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History and philosophy of geography III: Global histories of geography, statues that must fall and a radical and multilingual turn

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### **History and philosophy of geography III: Global histories of geography, statues that must fall and a radical and multilingual turn**

**Abstract.** *Finishing my triennial series of reports on the increasingly vibrant (and still much neglected) field of the history and philosophy of geography (HPG), I first discuss how some trends that I identified are continuing, such as a growing drive toward internationalisation and multilingualism and an increasing engagement with decolonial themes and histories of radical activism inside and outside the academically defined field of geography. I conclude with a call to go further in fostering cosmopolitanism, multilingualism and epistemic inclusion as a way to contribute to decolonise geography starting by its amazing philosophies and histories.*

**Keywords:** Global Histories of Geography; Internationalism; Decoloniality; Radical Histories; Multilingual Turn

During 2021, HPG' vibrancy has been confirmed by both the flow of related international publications and the resumption (mostly in virtual format) of the worldwide multilingual networking and conferencing that is among this field's strengths as discussed in the previous reports (Ferretti 2020 and 2021a). It was the case with the symposia organised by the Commission History of Geography of the International Geographical Union, including the session 'Bridging Differences: East, West, Seas and Mediterranean Worlds', that was organized in collaboration with the IGU Commissions on Gender and Political Geography to bring a critical, feminist and decolonial perspective to the International Geographical Congress.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Commission's website: <https://ugihg.hypotheses.org/>

It was also the case with the international conference ‘Activism and Scholarship’ dedicated to the centenary of anarchist geographer Peter Kropotkin (1842-1921), which paralleled similar initiatives virtually based in Canada, UK and Italy all along the year, being organised by the University of São Paulo (USP), the Association of Brazilian Geographers, the Commission History of Geography, the History and Philosophy of Geography Research Group (HPGRG) of the RGS-IBG and the anarchist library *Terra Livre*.<sup>2</sup> The result was an amazing one-week multilingual conference (mainly in Portuguese, English and Spanish). Its virtual localisation in Brazil allowed for highlighting the increasing proximity between radical and anarchist geographies and decolonial approaches, as demonstrated by several presentations of South American scholars reading Afro-Brazilian, indigenous, peasant and feminist struggles through anarchist lenses, whose papers are available in the YouTube channel of the USP Faculty of Letters (FFLCH).<sup>3</sup>

Another event that has been virtually resumed this year, the one-day conference ‘40 Years of HPGRG: Looking Back and Looking Forward’ has confirmed the growing interest of geography’s historians in matters of inclusion, internationalization and decoloniality. While some of the most appreciated interventions addressed themes that are relatively ‘traditional’ in the field of HPG, such as Tim Cresswell’s keynote speech on the ‘geographies of geographical knowledge’, and Hugh Clout’s account of his extraordinary work at the intersection of biography and geography (Baigent and Novaes 2020), one of the most significant interventions was the speech of Patricia Daley, raising matters on the racial discriminations that existed and still exist in the British university system. This kind of contribution potentially opens new avenues for the history of marginalized people in geography, revealing the abuses that scholars suffered and suffer due to their gender, ‘race’, social and geographical origins or political ideas.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See Conference’s website: <https://kropotkin2021.com/>

<sup>3</sup> See USP/FFLCH’s YouTube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/c/uspfflch1>

<sup>4</sup> See Symposium’s website: <https://hpgrg.org.uk/40-years-of-hpgrg-looking-back-and-looking-forward/>

This is the key point of this report, matching and extending arguments that were developed in recent contributions in the cognate field of historical geography about the need to lend political relevance to this field (Van Sant et al. 2020), with a special emphasis on decolonial debates (Clayton 2021). It is also worth noting that important English-speaking journals express increasing willingness to include different cultural and linguistic areas by launching dedicated rubrics (McFarlane 2021). I argue that the field of HPG is evolving towards international diversity, engagement with decoloniality and radical histories, and that these trends include an increasing deal of contributions from non-Anglophone areas that can no longer be neglected.

