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PANDEMIC IN BRAZIL: EFFECTS ON MIGRATION PROCESS

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Abstract. *The rapid increase in the number of victims of COVID-19 brought panic, fears, frustrations and social hatreds were decoded into persecution, strengthen prejudice, discrimination, exclusions and xenophobia which affected the migration process. We conclude that, although immigrants in Brazil have access to public schools, medical services and support for government grants, not all of them can, due to the lack of up-to-date documentation and support from consulate services, most of them were paralyzed during the pandemic. Regarding vaccination there was no problem, immigrants have the same rights as the other citizens of the country, but a large number, still refractory, do not believe in the effects of the vaccine and resort to their traditions, in addition to negationism, like some others Brazilian citizens.*

Keywords: *pandemic, immigration, discrimination, migrant adaptation, Brazil.*

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has widened the gap between privileged minorities and prevailing poverty. When the first deaths appeared, in early 2020, caused by the Coronavirus, the disease was represented in the popular imagination as a disease of the rich. The information pointed out that the first victims of the virus were those who arrived from their trips abroad and infected those who were close.

The underprivileged populations, largely uninformed, did not know what a pandemic meant and its dimension, despite the daily news about deaths, contagion and measures on prevention and vaccine.

A disconcerting ignorance and support from government information that COVID-19 could be another of the known and treatable flu, a “little flu”, according to the authorities, that would not affect the strongest.

Thus, Brazilian society accompanied the burial of strong, obese and mostly poor men and women, who did not have the opportunity to reach hospitals and receive adequate treatment. The fulminant contagion ended the imaginary, as pointed out before, of the *rich man's disease*.

The rapid increase in the number of victims of COVID-19 brought panic and, shortly thereafter, measures of social isolation, using of masks, changes in labor relations, unemployment, fear, loneliness. In addition, media channels changed common sense and theories mixed with hunches, popular culture, largely confronting science itself. Fears were released and the frustrations and social hatreds were decoded into persecution. In this context, prejudice, discrimination, exclusions and xenophobia have gained the sleeping

spaces of a conservative and backward society. Negationists ways of thinking have gained ground in a society with serious educational and cultural failures. The migration process, obviously, was also heavily impacted.

Ignorance and lack of health information have gained ground in a country with an educational and cultural deficit. The denialist practices that strengthen ignorance, associated with the dominant sectors in charge of solving health and life problems, have extended to the less favored layers¹.

Part of the public sector, especially linked to health, together with some businessmen in the field, took advantage of the pandemic context to enrich themselves. In political and social command and with the population isolated in their homes, the violence of corruption left the mark of infamy in a society suffered with around 700,000 deaths.

In private life, social isolation, sudden changes in everyday life and living for a long time in confinement have largely altered domestic and social relationships. Pandemic brought real chaos.

With no official programs to combat the pandemic, largely coercive measures were adopted to stop the spread of contamination that accelerated the introduction of undemocratic practices and the increase in social differences, exclusions².

In this way, Latin American rulers, especially the Brazilian government, reacted and stood against the measures of social isolation, the implementation of confinement that would reduce growth and economic activities, he seeks a different place from other political agents.

In the certainty of the deepening of the economic and financial crisis, the acceleration of unemployment when they realized the impossibility of a resumption of economic growth, these autocratic rulers adopted and continue to impose practices that stimulate social polarization. They intend to get rid of any health responsibility and commitment to society.

During the 20th century, other serious diseases ravaged the world. After producing large losses, they were mitigated and even stagnated with the advancement of science introducing new medicines, treatments and vaccines such as Malaria, Typhus, swine flu and AIDS among other contagious diseases. In the second decade of the 21st century, in 2019, the world woke up frightened by a new virus – the SARS COV 2 producing a disease known as COVID-19.

Infections or pandemic outbreaks are nothing new in the western world, almost always attributed to eastern origins, coming through ports and airports. In the same insidious way, COVID-19 has hit the western world. As death swept thousands of people across Asia, ignorance and disbelief dominated Europe and the rest of the non-Asian world. After all, it was a Chinese plague.

