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Finding Peace in the Tension between Homogeneity and Diversity: Plurality of Economic Systems

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Abstract: The dominant institutional approach to peace is that the nation-state must create peace through unity and homogeneity: one nation, one language, one law, and one national economy. The prospect of diversity implies a chaos that is abhorred, categorized, systematized, and neatly ordered. Yet this process of attempting to create peace through unity suppresses the natural forces of differentiation, and thus creates fertile ground for the escalation of conflicts. Alternatively, the prospect of unending variations seems to create the impossibility of finding any common ground. Peace, in this presentation, is relational, and as this paper assumes that the creation of value also depends on relations and agreements, it seems relevant to focus some light on the role of diversity in understandings of economics, and to question the assumptions of the discourses of economics and development. This discussion intends to suggest that through the acknowledgement of the existence of a plurality of economic systems, the possibility can be created to imagine a peace of dynamic interactions of diversity.

Keywords: Peace, Economics, Postmodernity, Weak Pluralism, Transrational, Plurality, Development

Polemizing Diversity

The purpose of this paper is to reflect on the meaning of diversity for the interpretation of the concept of peace and to present the possibility of different approaches to economy as expressions of plural peaces. Therefore, in reflecting upon the relationship between peace and diversity in the domain of economics, I was invited by the call for submissions to “move away from simple affirmations that ‘diversity is good.’” In an attempt to take this proposition to heart, I decided to be polemical and flip the affirmation on its head. Diversity is horrible for peace, and with special attention to the realm of economics, diversity is bad for business.

If you will indulge this rhetorical gimmick, allow me to make the case by outlining in some broad strokes some of the assumptions of this line of thinking. In the social milieu in which I live (Western Canada and sometimes Central Europe), there is a strong assumption that people need to speak the same language in order to understand each other (and do business) and that we need to *understand* one another in order to be at peace. Secondly, there is an assumption that peace requires standardization — clear rules for everyone — which is the inherent oppression in modernity (Dietrich & Sützl 1997, 292), that, being dissimilar, we still all have to follow the same rules. This can be seen at the national level in the absolute sovereignty of the nation-state and at the supranational level in the proliferation of the myriad agencies of the United Nations. Thirdly, the free-market system assumes that all things can be subsumed to a single standard of value. It is therefore imbued with a divine power to dictate a price on everything from an hour of companionship with an escort to a bunch of bananas. Lastly, it is assumed that peace and justice go hand-in-hand: either justice is a prerequisite for peace or peace is a precondition for justice to be served, however, neither addresses the problematique of disparate justices; justice for me may be having more sunlight in my yard and justice for my neighbour may be keeping her tree alive. How, then, can there be peace when, in the absence of a universal arbiter (e.g. the state), our personal senses of in/justice appear to be intractable? Because of such examples, I am tempted conclude that diversity threatens peace and that homogeneity, the suppression of diversity, is the path to peace. However, laying the rhetorical device to the side, I theorize that the understanding

of peace is not as straightforward and universal as it may first appear. There may still be some room for diversity in peace.

It must be said that the peace to which I refer here is only one kind of peace, or rather one family of *peaces*. Such a notion of peace, *modern peaces* (Dietrich & Sützl 1997; Dietrich 2006; Dietrich 2011; Dietrich 2012), is perhaps the most ubiquitous and subsuming conception of peace in the world today. However, as I intend to argue, it is not the sole interpretation of peace. In short form, the modern peaces are based on the territorial nation-state as envisioned by Hobbes, the separation of mind and body of Descartes (Cartesian reductionism), the calculability of all things as put forth by Newton (Newtonian mechanism), and the capitalist world system (Dietrich & Sützl 1997, 283). The national economy, measured by GDP and calculated in US American dollars, is the expression of the modern peaces in the realm of economics.

With this paper I wish to challenge the assumption of one national economy and propose that using solely a modern understanding of economics is a suppression of diversity. I will do this by showing, through the framework of the theory of the many peaces, that modern economics, the modern way of perceiving the world, is only one of many. My argument is that there are many ways of understanding economics, many ways of understanding peace, and that they are interrelated. I understand both peace and exchange as *relational* processes and therefore the ontological underpinnings of one will inevitably impact the other. Finally, I assume that the ways in which humans interact and exchange is in order to generate the kind of peace in which they believe.