### **Globalizing histories of geography, and prosopography**

In the last years, HPG scholars have engaged with geographies of internationalism, providing original contributions to the fields of global histories that are rediscovering transnational archives to understand the contexts of internationalising processes (Baring 2016). Placing special emphasis on pacifist, antiracist and anticolonial internationalisms, Jake Hodder, Mike Heffernan and Stephen Legg discuss international archives arguing for the need of adopting archival methodologies that allow understanding the specificities and plurality of archives produced by international organizations and transnational groups in the twentieth century (Hodder, Heffernan and Legg 2021).

While the globalization of geography's histories is not limited to diplomatic arenas, given the recent attempts of doing global histories of geographical thought in relation with energy as a contribution to current climatic debates (Turnbull 2021), international conferencing remains one of the richest fields for scholarship on internationalism, as further shown by an anthology edited by the authors mentioned above (Legg, Heffernan and Hodder 2021). In this vein, the use of multilingual archives to reconstruct places and contexts of geographers' works remains indispensable to deal with early critical geographies. It is again the case with Josué de Castro, who committed to the global endeavour of the CID (the Paris-based *Centre International pour le Développement*), a worldwide network involving exiled and persecuted scholars in the decades of Cold War and decolonisation (Ferretti 2021b). Castro's works, and critical authors from North-eastern Brazil, remain key inspirations for geographical scholarship dealing with

contributions from non-Anglophone regions of the Global South (Davies 2021a and 2021b; Davies and Ferretti 2021; Ferretti 2021c) as I further detail below.

Rediscovering Southern geographical traditions that challenge the long-lasting domination of the Global North in geographers' biographies, the leading periodical publication in this field, *Geographers Biobibliographical Studies* (GBS), has dedicated this year's volume to geographers who were born or mainly based in South America. In addition to Castro, most of the biographed scholars promoted socially-engaged geographies criticising coloniality and social inequalities, namely Elina Morales (by Marcelo Kezic and Susana Curto), Bernardino de Souza (by André Nunes de Souza), Jaime Cortesão (by Francisco Roque de Oliveira) and Carlos Robert de Moraes (by Carlos Nogueira). I reproduce this way their names' list to emphasize the notion of 'prosopography' as discussed by the collection's editors Elizabeth Baigent and André Reyes Novaes, who hypothesise that presenting some individuals as 'part of a larger whole [can] further enrich our vision simultaneously of the parts and the whole' (Baigent and Novaes 2021). Concurrently used by the editors of the special issue of *Espace Géographique* addressing the attitudes of French geographers towards May 1968 as discussed below (Orain 2020), the idea of prosopography can be used as a conceptual tool to make sense of the common engagement of scholars who were not necessarily associated by personal links.

Yet, the intentions of GBS's authors and contributors go beyond the mere rescuing of Southern figures, and consider the adoption of 'an anti-essentialist approach to southern geographical traditions' (Baigent and Novaes 2021) as a key task for their research agenda. According to Baigent and Novaes, solutions to avoid re-essentialising the 'South' can be tentatively found in applying relational methodologies to the circulation of knowledge between the Norths and the Souths. A key task for that is considering the possible balances between the 'foreign influences and local knowledge that defines southern scholars and their practices' (Baigent and Novaes 2021). For instance, Carlos Robert de Moraes wrote a famous book, in Portuguese, on the history of geographical thought that was heavily indebted with notions coming from the 'North', such as Marxism. Yet, his work can be considered as the courageous attempt of a Brazilian scholar to adopt the 'international' outlook which is still too often considered as a privilege of Anglo-American literatures, while all the remainder is supposed to be merely local

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or regional scholarship. The editors conclude stressing the need of avoiding both the exoticisation of Latin American (and generally Southern) critical geographies as something to be gesturally exposed as long as it is fashionable, and their discarding as an imitation of Northern models. The result should be a full appreciation of how complex and diverse transnational and transcultural circulations of knowledges are.