The news arrived quickly and with its myths and legends about the exotic habits of Asians. The cartoons and stories told were unbelievable and the killer villain of the time

¹ Denialism intends to invalidate reality by its simple negation. In Brazil, the President (2021) is the main supporter and intends to impose denialism as a state policy.

² “Our results also showed how there was a lack of coordination between the federal, state and municipal governments,” he emphasizes. The lack of government organization in the face of the first months of the pandemic confused the population [...] It will be very important to know not only the president’s speeches, but also those of other government and social actors.” – Pesquisa Universidade de Cape Town, da África do Sul, em parceria com a Fiocruz, Fundação Getúlio Vargas e a Universidade de São Paulo. Lira, ano 2021.

were bats, although rats and fleas continued to dominate in many societies and were even adored as in the city of Bikaner, India³.

The world was alerted by the death toll in the city of Wuhan. Immediately, the Chinese government adopted containment protocols and alerted the WHO (World Health Organization). Despite the alert, the disease presented unexpected characteristics, it was highly contagious, and due to the characteristics of today's society, it expanded to Europe, the USA and reaching all the countries of the American continent. The contagion started with people arriving from abroad, by the intense movement of airports and commerce. How to believe that it would reach the whole of society.

The virus that annihilated thousands of people in China and which spread rapidly around the world was considered by the WHO (World Health Organization) a Public Health Emergency of international importance. Known as SARS COV-2 it became the terror of humanity in the second decade of the third millennium.

In January 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) gave the highest level of alert about the outbreak of the disease, which two months later, on March 11, 2020, was characterized as a pandemic of COVID-19⁴.

Based on these recommendations, measures were taken such as distancing, washing hands frequently with soap and water, using gel alcohol and wearing masks, avoiding coughing or sneezing drops. If other symptoms appear, they should be monitored, such as a mild cough or fever.

Despite the news about thousands of deaths in Europe and the indication of social isolation adopted by most Asian and European countries, Brazil has not followed the same path.

Following the example of the Central Government politicizing the pandemic, contrary to the determinations of the WHO and the Ministry of Health, the population gave little importance to the outbreak that had been decimating thousands of people, not sparing the elderly, young people and children.

For the popular imagination, for a large number of people, the virus was selective, it especially killed rich people, and the warm environment of the tropics would allow the poor to be spared. The medical information and the research institutions reported on the expansion of the virus and its destructive power daily, trying to enlighten the population, but in vain.

Isolation was followed, as well as quarantine, but those who gloated were infected and infected even those who defended themselves in isolation.

Materials and methods

The methodological procedures adopted refer to cultural history, especially regarding cultural practices and representations. Quantitative and qualitative methods were used as methodological support to carry out the proposed study. The first, to define the inflows of those immigrants and refugees, the second to quantify the nationalities present in the group of refugees. These methods are significant for defining universes and mapping identities.

³ Bikaner City, Rajasthan Region, North India. Mata Karni Temple – Indians worship the goddess Durga. It is estimated that more than 25,000 rats live in the temple and share space and food with humans who also live there.

⁴ WHO Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19 – 11 March 2020 // World Health Organization (WHO) [site]. 11.03.2021. URL: <https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---11-march-2020> (accessed on 12.03.2022).

The numerical survey also served as a basis for analyzing the dialectic between the processes of human displacement.

Regarding the qualitative analyses, discourse analysis methods were applied in relation to certain documents, such as letters, newspaper, and others. The sources were investigated in the Archives of the Immigration Police, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Itamaraty), Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), Public Archives of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, Libraries and Consulates, in addition to consultations with the public archives of those countries. Other documents were researched through the collection of data in records and entry books of immigrants, seeking to map, whenever possible, the presence of refugees and immigrants in the State of Rio de Janeiro. The data collection extends to the Centers for Population Studies (NEP), as well as other sources archived in the municipal archives, in the Public Archives of the State of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. Data collected in newspapers and periodicals are incorporated into the research.