Following economic anthropologist David Graeber, the capitalist world system has created “the single greatest and most monolithic system of measurement ever created, a totalizing system that would subordinate everything—every object, every piece of land, every human capacity or relationship—on the planet to a single standard of value” (2001, xi). Within this structure, every living creature, every product of human labour, and every relationship or potential relationship is assigned a numeric value and can therefore be impersonally exchanged at will. Institutional understandings of peace tend towards creating a homogenous peace and the capitalist world system, with its peace of satisfied material needs, is a salient example. The modern economic system not only stifles diversity in assigning value but also attempts to overcome the dissonance, the cacophony of a multiplicity of voices, by imposing a monotone.

Therefore, the final question to be asked here is what can open the door for a transformation of our current, seemingly intractable, problems in the economic sphere when there are financial crises from Argentina to Iceland, the Occupy Wall Street movement, the *indignados* in Spain, and austerity protests in Greece? Is there something beyond the binary choice of austerity or Keynesian stimulation? If the modern economy is a world system, as Immanuel Wallerstein says (1974), then how do we incorporate the diversity that, according to Niklas Luhmann (2006), an autopoietic system needs? My invitation that follows hence is to try and re-imagine a diversity of ontological assumptions towards economics so that peaces can be found in the tension between a single standard of value and apparent infinite relativism.

Plurality of Ontologies

The theoretical lens that I have chosen to focus new light on the sphere of economics is Wolfgang Dietrich’s theory of the many peaces, which he has elaborated most succinctly in his book *Interpretations of Peace in History and Culture* (2012). In building on Dietrich’s ideas, I propose to look at ontological families of economy by applying the theory of the families of peaces that he has previously developed. The main purpose in looking at economics from the perspective of a theory of families of peaces is to re-cognize (in the dual sense of ‘acknowledging’ and of ‘cognizing again’) diverse ontologies in relation to peace and value.

I affirm that questions about economics and peace are, in essence, ontological questions. What exists? What do I do? What is work? What is valuable? These are all ontological questions

about the basis of economy and their answers will affect how one envisions peace and what steps one may take to live in such a state.

According to Dietrich, peace can be understood in five main categories, families, or cosmovisions; these are the energetic, the moral, the modern, the postmodern, and the transrational families. For the remainder of this paper, I follow Dietrich's theory of the many peaces and I shall present my interpretation of how each family shapes economic practises around its own understanding of peace.

Each family will be introduced in the order listed in the previous paragraph. It shall be pointed out that, for peaces as well as for economy, this is the order that they have historically appeared as dominant discourses. However, I do not intend this to imply an evolutionary trajectory, a vectoral understanding of the course of history, or a hierarchical ranking of one cosmovision over the other. Each one is in itself a complete and coherent *Weltanschauung*, or set of ontological assumptions. In our contemporary world, no single approach has completely supplanted any other. All five exist simultaneously and come to the fore depending on various contextual factors. This will hopefully be made clear through the course of this text.

Energetic Understanding

In the energetic family of peaces, peace is generally understood as an experience of harmony; therefore the economic systems associated with energetic approaches to peace are also based on finding harmony amongst the social members. Any discussion of 'economics' as an academic discipline, as a sphere separate from other aspects of life, implies in itself a modern worldview and therefore using it to apply to energetic perspectives is at best questionable, if not anachronistic and inaccurate. An exception is perhaps in the etymological sense of looking after the household (*oikos* 'house + *nemein* 'manage'). As energetic perspectives apply to some kind of exchange they are characterized by being relational, by an immanent connection with the natural world, and by serving to maintain the harmonic flux of society.