Among scholarship from ‘outside the core’ that is nourishing English-speaking journals, it is also worth mentioning some recent contributions from China, accounting for the increasing development of historical geographies that target internationalisation as a priority (Ding 2021), and addressing the history of Chinese geography in comparison with Anglo-American concurring trends. Junxi Qian and Han Zhang match the arguments of GBS’s editors in criticising the commonplaces considering as ‘international [only] journals published in English’ (Qian and Zhang 2021, 1), and highlight the importance of political contexts for the production of geographical knowledge. While geography as an academic discipline was imported in their country from the ‘West’ in the first half of the twentieth century, Qian and Zhang note that, after the 1949 Revolution, the adoption of scientific paradigms inspired by the Soviet Union’s academic system became hegemonic, and only physical geography and economic geography were authorised. Conversely, ‘urban geography, social and cultural geography, tourism geography, political geography, etc. were stigmatised as degenerate thoughts of the bourgeoisie’ (Qian and Zhang 2021, 2). Considering that this occurred almost in the same years in which cultural approaches accompanied the rising of radical geographies in the ‘West’, one finds an amazing confirmation of how political uses of geography can change through the mobilisation of similar intellectual tools for very contrasting aims.

After 1979, according to the authors, human geography has been resumed as a field of study, being increasingly open to influences from Anglophone scholarship, although ‘more has been drawn from quantitative paradigms’ (Qian and Zhang 2021, 2) that were never challenged by critical scholarship as it occurred in Europe and in the USA. This is also due to the permanence of a macro-disciplinary classification assigning human geography to the realm of ‘natural sciences’, which suggests that some lingering technocratic mindset still affects Chinese scholarship. Indeed, the authors lament the scarcity of conversations about ‘the postmodern,

post-structural, Marxist, feminist, performative, non-representational, and material turns in Anglophone geography' (Qian and Zhang 2021, 3). The main challenges remain political, given the authors' concern about current 'geopolitical animosity' (Qian and Zhang 2021, 5) between China and Western countries such as the USA, which might hinder transnational and transcultural dialogues. At least, this shows that scholarship still has the ambition to play roles in globally fostering peace and mutual understanding, as Kropotkin already discussed more than one century ago (Kropotkin 1885).

### **Decoloniality and radicality**

In her *Journal of Historical Geography* paper, Lara Choksey describes the pulling down of the statue of eighteenth-century slave trader Edward Colston by a group of *Black Lives Matter* activists in Bristol in June 2020 (Choksey 2020), consistently with the agendas of similar movements such as *Rhodes Must Fall*. While the wider decolonial claims for getting rid of the lasting symbols of colonialism in current societies go beyond the realm of geography, my contention is that these movements target stories that have a lot to do with the history of geography. Critical scholars know very well the 'dark sides' of Geography's pasts, including the complicity of many geographers in supporting slavery and colonialism by elaborating maps, writings and conceptual tools which helped colonialism to construct its justifications such as scientific racism, environmental determinism and Malthusianism. Yet, as critical scholars, we have the responsibility to increase public consciousness on still existing discriminations and lingering Eurocentric approaches to disciplinary histories, to help giving the final blow to all the statues that still have to fall.

Meanwhile, scholars addressing colonial relations and imperial matters in the history of geography continue to produce valuable output through the critical interrogation of archives. Innes Keighren reconstructs the library of William Macintosh, a Scottish colonial entrepreneur whose travel narratives raised heated controversies, in the 1780s, for 'offering a stinging rebuke of the alleged corruption and mismanagement of the East India Company' (Keighren 2021, 197). Eventually, the puzzling matters discussed by Keighren refer to the still unclear reasons for which Macintosh's library was transferred to the French town of Avignon and then seized by French authorities during the Revolution, raising the suspect that Macintosh could have

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been a British spy. However, this case further shows the complex entanglements of geographical knowledges and empire given the highly strategic roles that these knowledges can play for both colonial and military endeavours.