In the field research phase, the oral history techniques indicated by José Carlos Meihy (1996) will be carried out [1; 2]. According to Meihy “[...] *implies a perception of the past as something that continues today and whose historical process is not finished [...] it guarantees social meaning to the lives of deponents and readers, who come to understand the historical sequence and feel part of the context in which they live*”. Ethnographic methodological resources will also be used for the reports/depositions, highlighting the approaches of Carlos Nogueira Fino, from the University of Madeira in “Ethnography as a method: a way of understanding cultures” (2008) [3]. In the preliminary phases of the research, interview and subsequent application of the questionnaire, groups of immigrants/refugees will be selected.

According to Augusto Nivaldo Silva Trivinos (1987), the observation of a phenomenon implies that it is abstracted from its context, so that it can be studied in its different dimensions, such as acts, meanings and relationships. These data will make it possible to obtain “*information on the issues raised, in addition to constituting important sources for the studies*” [4].

Such procedures, according to Rocio Fernandez-Ballesteros (1996), prioritize reports and information, which describe in detail, and therefore, in the most “faithful” way possible, the different facets and modalities that characterize the subjects, groups or situations observed [5].

When prioritizing the reports/information, we considered the interpretation performed by the researcher, who values both the narrator’s subjectivity and the possibility of building a narrative about the story, feasible and practiced by that particular community. What interests us are descriptions, such as the possibility for an individual to represent himself, to represent what he supposes to be his “history” and his “culture”, and to communicate all this to another that he supposes to be “different”, “foreign”.

Thus, according to Augusto Nivaldo Silva Triviños, field notes “consist basically in the written description of all the manifestations (verbals, actions and attitudes) observed by the researcher in the subject, in addition to the physical circumstances that are considered necessary. The field notes should also record the researcher’s ‘reflections’ in the face of the observation of phenomena. They may represent the first spontaneous searches for meanings, the first expressions of explanations” [6].

The interviews carried out with previously selected immigrants/refugees, who perform different social functions in their professional activities and have something in common that brings them together, such as identity and involvement with cultural practices and representations.

Results

Difficulties faced by immigrants

The difficulties encountered by immigrants when they arrive in Brazil to occupy new spaces are multiple and, for the most part, have not yet been resolved, even for those who arrive with a permanent visa. These obstacles multiply for those who enter informally, as they are not recognized and live on the margins.

Due to the precariousness of public policies in the country, recent migrations have taken on a relevant role in political and legal discussions, as pointed out by the Ministry of Justice, which in 2013 created a commission to prepare a draft law on Migration and Promotion of the Rights of Migrants in Brazil (*Lei de Migrações e Promoção dos Direitos dos Migrantes no Brasil*), even if the former was still in force.

Despite the difficulties encountered and administrative obstacles that hinder the process, some work is carried out in order to gain greater knowledge of the problem. Researches were carried out, in this period, by the Ministry of Justice, with immigrants in vulnerable situations, such as refugees and people with humanitarian visas, which pointed out some problems faced by this migratory contingent in search of new spaces to rebuild their lives.

The first and greatest difficulty is language, a barrier, even for Spanish-speaking immigrants. According to data from the Ministry of Justice, the main integration barrier that immigrants face upon arrival in Brazil is not access to employment, housing or work, but the language. For this reason, many Brazilian universities started to offer Portuguese language courses for foreigners.

Another major obstacle is the difficulty in obtaining documentation, starting with the consulates and then the Brazilian bureaucracy. One of the most difficult barriers is access to information and the job market. Daily problems such as integration into the local culture, discrimination, prejudice and xenophobia add to the difficulties in finding housing and social support. Most immigrants in Rio de Janeiro look for communities and distant places on the outskirts to live, due to the absence of bodies that can support them to find minimum conditions for survival.

Newcomers with a permanent visa, and medium education, for the most part, are protected by social networks. Friends and family members residing in the country are in charge of finding housing and employment. The insertion in the community becomes more accessible, like the Angolans, Bolivians and Syrians in *Complexo da Maré*, in Rio de Janeiro, among other communities, extending to *Vilar dos Teles*, *São Gonçalo* and other peripheral areas.