Exchange in energetic perspectives is always relational and often symbolic. Marcel Mauss (1925) coined the term "gift economy" to describe the apparently enigmatic ceremonies in which things were given away, as in the potlatch of the West Coast of Canada, rather than, as was the conventional anthropological assumption of human behaviour, accrued and hoarded. I consider Mauss' gift economies (see also Eisenstein 2011) to be expressions of an energetic understanding, however, I do not use the terms interchangeably. As an example of the symbolic nature of gift economies, George Clutesi of the Tseshaht nation relates that in the traditions of the West Coast of Canada, the potlatch¹, "the most important gift one could give was the bestowal of a song together with its dance and the ornate paraphernalia needed to show any subsequent ceremonial presentations" (Clutesi 1969, 10). Clutesi's recount underlines that the most important is the ineffable; the greatest value is not an axe or a chicken, it is a song, dance, and the permission to enact it. Moving to another example from my cultural experiences in Canada and Central Europe, if I am invited for dinner to a friend's or acquaintance's house, it is often customary to bring a bottle of wine. The wine may carry a remunerative aspect as a contribution towards the common meal, however, the gift of the bottle plays a greater role as a symbol of my respect and gratitude and as a token of reciprocity.

Energetic perspectives believe that the human being is part of the natural, physical world, not over and above it; humans are in an inextricable and symbiotic relationship, an embeddedness, in the physical world which is the source of life itself. Thus, the human body and spirit form part of any interaction. Something of the giver stays with the gift; the product is

¹ Kwawaka'wakw (Kwakiutl) potlatches have been described by Franz Boas (1897), Marcel Mauss (1925), David Graeber (2001), and referenced by Karl Polanyi (1944). George Clutesi describes a Nuu-chah-nulth (Nootka) potlatch. Both traditions undoubtedly share the energetic component that is being highlighted here and it is not my intention to gloss over differences between the two cultural groups.

imbued with the nature of the producer. If I give you an ugly sweater, you might just keep it because I gave it to you (and maybe knit it myself) and you are reminded of me whenever you wear it. Heirlooms are another example of an energetic approach, as they have the ability to collect a history and presumably carry with them part of that history (Graeber 2001, 34). In this way, in energetic perspectives, one can not say that an exchange is just business, since the interaction is not abstracted means but rather carries with it the intentions of the people involved.

Goods or gifts are exchanged with the intention to maintain the dynamic equilibrium of harmony in a society. From the basis of understanding peace out of harmony, exchange could never be with the purpose of seeking the greatest material advantage or about maximizing profit. Even taking into account Adam Smith's (1776, 119) assumption that individual self-interest (and not benevolence) results in a net benefit for society, the form of exchange of maximizing profit in an interaction would simply never make sense to an energetic participant. Equally, the assumption that labour hours dictate value could never be the chief organizing principle under an energetic understanding.

Moral Understanding

Moral approaches to economics can be understood as finding peace out of justice and security. Defining characteristics of the moral approach to economics are relationality, formalized money, and formalized normative systems. The moral paradigm is the first one that resembles what we might think of today as falling under the rubric of economics.

Moral approaches attempt to keep the peace through the imposition of a strict normative framework that guides human behaviour. Peace derives from the justice and security that are thus ensured by adherence to the norms. The norms or laws are of divine origin and are therefore indisputably true. Deviation from the given norms, a deviation from the truth, disturbs the social order therefore creates insecurity and the possibility for injustice, and is thus the expression of un-peace. It is the outsider, some *other*, who does not know (and has not internalized) the rules who is most likely to disturb the peace. Furthermore, the moral normative framework creates a monopoly of the one truth, to the exclusion of all others (Dietrich 2012). Relationships of exchange then become governed by a normative code that must be enforced because it is right, as prescribed in the divine law, in order to preserve security on Earth and justice in the hereafter. For an example from the Judeo-Christian tradition, when the Ten Commandments say to labour six days and then respect the Sabbath, it means no Sunday shopping, which has consequences to the believer for peace on Earth as well as for peace in Heaven.

Returning to the example of the bottle of wine, I will point out a difference between an energetic and a strictly moral approach. Imagine I am invited for dinner to a dry household, one that, for personal, religious or other reasons, does not consume alcohol. My gesture to contribute to the shared meal and festivities, my token of reciprocity, may be met with hostility. Operating under a strictly moral assumption, in my attempt to "chip in," I have disrupted the social order, perhaps offended my hosts, and I have proven that I am not part of the "we" because I did not know the rules beforehand. By contrast, someone operating under the energetic principles could perhaps see through the inappropriate form of the gift (giving wine to a teetotaler) and perceive the spirit of the gesture, which remains the symbol of gratitude, appreciation, contribution, and reciprocity.