In the same vein, cultural histories and geographies of exploration discuss diverse understandings of tropical exceptionalism related to the effects of climates on human bodies through cases such as alcohol (Armston-Sheret and Walker 2021), and further address the construction of museum collections focusing on colonial and postcolonial circulations of objects (Driver, Nesbitt and Cornish 2021). Imperial uses of geographical notions are addressed by Hungarian scholarship on the invention of the ‘Carpathian Basin’, which served to represent a big Hungarian nation fostering a sort of subaltern imperialism at the time of the Austro-Hungarian empire (Balogh 2021). This theme chimes with Italian contributions on anti-colonial geographer Cesare Battisti (1875-1916), who concurrently worked on the Southern side of the Alpine watershed to claim the last remaining Italian-speaking provinces that were still subject to the Austro-Hungarian Empire before 1919 (Dai Prà and Gabellieri 2021). Importantly, Dai Prà and Gabellieri match recent scholarship that firmly relocates the figure of Battisti in the socialist field, challenging its common nationalistic uses in Italian historiography.

Still critically addressed by historians of cartography (Barber 2020; Lois 2020), the history of exploration and expeditions is also used for current political claims. Canadian scholarship discusses how the legacy of the famous Franklin’s ‘lost expedition’ of 1845-46 has been variously mobilised by Canadian governments, especially the conservative, ‘to form a new Canadian northern identity and to assert Canada’s sovereignty over the Arctic’ (Pawliw, Berthold and Lasserre 2021, 9). While these aims can be quite straightforwardly considered as imperial, it is puzzling to note parallel attempts to use this memorial heritage to ‘unite Anglophones, Francophones and First Nations under the term that they all participated in the war[of 1812]’ (Pawliw, Berthold and Lasserre 2021, 12), trying to (nationalistically) enrol the first victims of imperialism, that is indigenous peoples, through the shared memory of ‘heroic’ imperial expeditions. Again, the diversity of geography’s political uses is apparent in the underplaying of Franklin’s memorialisation under the current liberal government, less interested in Arctic competition than its predecessors, according to the paper’s authors.

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While a growing interest in alternative histories of geography is exposed by recent publications on spatial histories of rebel slaves' communities in the Americas (Zavala Guillen 2021), and we can also salute the first attempts to historicise the field of critical geopolitics 25 years after the launch of that label (Koopman et al. 2021), the current rediscovery of critical and radical geographical traditions is strictly associated with current critiques of geography's colonial pasts as discussed above. This year, it has been especially the case with French geography: Gallic anticolonial geographers who were directly associated with struggles for national liberation in Africa such as Jean Dresch, André Prenant and Jean Suret-Canale have been rediscovered by arguing that their works can be considered as a peculiarly French version of 'Radical Geography' between the 1950s and the 1970s (Ferretti 2021d and 2021e). As for French-speaking scholarship, Dylan Simon's book on geographer Max Sorre confirms the centrality of these figures in France. Simon defines the years from 1944 to 1956 as 'a period of controversies [between] Marxist geography [and] bourgeois geography' (Simon 2021, 221-222). The tensions that existed among the main tenants of the discipline over the tenure of junior scholars showed how Leftist scholars such as Dresch kept academic places at the highest levels.

Even more significantly, a special issue of the leading journal *Espace Géographique* has been dedicated to the participation of geographers in the protests of May 1968. The newness and originality of this interest in critical disciplinary histories in France is shown by the fact that this special issue is based on the recordings of a meeting that took place in 2008, which had strikingly remained in some drawers for more than 12 years. The editor, Olivier Orain, can today observe that *Espace géographique* is 'somehow the heir' (Orain 2020, 1) of the protests of May 1968 even though its founders, 'generally Leftists' (Orain 2020, 3), did not play very central roles in the contestation movement. As the 2008 discussion's organiser Marie-Claire Robic contends, the stake was 'breaking a sort of geographers' silence .... on "geography and May 68"' (Robic et al. 2020, 5) which contrasted with the active reflections that were promoted within other disciplines such as sociology. The rich 'prosopography' of the direct witnesses attending the 2008 discussion accounts for a very diverse level of geographers' commitment to 1968 contestations. While some of them, often as students, were directly involved in the events,

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the outraged reactions of several conservative mandarins led to political ostracism toward certain scholars, which reveals how strong were the political tensions within a scholarly field that someone, in France, still pretends to be ‘neutral’.