To combat the difficulties that have arisen and accommodate these new arrivals, in addition to the problems of local residents who experience the same situation of abandonment, the National Committee for Refugees (*Conare*), has adopted a series of palliative measures such as accelerating the issuance of Working Cards and official documents. These measures helped to lift most of them out of invisibility. The immigrant with the new Identity is recognized, in addition to the Committee supporting the fight against human trafficking and slave labor.

It should be noted that during the acute phase of the pandemic between 2020 and 2021, these new groups of immigrants were practically abandoned. And even those who received support from the refugee bodies to work on the streets, selling food, like the Syrians and others from Europe. Most were left without customers, due to the isolation policy, empty streets and no one to buy anything. Most asked to deliver the goods at home. These small

street vendors, with carts and authorization to sell, had no structure for delivery. The impoverished and abandoned moved to the communities and periphery, counting on the solidarity of the residents.

This process expanded intercultural relations and the problems became community ones. Faced with this situation of complete absence of governmental support, several NGOs and solidarity groups emerged, trying to solve the problem, but, despite the good intentions, they worsened the precarious situation. Along with these groups, there were also those who exploited the labor of abandoned immigrants.

The NGO Estou Refugiado, led by Luciana Capobianco, points to a 30% increase in requests for information on how to hire refugees⁵. This interest is strange, considering that in this period the country has about 12 to 14 million unemployed, including skilled and unskilled people. The immigrant came to add to this social chaos⁶.

Immigration and pandemic in Brazil

Migratory flows were interrupted by the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic, under pressure imposed by the government in an attempt to stop the spread of the virus.

As sanitary restrictions began to ease, with the decrease in deaths caused by COVID-19 and the advance of vaccination, migratory movements restarted, albeit timidly, especially by land.

This decrease in displacements was registered by the International Traffic System (STI) which announced an unprecedented drop in movements (entries and exits) at the Brazilian borders as of March 2020. According to the STI: “[...] movements in the year 2019 were almost 2.5 million, while in the months of April and May 2020, this number was around 90 thousand, falling still to less than 40 thousand in June and July” [7].

At the borders, between January and August 2020, the drop in the movements of temporary migrants and citizens was accentuated. Also, according to the same report: “[...]the decrease in border movements, although widespread, was not uniform across the Brazilian territory, ... with the states of Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina having much lower falls than the other states, while the state of Roraima, characterized by the entry of Venezuelans, had the biggest fall” [7].

Movements registered in municipalities bordering Uruguay, such as Santana do Livramento (RS), registered an increase of almost 10% of movements, while Pacaraima (RR), on the border with Venezuela, registered a drop of more than 70%. According to OBMigra surveys until “August 2020, Brazil received 75% fewer regularized immigrants between January and August 2020 compared to the same period in 2019” [7].

Socioeconomic aspects

In Rio de Janeiro, South American immigrants were greatly affected by the economic crises produced by the pandemic, increasing the situation of helplessness.

During the outbreaks of COVID-19, infected patients were treated at SUS⁷ when there was a vacancy. Most of the time, only in the emergency room and sent home, due to the lack of hospital beds, already occupied by local patients and many who arrived from other cities.

⁵ Estou Refugiado. Folha informativa – COVID-19 (doença causada pelo novo Coronavírus) [Information sheet – COVID-19 (disease caused by the new Coronavirus)]. 18 May 2020. (In Port.)

⁶ Other institutions that collaborate with immigrant issues are the Mission of Peace (Missão de Paz), coordinated by Father Paolo Parisi, in São Paulo; Fundação Fé e Alegria, which serves Venezuelans in São Paulo; ADUS – Institute for Refugee Reintegration (Instituto de Reintegração de Refugiados), directed by Laura Lopes.

⁷ Public Healthcare System of Brazil.

The foreign language, although understandable, was also a hindrance, as they did not speak Portuguese well, they were not understood by the employees who tried to medicate them and send them to continue the treatment at home.

The lack of jobs and money to buy medicines directly affected them, as popular pharmacies also collapsed. The intense unemployment of the population affected street commercial activities. The streets and squares were empty, and the movement has drastically decreased, due to the policy of isolation and home office work.

Many immigrant families had to abandon their homes in Rio's neighborhoods and suburbs and look for housing in the periphery communities, crowding into the homes of relatives and friends. This change favored greater contagion of the disease.

