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Migration Problems at the Regional Security Level: Reasons for Georgian Migration Abroad

Abstract: Migration has become one of the most current themes in the reality of Georgian society since the destruction of the Soviet Union. However, this process dates back to the twentieth century in the history of Georgian migration. Wars, chaos and turmoil, geopolitical location, and social and political conflicts constantly triggered the population to migrate either within the country or abroad. The most recent history of Georgian migration can be divided into several waves or phases: 1. Before the 1950s (Soviet Union regime), when the population was forced to leave their living place by brutal political repressions; 2. In the period of the 1950s to the 1990s, when Georgians migrated within the territory of the Soviet Union Republic; 3. The mass migration of the 1990s, which was caused by social crisis, economic hardship, political turmoil, military conflicts (including inter-ethnic conflicts in Abkhazia (1992–1993) and South Ossetia (1988–1992) and the civil war of 1993, against the democratically elected Georgian president Zviad Gamsakhurdia; 4. The later migration outflow from Georgia was mainly recorded in 2000, when a huge wave of migrants went to Russia but, as the visa regime had been restricted, Georgian citizens had to choose another destination. This time migrants headed to European countries and the USA. It has to be mentioned that since 2002, the emigration process has become more and more diverse as the motivation of migrants varied as well as the places of destination. Unfortunately, the data that reflects the precise picture of migration in Georgia does not exist. Even the official data cannot be acknowledged as accurate information about the migrants or migration because of the absence of a precise mechanism that collects reliable statistical information. It depicts data based on various sources and methodologies that should be taken into consideration when highlighting the number of migrants.

Keywords: Migrants, migration, remittance, gender models, transnational mothers, stigma.

Introduction

Currently, in a time of globalization and interdependence, some problems conceived some time ago as less plausible from an international security perspective are seen as more drastic and rigid. Among them could be named the factor of migration. It is a complex phenomenon as it is. It is mainly accumulated by different factors, such as socio-economic reasons, political turmoil, private reasons, etc. Massive labor migration in Georgia began in the 1990s. In 1991 Georgia became an independent country, which was followed by political turmoil, two armed, and the intra-border conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia proved devastating to the struggling Georgian economy, which had collapsed with the breakdown of the Soviet Union. A large part of the population of what had been one of the USSR's richest and most prosperous republics found themselves jobless and impoverished. Employment guarantees prosperity – salaries, especially in the public sector, were low. The private sector, where wages were higher, could not provide a sufficient number of jobs to satisfy the demand for employment. It is thus hardly surprising that a significant part of the Georgian population resorted to emigration in order to survive economic hardship. In the years 1990–2000, Georgia was abandoned by 800,000 to 1,000,000 citizens. The major point in Georgians' decision to emigrate was the regression of economic aspects, unemployment, and political instability in the country (in the period when Georgia became independent).

1. How is the Migration Process Organized?

There are some specific methods how migration is organized:

- The departure of migrants occurs with the assistance of relatives or friends (private invitations).
- It might also be organized by travel agencies or student exchange programs.
- Labor migration is often arranged by state employment services and invitations of specific employment (from the factors mentioned above, private contacts and student exchange programs occur the most often).

Hence, so-called “random” migrants are people who live and work illegally.

2. Gender Models in Georgian Migration

During the first years of Georgian independence, labor migration from Georgia consisted predominantly of males and was directed toward Russia. Georgian migrant laborers were occupied mostly in construction and petty trade. The problems that were intensively emerging in Russia for Georgians made migrants think about identifying different destinations, in order to gain higher income. These new destinations

