable, creating a new precariat of graduate students and adjuncts surviving on a bare pittance, replacing tenured faculty. All of this happens to be a good disciplinary technique, for obvious reasons.

For those with eyes open, much of what has happened was anticipated by the early '70s, at the point of transition from regulated capitalism to incipient neoliberalism. At the time, there was mounting elite concern about the dangers posed by the democratizing and civilizing effects of 1960s activism, and particularly the role of young people during “the time of troubles.” The concerns were forcefully expressed at both ends of the political spectrum.

At the right end of the spectrum, the “Powell memorandum” sent by corporate lobbyist (later Supreme Court Justice) Lewis Powell to the Chamber of Commerce called upon the business community to rise up to defend itself against the assault on freedom led by Ralph Nader, Herbert Marcuse and other miscreants who had taken over the universities, the media and the government. The picture was, of course, ludicrous but it did reflect the perceptions of Powell’s audience, desperate about the slight diminution in their overwhelming power. The rhetoric is as interesting as the message, reminiscent of a spoiled three-year-old who has a piece of candy taken away. The memorandum was influential in circles that matter for policy formation.

At the other end of the spectrum, at about the same time, the liberal internationalists of the Trilateral Commission published their lament over “The Crisis of Democracy” that arose in the “terrible” ’60s, when previously apathetic and marginalized parts of the population — the great majority — began to try to enter the political arena to pursue their interests. That posed an intolerable burden on the state. Accordingly, the Trilateral scholars called for more “moderation in democracy,” a return to passivity and obedience. The American rapporteur, Harvard professor Samuel Huntington, reminisced nostalgically about the time when “Truman had been able to govern the country with the cooperation of a relatively small number of Wall Street lawyers and bankers,” so that true democracy flourished.

A particular concern of the Trilateral scholars was the failure of the institutions responsible for “the indoctrination of the young,” including the schools and universities. These had to be brought under control, along with the irresponsible media that were (occasionally) departing from subordination to “proper authority” — a precursor of concerns of the far-right Republican Party today.

The right-liberal spectrum of concerns provided a good indication of what was to come.

The underfunding of public education, from K-12 through colleges and universities, has no plausible economic rationale, and in fact is harmful to the economy because of the losses that ensue. In other countries, rich and poor, education remains substantially free, with educational standards that rank high in global comparisons. Even in the US, higher education was almost free during the economically successful years before the neoliberal reaction — and it was, of

course, a much poorer country then. The GI bill provided free education to huge numbers of people — white men overwhelmingly — who would probably never have gone to college, a great benefit to them personally and to the whole society. Tuition at private colleges was far below today's exorbitant costs.

Student debt is structured to be a burden for life. The indebted cannot declare bankruptcy, unlike Trump. Current student debt is estimated to be over \$1.45 trillion, [more than] \$600 billion more than total credit card debt. Most is unpayable, and should be rescinded. There are ample resources for that simply from waste, including the bloated military and the enormous concentrated private wealth that has accumulated in the financial and general corporate sector under neoliberal policies.

There is no economic reason why free education cannot flourish from schools through colleges and university. The barriers are not economic but rather political decisions, skewed in the predictable direction under conditions of highly unequal wealth and power. Barriers that can be overcome, as often in the past.

Bob, what's your own response to the question I posed above?

Robert Pollin: Student debt in the US has exploded in the past decade. In 2007, total student debt was \$112 billion, equal to 0.8 percent of GDP. As of 2016, total student debt was [more than] \$1 trillion, equal to 5.6 percent of GDP. Thus, as a share of GDP, student debt has risen approximately seven-fold. As of 2012, nearly 70 percent of students left college carrying student loans, and these loans averaged \$26,300.

The rise in student debt reflects a combination of factors. The first is that the private costs of attending college have risen sharply, with public higher education funding having been cut sharply. Average public funding per student was 15 percent lower in 2015 than in 2008, and 20 percent lower than in 1990. The burden of the public funding cuts [has] been worsened by the stagnation of average family incomes. Thus, in 1990, average tuition, fees, room and board amounted to about 18 percent of the median household income. By 2014, this figure had nearly doubled, to 35 percent of median household income.

Despite these sharply rising costs, college enrollments have continued to rise. There are many good reasons for young people to go off to college, open their minds, develop their skills and enjoy themselves. But probably the major

attraction is the fact that income disparities have increased sharply between those who go to college versus those who do not. This pattern corresponds with the stagnation of average wages since the early 1970s that we discussed [previously]. The reality under neoliberalism has been that, if you want to have a decent shot at a good-paying job with a chance for promotions and raises over time, the most important first step is to get a college education. The pressures to go to college would be much less intense if working-class jobs provided good pay and opportunities to advance, as was the pattern prior to the onset of neoliberalism.