Desperate, without a job, home and often sick, they tried to return to their countries, but found difficulties at the borders and in the health protection measures that prevented them from leaving.

The pandemic has disrupted much of society. Many stores closed, went bankrupt and the delivery business increased. Several communities of immigrants who tried to build their lives in new spaces faced prejudice, discrimination and even xenophobia, as they were considered outsiders, invaders of spaces already occupied, although a large number of them had already been in the country for several years or decades. The most recent migratory waves were the most affected.

The difficulties were still great and the majority of them are left unattended. The situation in the State of Rio de Janeiro, as well as in the country, did not offer alternatives for progress. The greatest support came from cultural societies that are pledging to help those most in need.

Although immigrants have access to public schools, medical services and support for government grants, not all of them can, due to the lack of up-to-date documentation and support from consulate services, most of them were paralyzed.

The conquest of new spaces to build new ways of life has been transformed with a struggle for survival, competition in the search for jobs and dignity and haunted by the fear of contagion by Coronavirus.

Regarding vaccination there was no problem, immigrants have same rights of the other citizens. Served like any other citizen, but a large number, still refractory, do not believe in the effects of the vaccine and resort to their traditions, in addition to negationism.

Many immigrants usually come from rural areas and follow their "Hatiris" and their traditions. They use teas, homemade medication and shamanic practices, in addition to healerism.

According to Patrícia Nabuco Martuscelli (2021) the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the daily lives of refugees living in Brazil. He stressed that the main problems were "due to the closing of borders, access to documentation and health and emergency assistance" [8].

Discussion

We conclude that the changes introduced by official misinformation and the cultural deconstruction caused by the pandemonium of authoritarianism and negativism confirm the difficulties encountered in the crises that threaten democratic systems. Thus, given the

current socioeconomic context, it becomes complex to offer new paradigms for analyzing the social construction of the so called *new normal*⁸.

One of the cruel and humiliating aspects that the pandemic revealed to humanity, which existed underground and was silenced, was the aparophobia, hostility and hatred of the poor⁹.

Unemployment, hunger and helplessness led a greater number of people to look for the streets to live. This increase in the homeless population favored the emergence of ambiguous feelings. While part of society organized and organizes itself in solidarity efforts, taking clothes, medicine and food, most are hostile to the poor, and in cases they even eliminate, burning homeless people and Indians. They count on the silent complicity of a conservative society.

According to Simões (2021), “hatred of the poor is an evolution of prejudice and discrimination”. The poor lived on the fringes of society, on the fringes, later they were treated as excluded, reminded the author¹⁰.

Father Júlio Lancellotti, from the Pastoral do Povo de São Paulo, supports this position. The priest brought this issue up for discussion, helping to spread the word “aparophobia”. In some Brazilian cities, aparophobia even placed barriers on the freight of banks and commercial houses to prevent the poor from protecting themselves under the marquees. In Londrina, the City Council passed an anti-vacancy law (lei antivadiagem) to ban mattresses and tents in public places and buildings¹¹.

The participation of the Ministry of Health in the programs to combat `COVID-19 proved to be paltry. The delay of a year to adopt the vaccination policy that would minimize the number of deaths, the nation finds itself dominated by unscrupulous groups of government sectors linked to the Ministry of Health and businessmen in the field. States organized Machiavellian corruption plans to enrich themselves with the purchase of vaccines. While these groups organized themselves to enrich themselves at the expense of evil, the pandemic expanded and reached the entire population.

Without vaccines, hospitals, oxygen, intubation, medication and staff, those infected with the virus died in large numbers. Burials were held 24 hours a day. Most were thrown into a mass grave. Others remained in refrigerated cars waiting for the burial place.

Nothing touched the denialist government. Not a word of comfort, not a gesture. On the contrary, President took to the streets, beaches, raced motorcycles and the evil spread. More dead and alienation took over a large number of people who followed the same ritual.

⁸ Schirato M. A. R. Novo normal: entenda melhor esse conceito e seu impacto em nossas vidas [New normal: better understand this concept and its impact on our lives] // Insuper. Brazilian non-profit institution of higher education and research [site]. 07.05.2020. URL: <https://www.insper.edu.br/noticias/novo-normal-conceito/> (accessed on 12.03.2022). (In Port.)