Edited again by scholars of the Paris équipe EHGO (*Épistémologie et Histoire de la Géographie*), a collective book on French geographers’ approaches to the Second World War reveals equally a big diversity, reflecting the deep rift that characterised French society during the 1940-44 Nazi occupation. Yet, some of the chapters by Robic and Nicolas Ginsburger shed new light on the contribution of French geographers to antifascism and armed resistance, that could potentially nourish the incipient field of antifascist geographies (Braskén, Copsey and Featherstone 2020). It was the case with the story of Théodore Lefebvre, a Professor of geography at the University of Poitiers who provided one of the ‘rare, but not unique’ (Ginsburger 2021a, 299) examples of a senior academic contributing directly to the Resistance. Lefebvre paid his choice by being deported to Germany and decapitated in 1943 with another dozen of ‘Poitou Martyrs’. In French intellectual histories, the comparison is striking with *Annales* historian Marc Bloch who was equally murdered by the Nazis in 1944, which leads Ginsburger to discuss why a geographer like Lefebvre did not have the same notoriety and public recognition as Bloch. Ginsburger concludes that, in the post-war, the Poitou geographer’s memory did not have powerful advocates such as Lucien Febvre. Yet, it can also be supposed that the political tensions mentioned above in the field of French geography hindered any shared process of memorialisation of radical and politically committed scholars.

The same neglect affected the figure of Jacques Ancel, a Professor in Paris and a pioneer of non-Nazi geopolitics, who was detained in a concentration camp due to his Jewish origins. So much was the lack of information about his fate there, that Ginsburger mentions ironically a series of wrong versions on the circumstances of his death that were released by respected authors. For Ginsburger, while Ancel died more than one year after his liberation, therefore he was not directly a ‘victim’ of Nazi persecution, he has been anyway a ‘fighter’ (Ginsburger 2021b, 329), who even gave human geography classes to the other detained in the camp. The general forgetting of these stories is confirmed by Robic’s chapter on the book *Le grand refus* [The Great Refusal], that was written during the clandestine struggle by Grenoble geographer

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Jules Blache. Although Blache was a successful leader of French Resistance in Nancy and will continue his political and academic activities after the War, his book did not have the same success of similar works such as Bloch's *L'étrange défaite* [The Strange Defeat] (Robic 2021). This confirms the potentialities of investigating the hidden histories of critical, combative and politically engaged geographies, that appear to have been often put aside as too 'prickly' for the establishment of more respectable academic paradigms.

### **Fostering translations and multilingualism**

The current rediscovery of works by geographers from non-Anglophone Global South is accompanied by the spectacular flourishing of their works' translations. It is simply incredible that, in these months, two of the most important books of Milton Santos are being concurrently published in English for the first time. They are *Natureza do Espaço* [The Nature of Space] translated by Brenda Baletti (Santos and Baletti 2021), and *Por uma geografia nova* [For a New Geography] translated and introduced by Archie Davies. In her introduction to *The Nature of Space*, Susanna Hecht notes that, far from imitating his Northern (and especially French) inspirations, Santos carried out an original and 'decolonial ... critique of Third World development' (Hecht 2021, viii), and argues that this book crucially anticipates current interdisciplinary scholarship on socio-natures, hybridity and the study of non-human actants.

A similar innovative inspiration is identified by Davies with *New Geography*, Santos's pioneering attempt to reinterpret the geographical tradition for founding a socially engaged and progressive discipline. Additionally, Davies discusses theoretically and practically the challenges of the translator's work, arguing that translation should never be confused with the positivistic pretention of perfect correspondence. Translation is always a reinvention, in which translators owe a certain degree of transparency to their readers. It is the case with Davies's discussion on Santos' polysemic use of words such as *instância* and *técnica* and related difficulties (Santos and Davies 2021). Scholarship on Santos is still flourishing in Brazilian journals (Antunes 2021), which continue to translate and discuss classics of geographical radicalism including works by anarchist geographer Léon Metchnikoff (Pedrosa 2021) and his mentor Elisée Reclus (Paula 2020), one of Santos's inspirers. It is worth noting that, likewise dealing with transnationalism and translation, new contributions are trying to correct the initial

emphasis on ‘great men’ such as Castro and Santos which characterized the rediscovery of Brazilian critical geographies in English-speaking literature. It is the case with interviews to São Paulo female forerunners of critical and radical geographies (Ferretti 2021f), and with a project by Davies, Christen Smith and Bethânia Gomes to translate the exceptional works of Brazilian Black feminist Beatriz Nascimento (Smith, Davies and Gomes 2021).