In the Abrahamic traditions, time belongs to God (Spruyt 1994, 71), therefore, it cannot be bought or sold, and usury, the lending of money at interest, is therefore forbidden. With Enlightenment critiques levied by John Calvin (16th century), Francis Bacon (17th century), and Adam Smith (1776), this position was later no longer considered rational, which persists into the twenty-first century in that most people who deal with money could probably not imagine a world without interest. It is, in my formulation, the creation of formalized money that characterizes a moral system, moreover, in the argument of mathematician Brian Rotman (1987,

23), it is the construction of money as a *meta-sign*, a sign standing in for a sign, that paves the way for the charging of interest and the modern understanding of economics. When money itself can be bought and sold, says Rotman, is when the possibility of a modern understanding of money arises.

In economic terms, the moral view is highly relational like the energetic perspective, a fact that changes in the modern paradigm. This relationality can be imagined in examples such as medieval European feudal society (or feudal Japan) in which the social bonds, lord and liege, peasant and vassal, dictate precisely who does which business and with whom, rather than the assumption of free, autonomous, rational individuals. Because of the importance of these interpersonal relations, in the time that Adam Smith, the father of modern economics as a field of study, wrote *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), economics was a moral matter, and not a science couched in mathematical formulae.

Modern Economics

Based on the territorial nation-state, the Enlightenment, the rational maximizing impetus of the *Homo economicus*, and a religious belief in a vectoral chronosophy, endless progress that perpetually proceeds from a barbaric past to a civilized future, from the irrational to the rational, modern peaces are, just as the moral peaces, based on security and justice (Dietrich 2012). Moreover, it is a modern and secular interpretation of justice; it is the justice of the free and open market in which everyone is an equal participant and is subject only to the justice of the market, the natural laws of economics (that, according to the modern doctrine, existed *a priori* to any search for them) that have been rationally discovered by economists. Because these laws are scientific fact and mathematically demonstrable, they are, like the goddess Justitia, blind in that they are assumed to be objective and carry no moral judgments.

In the modern paradigm, economics became a science: God was replaced by the absolute of numbers (Smith & Max-Neef 2011). So too falls away the relational aspect that was so important for the energetic and the moral. Hendrik Spruyt (1994, 75) outlines succinctly the shift from the moral to the modern view of economics in his analysis of the dominance of the nation-state:

The business-person depersonalizes ties. Contracts between entrepreneurs are not the same as the contract of lord and liege. The latter is personal. Business contracts are upheld merely for the exchange of commodities, not because they signify some deeper bond. If service is required, it is depersonalized, circumscribed for a particular time and amount. One is buyer or seller, role players in the circulation of goods.

In the modern worldview, it is taught not to take it personally — it is just business. Modernity depersonalizes the transaction, but for the moral and the energetic perspectives, there is a deeper bond that is more important than the circulation of commodities. Pockets of this relational aspect can be seen in the continued support of family businesses, local producers, farmers' markets, businesses of friends, and the like, even when a cheaper alternative is available. It is only through modernity that *reason* (profits) can trump the *sacred*.²

The territorial nation-state becomes the ultimate arbiter of communality. It defines identity (the *we*) and circumscribes it to a physical space with clearly defined boundaries. In the moral paradigm, one may contribute financially to the community (e.g. alms, tithes, zakat) because of a moral imperative, because it is the will (or law) of God, whereas in the modern, it is replaced by acting for the common good, because it is for the good of the nation, for the party, or for the Fatherland (e.g. paying taxes). Furthermore, following Wolfgang Sachs' differentiation (1992, 111), the nation-state is defined by space (coordinates on a Cartesian grid) rather than by place (with a relational meaning to the subject). In contrast to the energetic, there is no immanent

² One may even argue that in modernity, profits *become* sacred.

relationship with nature; the physical world is there to serve man's interest. It should be protected only insofar as it can be further exploited. Human beings are no longer part of the natural world but are rather over and above it, and at best, are reticent stewards of a territory defined by political boundaries carved into Euclidean space.