were Europe and the USA. Here Georgians had to meet new challenges, had new opportunities and the possibility to start a new life. With the dramatic increase of migrant women in this process who were trying to shape their destiny, there were several sharp features outlined in Georgian reality. As an old, traditional country, Georgia does not recognize migration as a suitable way to survive for Georgian women. The main function for them is thought to be caring mothers, devoted wives and housekeepers. Second, “gender as well as social equality for ancient and medieval societies is not a relevant issue. However different cultures have different traditions in this regard. According to the oral and written sources one can trace tendencies of liberalization to some extent in Georgia for different times. Georgia is a country with a women’s cult and the elevated role of a woman in the society. It is emphasized by different expressions in the Georgian language: mother pillar, motherland, mother tongue, and mother-father¹. As a woman was believed to be a caring mother, it was necessary for her to be educated. Throughout the middle ages Georgian women got educated in European educational institutions; the first institutions of higher education for women in the Caucasus – “Women’s higher courses” – were opened in the capital Tbilisi in the early 20th century. After the establishment of Soviet power, women got the right to elect and to be elected. There was no difference in the salaries of men and women. Women can easily adopt men’s professions². Another good precondition for the total elimination of illiteracy was giving the right to girls and women to be enrolled in schools and higher institutions. As a result, there were a lot of successful women in different fields: education (successful teachers, managers), medicine (doctors, nurses), culture and art (painters, artists, actresses, etc.), the food industry. In reality, women somehow still occupy the leading position in a family workplace.

In spite of the fact that migration is challenging, as it is influenced by gender, even now, in our reality some people still have negative attitudes to women’s migration, because they blame mothers for leaving their children without care. More importantly, female migrants present a greater threat to traditional ideals of family and gender relations in comparison to male migration. Male migrants maintain their traditional breadwinner roles, while female migrants cannot easily maintain their roles as mothers and housekeepers from abroad. Migrant mothers are portrayed as selfish, abandoning their children. Male migrants are viewed as altruistic, sacrificing themselves for the good of their families

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- 1 I. Badurashvili, *Illegal Migrants from Georgia: Labor Market Experiences and Remittance Behavior*. Georgian Centre of Population Research (March 24, 2012), <http://www.carim-east.eu/media/CARIM-East-2012-RR-39.pdf> (accessed 12.09.2020).
 - 2 N. Javakhishvili, N. Butshashvili, *Domestic Violence in Georgia: State and Community Responses, 2006–2015* (in:) M. Barkaia, A. Waterson (ed.), *Gender in Georgia: Feminist Perspectives on Culture, Nation and History in the South Caucasus*, New York 2018.

Young, unmarried female migrants are viewed especially negatively. By living abroad, they are not subject to traditional sources of family and community control, placing them at risk of dishonorable behavior. In the many instances where women migrate in spite of the challenge it presents to local gender norms, little is known about how women adapt to such norms³. Substantial demand for female immigrant workers in many industrialized countries pulls women to labor markets abroad. High rates of female labor-force participation in many industrial societies create demand for workers in traditionally female jobs such as companions for the elderly, housekeepers, and nannies. Pay in these sectors tends to be low, but as housing is often provided within the terms of employment, female immigrants may find migration cheaper and easier than men do. Additionally, women may find it easier than men to migrate without legal documents. Often working in private homes, female undocumented migrants are not always in the public eye, and therefore have some protection from deportation.

To sum up everything mentioned above, it should be underlined that due to the gradual changes in gender models, Georgian migration history has also been changed. If it has been inappropriate for women to migrate, now in the 21st century it seems to be a progression from a gender perspective, and as women's emancipation. While the feminization of migration is considered to be a progressive sign in the West, as it is associated with gender equality, it is neither socially nor culturally acceptable for Georgians. Some people believe that women's migration impacts on the demographic potential and decreases labor capacity. Today, women compete in sports, and succeed at all levels in the workplace: they occupy high positions in governmental institutions, are MPs, etc. The ground has been changed and stereotypes have been destroyed. Perceptions about men and women are impacted by societal expectations. These expectations are reflected in a set of opinions about males and females. According to some critics, people expect gender-related characteristics, such as roles, traits, physical appearance, etc. to shape an orderly pack. The gender belief system influences an understanding of women's nontraditional roles⁴. The studies of Paul Rosenhrants and Inge Broverman studied characteristic features of woman and men, and identified "competences associated with men, that include characteristics such as confident, independent, controlling and warmth expressiveness cluster, typically associated with woman, that includes traits such as warm, kind and concerned for others welfare"⁵. In spite of the fact that in the modern world Georgian women could

3 J.R.B. Palmer, S.W. Yale-Loehr and E. Cronin, *Why Are So Many People Challenging Board of Immigration Appeals Decisions in Federal Court? An Empirical Analysis of the Recent Surge in Petitions for Review*. Cornell University Law School 2005, <https://scholarship.law.cornell.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1860&context=facpub> (accessed 15.04.2020).