Virtually all student debt in the US is now held by the federal government. It would therefore be a relatively simple matter to forgive some, if not all of it. This would enable young people to transition much more easily into creating their own households and families. At the same time, if the government is going to enact a major program of student debt forgiveness, it should be at least equally committed to relieving the heavy mortgage debt burdens still carried by tens of millions of non-affluent households in the aftermath of the 2007-09 financial crash and Great Recession. Similarly, the government should also be at least equally committed to both lowering the costs of college education in the first place, and [supporting] better wages and work opportunities for people who do not attend college.

The [blueprint for a progressive US](#) that the two of you have sketched out requires that a certain course of political action is carried out ... which includes educating the masses in getting from here to there. How is this to be done, especially given not only the peculiarities of American political culture, but also the balkanization of progressive and left forces in the country?

Chomsky: The answer is both easy and hard. Easy to formulate (and familiar), and hard to execute (also familiar). The answer is education, organization [and] activism as appropriate to circumstances. Not easy, but often successful, and there's no reason why it cannot be now. Popular engagement, though scattered, is at quite a high level, as is enthusiasm and concern. There are also important elements of unity, like the Left Forum, novel and promising. And the movements we've [already mentioned](#). Significant efforts are underway, such as those alluded to briefly [before], and there's no reason why they cannot be extended. While the left is famous for constant splits and internal disputes, I don't think that's more so now than in the past. And the general mood, particularly among young people,

seems to me conducive to quite positive changes.

I don't feel that there is anything deep in the political culture that prevents "educating the masses." I'm old enough to recall vividly the high level of culture, general and political, among first-generation working people during the Great Depression. Workers' education was lively and effective, union-based — mostly the vigorous rising labor movement, reviving from the ashes of the 1920s. I've often seen independent and quite impressive initiatives in working-class and poor and deprived communities today. And there's a long earlier history of lively working-class culture, from the early days of the industrial revolution. The most important radical democratic movement in American history, the populist movement (not today's "populism"), was initiated and led by farmers in Texas and the Midwest, who may have had little formal education but understood very well the nature of their plight at the hands of the powerful banking and commercial sectors, and devised effective means to counter it....

I've been fortunate enough to have seen remarkable examples elsewhere. I recall vividly a visit to an extremely poor, almost inaccessible rural village in southern Colombia, in an area under attack from all sides, where I attended a village meeting that was concerned with protecting their resources, including irreplaceable water supplies, from predatory international mining corporations. And in particular, a young man, with very little formal education, who led a thoughtful and very informed discussion of sophisticated development plans that they intended to implement. I've seen the same in poor villages in West Bengal, with a handful of books in the tiny schoolroom, areas liberated from landlord rule by Communist party militancy. The opportunities and, of course, resources are vastly greater in rich societies like ours.

I don't think it is idle romanticism to recognize the potential that can be awakened, or arise independently, in communities that free themselves from indoctrination and passive subordination. The opportunities I think are there, to be grasped and carried forward.

Pollin: I think it is inevitable that leftist forces in the US would be divided, if not balkanized, to some extent. Among the full range of people who are committed to social and economic equality and ecological [justice] — i.e. to some variant of a leftist vision of a decent society — it will always be the case that some will be more focused on egalitarian economic issues, others around the environment and

climate change, others on US imperialism, militarism and foreign policy, others on race and gender equality, and still others on sexual identity.

I certainly do not have the formula for how to most effectively knit all these groups together. But I do think we can learn a lot from the major successes out there. The 2016 Bernie Sanders presidential campaign is a first obvious example. Another is the California Nurses Association/National Nurses United (CNA/NNU) that I mentioned [before]. This is a union, fighting first for the well-being of its members, who are overwhelmingly women, with a high proportion being women of color. At the same time, CNA/NNU has been in the forefront of campaigns for single-payer health care and even the Robin Hood Tax on speculative Wall Street trading.

There are other progressive organizations that have proven track records of success. One is the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE), which has long been active around both living wage and other worker rights issues, as well as community economic development and environmental justice. A more recently formed coalition is NY Renews, which is comprised of 126 organizations in New York State who have come together to advance a serious program in the state to both dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emissions and expand good job opportunities. The Washington State Labor Council — part of the AFL-CIO — has also been committed and innovative in bringing together coalitions of labor and environmental groups.

The US left needs to learn and build from the achievements and ongoing work of these and similar groups. In fact, as Margaret Thatcher used to say, “there is no alternative” — if we are serious about successfully advancing a left alternative to the disasters caused by 40 years of neoliberal hegemony.

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