Thus, peace is the justice of the free market and the nation-state is the unit of competition. This peace, stemming from the justice of the market, reverberates in the rhetoric of US American president Barack Obama (2012) when he pronounces that everybody gets a fair shot and everyone plays by the same rules. It is not substantially different from Marx's (1875) "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need." According to the modern assumptions, everyone has the right to have material justice through the equalizing mechanism of the market, which lends impetus to development; the institutionalized apparatus of national economic development is the means by which the peace of material secular economic justice can be achieved for all. Following this interpretation of justice, when all the poor people in the Third world are developed, sufficiently educated and civilized to be like the rich and good ones, then there will be peace because everything will be equal and fair. Perhaps the best example of the modern economic endeavour to achieve peace through justice has been the ostensible rivalry of Marxism and capitalism. In such an understanding it is no longer necessary to wait for a celestial salvation after death, it is now possible to achieve justice on Earth now, either through the process of a workers' revolution, in the case of the former, or from the increased prosperity and technological progress stemming from the comparative advantage of costs, as David Ricardo argued (1817), in the case of the latter. This dream persists today in the robes of development; for those that are left out of the peace of the benevolent justice of the market, they will be developed until they conform.

The Postmodern Twist

Postmodernity is understood here as a reaction to modernity, a disillusionment and questioning of the truths of modernity, without proposing something new, otherwise the prefix "post-" would be superfluous as the new epoch would be named by some characteristic of the new paradigm and not defined as an inextricable ontological reaction to the preceding (Dietrich & Sützl 1997, 283). The current of postmodernism, in fact, refuses to propose new structures or organizing principles because it is precisely the grand universalism of modernity that postmodern thought is criticizing (e.g Wilber 1995). The most relevant postmodern critique for the purposes of this enquiry into economies and peaces is the disenchantment with the territorial nation-state. Postmodern peaces are networked and systemic fabrics of peaces based on harmony and weak (see Vattimo 1984; Vattimo 1997), unconditional (as compared to absolute) truth.

In the modern paradigm it is the nation-state that is the unit of organization for economic activity. The national economy, measured in GDP, is the mechanism for the increased prosperity of the nation, the homogeneous unification of all the activities of the people in a given prescribed territory. The change in the postmodern approach is that the state is no longer the most important unit of organization; reason and the logic of profit go beyond the logic of the nation-state. Unless patriotism pays a dividend, there is no *reason* to invest in one's patria over some other place where labour is cheaper. As Spruyt (1994, 188) observed, "trade no longer seems to follow the flag."

The postmodern condition, the "incredulity towards metanarratives" (Lyotard 1979, xxiv), critiques the peace of justice and security promised by modernity. Under the premises of recognition of a "postmodernity," recognition of endless diversity, the certainty of common ground is threatened. If everyone has her own unique perspective and I can never be sure if there is any solid moral or ontological ground that we can share, then I can never be sure if we can ever fully *understand* each other. Then, the best that we can do is to *tolerate* each other. For that, the peace of security is needed: clear and strong borders, strong defensive capabilities, and global

governance. In essence, it is the geo-political order envisioned by Thomas Hobbes in his seminal *Leviathan* (1651) and the dream of reason that produces monsters (Goya c. 1799). This description of a peace based on security is therefore a modern response to the postmodern condition.

Postmodern peaces thus differentiate from the modern paradigm and embrace diversity and multiple “truths.” The current of postmodernism presents a “worldview characterized by antihierarchy, social construction of reality, strong equality, multiculturalism and relativistic value systems” (Wilber 2000, 50). A modern worldview assumes that it is possible, although difficult, to civilize everyone, to develop everyone, to a singular and unified ontology based on reason, progress, and global citizenship, whereas a postmodern worldview assumes endless diversity and is uncertain as to whether one can ever really know the subjective experience of the other.

An example of a postmodern economic peace is nongrowth-oriented economy as envisioned by Kenneth Boulding (1966; 1968) and more recently picked up by Tim Jackson (2009). In this case, the vector of growth is wrong: modernity has been going the wrong way on a one-way street. Peace in this sense is not as concerned with the modern narratives (justice and security for all) as it is with well-being, ecological limits, and political subversion. Always argued rationally, postmodern peaces manifested in economics can be seen in the dual forces of globalization and romanticization of the local. Returning once again to the bottle of wine, and this time to my choice of wine, I will outline these two interpretations of postmodern economic peaces. Understood in a postmodern way, I may choose a Chilean wine (even though I live in Canada) because it is inexpensive and disregard any sentimental national allegiance; this reflects a modern response to the postmodern condition. Alternatively I may choose a local wine, not because I like the wine, or because I swore an oath of allegiance to the wine grower, but because I subscribe to the 100-mile diet and this purchase is a political act of protest against industrialized agriculture and modernization.