4 T. Shioshvili, *American Ethnicity*, Tbilisi 2016, pp. 115–120.

5 I.K. Broverman, S. Raymond Vogel, D.M. Broverman, F.E. Clarkson and P.S. Rosenkrantz, *Sex-role stereotypes: A Current Appraisal*, "Journal of Social Issues" 1972, vol. 28, pp. 59–78.

resist so many difficulties, and express readiness and flexibility to defeat challenges, Georgians still preserve the tradition of considering maternity the primary role for Georgian women. They believe that women's migration impacts on the demographic potential and decreases labor capacity, besides taking into consideration the fact that Georgian families are considered to be traditionally more patriarchal than matriarchal, so it is not hard to understand why the social stigma is still attached in their minds. They know that up to now some negative comments made by their relatives, neighbors, even family members will overlap in their minds.

3. The Vital Role of Georgian Migrant Women in Georgia's Budget

But the reality is completely different, as their contribution to their family well-being (even now) is vital. Employment in the United States significantly increases and improves the economic condition of many Georgian families, the remittance became the only way of income. The average income of migrants is 750–800 USD a week. The major percentage of the income of the immigrants is sent to Georgia. These remittances play a crucial role in covering the external budgetary deficit as well as the basic needs of the population. According to Georgian researchers, the majority of Georgian immigrants in the USA are women between 20 and 50; most of them are skilled professionals, knowing foreign languages. However, some are employed as domestic servants, or nurses for the sick and old people. Crossing the border of the USA, they have to make decisions, take action, plan their life, and realize their labor roles in the family independently. Speaking about the feminization of transnational migration, we have to take into consideration that it has been prompted by rising global demand for labor in specific female-type domestic jobs. According to the statistics, more than 80% of immigrants support their families with remittances, and 4% send clothes or various domestic appliances. Money is sent by means of bank transfer; on average migrants sent 21% of their income. It is important to mention that Georgian migrant women suffer from 'quilt complex', being parted from their family and children. According to the studies of the United Nations Development Program, leaving their families and starting a new life abroad, for a woman, is a novelty for such a traditional society as Georgia. The women have the new role: a bread-earner or breadwinner, which is controversial to the traditional role of women as mothers. Female migrants from Georgia become "transnational mothers," taking care of other people's children and leaving their own children in the care of husbands and/or other members of their families, such as grandparents. The division of labor in Georgian households is undergoing major changes as female emigrants have become families' primary breadwinners. International labor migration has become a key feature of the social, economic, and political development of Georgia. Migration has dramatic consequences for the demographic structure of some

Georgian regions, and remittances sent through official channels are still beneficial for many Georgian families. If the migration policy is created correctly, migration will have positive impacts on further development of the country's solid economic and political system. It will also help social problems to be solved and the budget deficit to be covered. In order to gain benefits from migration and turn the process to the positive side, it is important for Georgian policy makers to focus on the needs of people who migrate. It is essential to estimate their personal data, their destination, and reasons for migration.

4. Migration Data

I planned to focus on qualitative and quantitative data collection during my dissertation writing process and I intended to use my questionnaires and interviews in order to find out:

- *the real reasons for the migration of Georgian women to the US*
- *how the migrant women could defeat the challenges in the foreign country*
- *whether economic factors influence their decision to leave their homes*
- *if Georgian women migrants suffer from being neglected by their families (just demanding money from them)*
- *if the fear of social stigma still exists among migrant women*

I have interviewed Georgian women migrants and also tried to recruit their family members in the process. I wanted to find out the reasons for their migration, the obstacles they had to defeat, if they had ever been neglected by their families, etc.

I was able to conduct a total of 36 interviews – 5 Skype interviews and 31 online. I interviewed 20 women who used to live in Tbilisi and 13 from different regions of Georgia. All of them live in the different states of the US. Respondents ranged in age from 35 to 67 and were fairly well educated; 21 graduated from different Georgian universities and gained diplomas in different fields (or got an MA degree), 9 had post-secondary professional education, the others had a high school education.