⁹ In 2017, the word Aparophobia (aparofobia) was used by the Spanish philosopher Adela Cortina, from the Fundación del Español Urgente [9] and included in the Dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy. It means phobia, dread and hatred of the poor.

¹⁰ Carvalho C. Aporofobia: depois do preconceito, o ódio aos pobres toma as ruas; entenda [Aporophobia: after prejudice, hatred for the poor takes to the streets; understand] // O GLOBO. Brazilian newspaper. 12.12.2021. URL: <https://oglobo.globo.com/brasil/aporofobia-depois-do-preconceito-odio-aos-pobres-toma-as-ruas-entenda-25315545> (accessed on 12.03.2022). (In Port.)

¹¹ Carvalho C. Padre Júlio Lancellotti: ‘há uma epidemia de hostilidade a pobres’ [Father Júlio Lancellotti: ‘there is an epidemic of hostility towards the poor’] // O GLOBO. Brazilian newspaper. 12.12.2021. URL: <https://oglobo.globo.com/brasil/padre-julio-lancellotti-ha-uma-epidemia-de-hostilidade-pobres-25315964> (accessed on 12.03.2022). (In Port.)

Denier politicians died, even so, nothing changed the social behavior of those who believed in “herd immunity”.

While insanity dominated the political and economic sectors, scientific centers worked hard and vaccines began to be applied. Currently, most of the population has been vaccinated and the death toll has dropped considerably. Science won and Denialism is fading, ashamed, nullified in the face of the success of science.

The changes caused by the COVID-19 Pandemic, in addition to altering daily life worldwide, pointed to new perspectives for survival with *the new normal*¹².

But, what does this new normal built with irreparable losses, social and moral damages mean. A new life needs to be understood from the new reality that is being presented. It takes time to penetrate the ambiguity of the new normal.

New ways of seeing the world can help. New *cosmovisions* and clashes of imaginaries will collaborate for a better understanding of the new structure that is being designed, from the current situations weakened by endogenous and exogenous losses and suppressions.

The pandemic did not bring news. Everything was foreseen. Deaths, sadness and loneliness. However, the pandemic revealed what was underground, political debauchery, repressed hatreds, exclusions and, above all, inhumanity [10; 11].

Humanity is still under the pandemic. The Omicron and other variants are coming. The new normal awaits us. And the new normal is the great unknown that accompanies us on this journey of humanity. What seems certain is that social inequalities were extremely deep in the process – which brings up a huge set of new challenges.

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¹² “Standard that assures the people who are contained in it a certain protection, security, continuity, and, therefore, survival” (see: Schirato M. A. R. Novo normal: entenda melhor esse conceito e seu impacto em nossas vidas).

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ВЛИЯНИЕ ПАНДЕМИИ COVID-19 НА МИГРАЦИОННЫЕ ПРОЦЕССЫ В БРАЗИЛИИ

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Аннотация. Стремительный рост числа жертв COVID-19 породил панику, страхи, разочарование и социальную ненависть, которые привели к травле, усилению предрассудков, дискриминации, изоляции и ксенофобии, что повлияло на миграционные процессы. В ходе проведенного исследования мы пришли к выводу, что, хотя иммигранты в Бразилии и имеют доступ к бесплатному образованию, медицинскому обслуживанию и государственным субсидиям, но не все из них могут воспользоваться ими из-за отсутствия необходимых документов и поддержки со стороны консульских служб, поэтому во время пандемии большинство мигрантов были ограничены в своих возможностях. С вакцинацией проблем не возникало, поскольку иммигранты имеют на нее те же права, что и другие граждане страны, однако большая часть иностранных граждан по-прежнему не поддерживает вакцинацию, не верит в ее эффективность и вместо этого прибегает к народной медицине. При этом многие граждане Бразилии до сих пор продолжают отрицать опасность коронавирусной инфекции.

Ключевые слова: пандемия, иммиграция, дискриминация, адаптация мигрантов, Бразилия.

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