The political and epistemic challenges of translation and multilingualism are further discussed in a special and multilingual issue of Brazilian journal *Terra Brasilis*, edited by Guilherme Ribeiro, Laura Péaud and Davies and significantly titled: ‘Politics and geopolitics of translation. Multilingual circulation of knowledge and transitional histories of geography’. Discussing the articulation of two themes that do not necessarily travel together, that is multilingualism and translation, Davies notes that ‘there is some irony in a multilingual dossier on translation’, warning on how, to foster ‘multi-lingual and multi-national histories of geography’ and ‘to produce emancipatory and diverse geographical knowledges, there is nothing *inherently* useful about translation’ (Davies 2021c). Well aware of discussions on postcolonial translation and on the exercise of power that translations imply, the issue’s editors stress the need to first discuss how and what to translate and argue that translation should not be an excuse for scholars to remain in the comfort zone of monolingualism waiting that someone else translates for them what becomes fashionable in other traditions.

They contend that: ‘Multilingual scholars can deploy a more eclectic range of theorizing, not only within the language-disciplines of their national or regional contexts, but also to flows of theory-making that pertain both in the international sphere and, somewhat distinctly, in English speaking countries’ (Davies 2021c). Importantly, challenges are far from being limited to Anglophone domination, as also nationalism, provincialism and local linguistic imperialisms hinder transcultural dialogues and circulations of knowledge. Several contributions account for the difficulties that one finds in going beyond national frameworks such as ‘Brazilian geography’ or ‘French geography’ (Claval 2021; Ribeiro 2021b). In this sense, revealing anecdotes are told by the issue’s editors about the problems existing, potentially everywhere, with small-minded academic chauvinisms. Ribeiro recounts the Brazilian story of a student who was blamed by his university professor because he had dared to read a paper in English,

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which was unbelievably considered as ‘snobbism’ and ostentation of a class privilege (Ribeiro 2021a), while Péaud tells how, still around 2000, a French anthological translation of texts by Anglophone geographers was anathemized by certain tenants of French geography fearing to be culturally colonized by the wretched Anglo-Saxons (Péaud 2021). The editors’ conclusion, that I strongly support, is that translation and multilingualism can be the two sides of the same medal provided that one understands them as tools to build cosmopolitanism and transcultural dialogue.

Finally, reflections on how international conferences impacted the use of adjectives associated with geography since the end of the nineteenth century are developed by Robic (2020), paralleling works by Emily Hayes on the adoption of neologisms and ‘portmanteau’ words to define geographical knowledge (Hayes 2021). Also, very welcome contributions by multilingual historians of geography are being produced on German sources, on the university institutionalization of German geography as part of the process of building national identity between the nineteenth and the twentieth century, including through international relations (Jöns, Heffernan and Bond 2021), and on geographies of Enlightenment. It is the case with new studies on the production of geography books in eighteenth-century Germany that were full part of *Aufklärung*’s cultural contexts (Fisher and Withers 2021).

## Conclusion

Closing this final piece of my triennial series, I note with satisfaction the increasing body of critical scholarship from non-Anglophone Global South that is being translated and brought to the attention of global scholarship. This occurs under the form of both official translations and papers by multilingual scholars working on sources and cases that productively diversify histories and philosophies of geography. Even when related scholarship is not (culturally or literally) translated into English and circulates in the languages of origin, it is great to see how the interest in this relatively marginalised sub-disciplinary field is growing everywhere, being increasingly connected with critical, radical and decolonial approaches. While this field continues to encounter the same challenges as the remainder of the geographical discipline in its efforts of being more inclusive and of decolonising its methods and notions, it is now undeniable that the history of geography can no longer be dismissed as a simple curiosity for

eccentric people. It fully participates to the public endeavour of building politically engaged and socially relevant geographies.

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