What was most important for me is that I still found evidence of social stigma surrounding them, as a majority of them are guilt-ridden. They still suffer from stigma, cannot resist criticism from their husbands and family members, and are ashamed of their decision, which is considered to be wrong and inappropriate for Georgian women. Most respondents described migration as a decision they had to make because of different reasons, unwillingly. As they complain, migration is particularly harmful for mothers who had to abandon their children and cannot have them around. Some of them had regrets about their old parents who died in grief and sorrow without seeing their beloved daughters; most of their husbands have new wives, leaving children with ex-wives' parents or relatives. But many respondents said that people in general pitied migrant women, rather than condemning them, because

migration is not seen as a voluntary act. Most of them confessed that they nearly did not have to suffer from culture shock as they had lived in trouble, had a string of problems (mainly financial), and America seemed to be a “paradise” for them. The only thing they wish for is reunion with their families.

This is the detailed information about the result of the survey: there were 9 questions in the questionnaire. All of them dealt with migrants, the migration process, and reasons for migration. The first question was about the reasons for migration. 50% of migrants presented unemployment as the main reason, 42% of Georgian women migrate because of the political situation, while 8% shared the following reason: family conditions and to study abroad. The next question inquired about their adaptability to the American lifestyle, how easily they could adjust to completely new ways of living. Out of 36 women, 20 found it easy to adapt, 10 found it difficult to live in a foreign country without family. 5 women answered that it is still very difficult for them to adopt a new lifestyle. The third question was: “Do you think that the remittances Georgian women labor migrants send to their families in Georgia are still crucial for them?” 92% of migrants considered the financial support of their families as the major responsibility and the main reason for their migration to the US. Question 4 intended to find out if migrants had suffered from culture shock. 20 migrants think that they had, while 13 of them did not agree and claimed that in comparison to the shock they used to have in Georgia because of financial and social problems, the US seemed to be paradise. Only 5 migrants had to defeat the problem of culture shock. The fifth question was asked to the migrants in order to gain information about the factors that played a crucial role in the process of defeating culture shock. 56% could realize the reasons for her migration and their roles in the family, 22% percent believed that if there were no other Georgian migrants, they would not survive (they used literally this word – to survive) and the rest of the migrants thought that it was helpful for them when they could get in touch with their family members via mobile connection. On question 6, whether they are still “bread winners,” 80% of migrant women answered that they still are, 15% disagreed and claimed the opposite. Setting the seventh question, I wanted to know what they missed most of all. As I found out, 58% of migrants missed their family members, 28% missed their mother country, while 8% dreamed about family atmosphere, Georgian cuisine and family dinners. The following question represented Georgian society’s attitude towards Georgian migrant women. I wanted to find out if they are still being criticized for leaving family and children without care. Unfortunately, 69% of migrants are still surrounded with stigma and feel guilty about their decision. Finally, I wanted to know when they plan their final return to Georgia. As they explained, they cannot return as the socio-economic problems have not improved and still exist in their mother country. They doubt they will get employed in Georgia.

Conclusions

International labor migration has become a key feature of the social, economic, and political development of Georgia. Migration has dramatic consequences for the demographic structure of some Georgian regions and the remittances sent through official channels are still beneficial for many Georgian families. Migration plays and will continue to play a central role in Georgia's political, economic, and social development

Moreover, migration has become the main challenge in national policy making. Many countries consider it as a national security and foreign policy priority. For migrant-receiving countries, understanding what types of people most commonly migrate is crucial for developing effective immigration policy. For migrant-sending countries, knowing who migrates is important to predict the ways in which migration will shape the country's political and economic future.

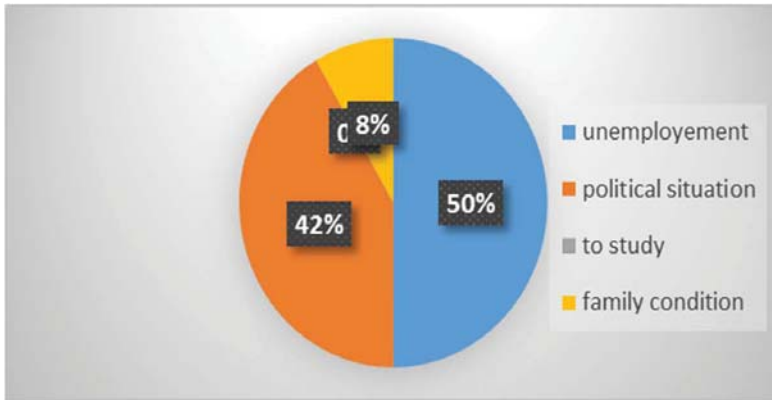
Appendix 1. Questionnaire on Georgian Migrant Women's Social and Economic Conditions – Circle the acceptable answer