A Transrational Approach

So what do we do with all this? How do we find any peace in a world in which either everything seems relative or the homogenizing effects of a singular rational peace seem to strangle diversity and expression? Dietrich and Sützl (1997, 290) posit that with an orientative knowledge of the energetic principles, it can be possible, not to reject rationality, but to go beyond rationality, integrating it into a whole that respects the rational mind as much as the spiritual and visceral. Such an approach, that attempts to go *beyond* rationality by integrating body and spirit, is known as a transrational approach.

Dietrich (2011, 345) sums up how the transrational perspective is not about rejecting the tenets of modernity, rather, re-interpreting them with a new orientation.

The transrational twist refers therefore to a mode of business that is not primarily oriented to growth, supply, or justice, yet grows if the context requires it and innovations in supply permit it, as long as they are contextually needed, and requires justice when it refers to systemic balance. I am not in favour of overcoming, eradicating, or forbidding these cornerstones of the National Economy, rather the *Verwindung*, the “twisting” of their own magic that guides our knowledge. (My translation)

I maintain that the moral, modern, and postmodern approaches to economics are easily understood and fit into the assumptions of contemporary society. It is the energetic principle that, for many, has been collectively forgotten and actively suppressed. The challenge of adopting a transrational perspective is reintegrating the energetic elements into a paradigm that has largely dismissed them. This approach of including transdisciplinary elements of nature and systems theory into economics has been pioneered by economists such as Ernst Friedrich Schumacher

(1973) and Kenneth Boulding (1946), the latter being, according to Dietrich (2011, 330), a forerunner of the early environmentalist movement. The energetic principle of the connection with nature plays an increased importance in a transrational approach, which is different than the postmodern offspring of environmentalism, preservation of natural resources so that they may be further exploited in the future, or of ecotourism, in which an area is protected not for its intrinsic value but for the potential it has an economic and commercial endeavour. Rather, a transrational approach is akin to Arne Næss' Deep Ecology, that nature has an intrinsic value that is essential to human beings, or to James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis' renowned Gaïa theory (1979), that the planet is, as an autopoietic system, a living entity. A transrational approach to economics is one that re-incorporates the understanding of energetic conceptions into the world of rationality.

Do I want the objective sphere to subsume all relations? Do I want all relations, from my sexual experiences to my mystical experiences to be for sale? Do I want to buy my way into heaven? From a (post)modern perspective there may be nothing wrong with it. It may make perfect logical sense to pay all formal and informal tasks. It may be reasonable to remunerate unwaged social roles such as being a mother by the same mechanism that determines the price of a box of nails. An exploration of diversity in economic ontologies has led me to the conclusion that the answer to any of those questions may correlate to the family of peaces that I espouse.

Conclusion

Returning to where this inquisitive journey began, diversity may be bad news for moral and modern interpretations of peace based on security and justice, however, as this text intends to show, when peace itself is seen as a plural concept, there is room for a further unfolding of other concepts, economics being just one possibility. This presentation of diverse interpretations of peace and economy does not mean that anything goes, but it does mean that there are choices. If I can recognize that there are diverse ways to exchange, many guiding principles for what peace or a good life means, then I might have the ability to make a conscious choice. If I recognize that value is an agreement, then I might be free to decide, in relation with others, what has meaning for me.

If we are serious about diversity, we need to be serious in questioning universal concepts. Whether it is universal human rights, global citizenship, the nation-state, justice, or, as this paper argues, the "economy," it may be that its claim to peace comes at the expense of excluding other peaces. I believe that by first being aware that there is a plurality of ontologies influencing how people interact, we may be more aware of which assumptions we carry with us when we try to make peace and when we go to the market. Then I may be better able to answer when I ask myself, "what peace do I want?" In recalling Ivan Illich's famous quotation (1992, 17) that "war tends to make cultures alike whereas peace is that condition under which each culture flourishes in its own incomparable way," I reaffirm that it is diversity of peaces that allows for incomparable expressions of life, including our economic underpinnings.

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