Questions	Possible answers
1. What was the main reason for your migration?	Poor economic system of Georgia and unemployment
	Political situation
	To study
	Family conditions
	Other reasons
2. How easily could you adapt the ways of the American lifestyle?	Very easily
	It was difficult for me
	I haven't yet adapted
3. Do you think that the remittances Georgian women labor migrants send to their families in Georgia are still crucial for them?	Yes
	No
	I don't think so
4. Did you suffer from culture shock? (a stressful situation which may occur when one changes working place, living place, different cuisine, traditions, etc)	Yes
	No
5. In case you had (or still have) culture shock, what factors helped (helps) you to defeat it?	Socializing with Georgian migrants
	Using Skype calls
	Realizing my role in my family
	Other factors

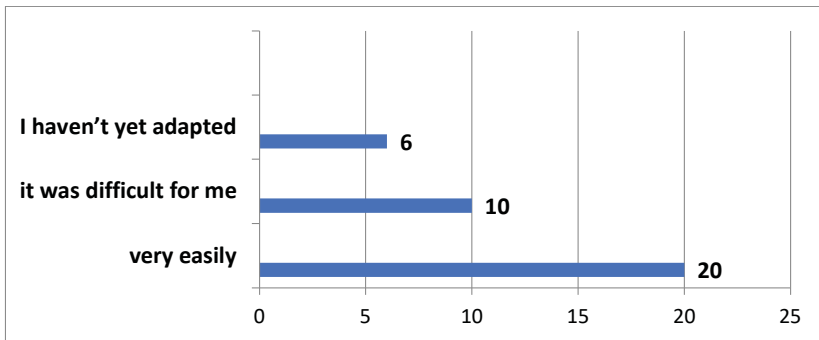
6. Do you share the opinion about the new role of Georgian women as "bread winner?"	Yes
	No
	I don't think so
7. Write one thing you miss most of all about Georgia.	
8. Have you experienced criticism and stigmatization?	Yes
	No
9. Are you planning your return to Georgia?	

Appendix 2. Analysis of the Online Interview Questions

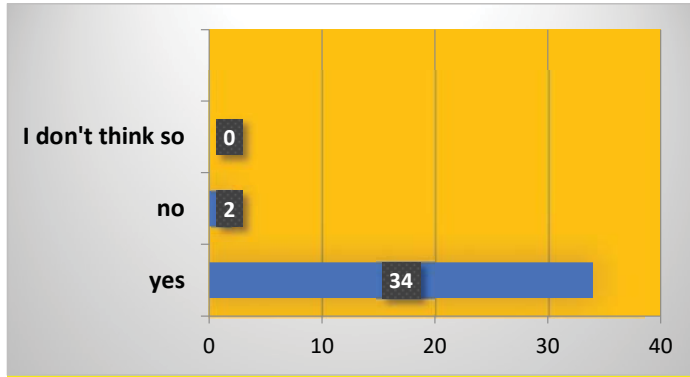
Question 1: What was the main reason for your migration?



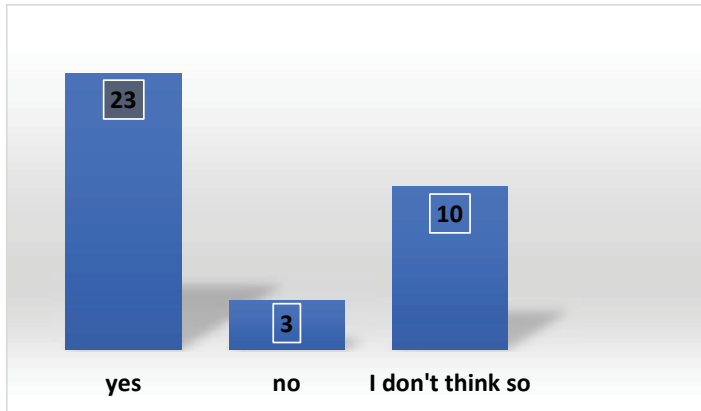
Question 2: How easily could you adapt the ways of the American lifestyle?



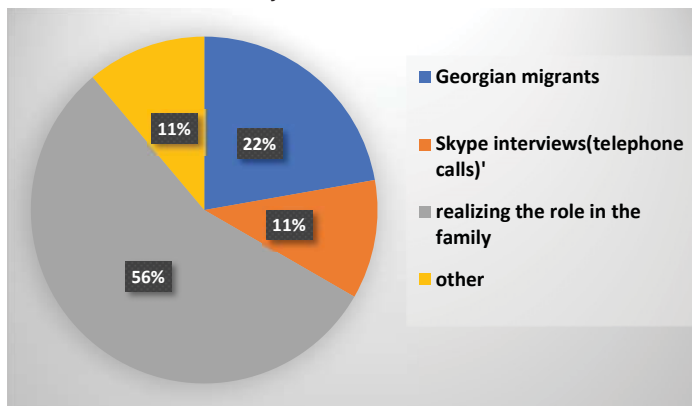
Question 3: Do you think that the remittances Georgian women labor migrants send to their families in Georgia are still crucial for them?



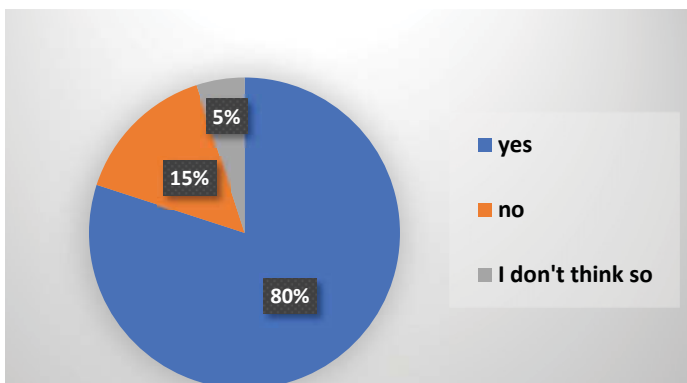
Question 4: Did you suffer from culture shock?



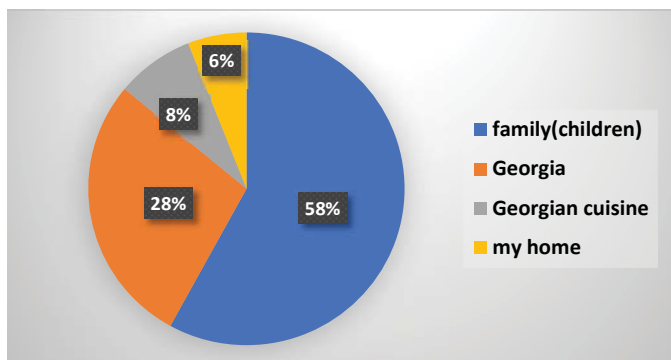
Question 5: In case you had (or still have) culture shock, what factors helped (helps) you to defeat it?



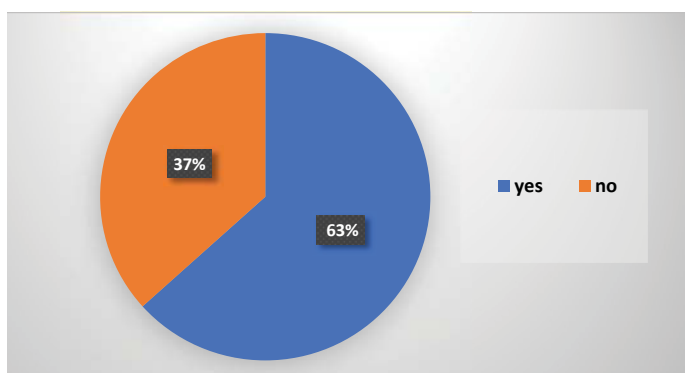
Question 6: Do you share the opinion about the new role of Georgian women as "bread winner?"



Question 7: Write one thing you miss most of all about Georgia.



Question 8: Have you experienced criticism and stigmatization?



Question 9: Are you planning your return to Georgia?

– 98% of Georgian migrant women are willing to return to their families, but are not ready yet.

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