

Review Essay

At the Limits of Justice: Women of Colour on Terror

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Introduction

I remember my first reading of the inspiring anthology, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women of Color* (1983) at the recommendation of a university professor. This anthology, edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, gave voice to the feelings of displacement I encountered as a Filipina migrant to a settler nation-state like Australia.

Although I read this book twenty years after the first edition was published, the stories, poetry, and illustrations etched across its pages spoke of what I was never encouraged to admit as a Filipino immigrant to Australia: that is, being a racialised female was something that merited acknowledgement, not derision, apathy or effacement. The anthology was a call to arms that deployed a communal invitation to stand up, speak out, and redress the ongoing colonial and imperial acts of violence that reduced ‘women of color’ as ‘less than’, even within supposedly pro-women feminist spaces. In her chapter, ‘Speaking In Tongues: A Letter to 3rd World Women Writers’, Anzaldúa begins with ‘Dear mujeres de color’ (women of color) (1983: 165), already positioning this anthology as a text that negotiates and challenges

the normative English-language centrism of the academe and white, western feminist spaces.

I experienced the same feeling when I read the pages of this volume, *At the Limits of Justice: Women of Colour on Terror* (2014), which is edited by Suvendrini Perera, a professor in the Department of Communication and Cultural Studies at Curtin University, Australia, and Sherene Razack, a professor in the Department of Social Justice Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, in the University of Toronto, Canada. Within the volume, each chapter lays a brick on the foundations which create solidarity, while at the same time, dismantles the basis through which solidarities are fractured and dismembered. The authors' different writing styles, theoretical frameworks, case studies, and personal investments generate a collaboration that pushes me to think and feel beyond dominant narratives of 'terror' and 'justice', and importantly, to account for my own privilege and complicity in ongoing relations of fear, hate and exclusion.

This volume thus builds on a coalition built by activist texts, such as *This Bridge Called My Back* (2014), and in fact, the editors of this volume situate *At the Limits of Justice* 'within the genealogy of women of color feminism in the global North, beginning with the landmark anthology, *This Bridge Called My Back ...*' (Perera & Razack 2014: 4). *At the Limits of Justice* thus creates a textual bridge that contributes to the power of shared stories, rigorous theorisations and collaborations that negotiate with the politics of proximity and distance. Proximity here is based on where one was born, where one lives, and where one's ancestry can be traced. Distance refers to where one currently resides and works, as well as how distance is calibrated according to the agendas of dominant media and governmental institutions that render individuals and populations in the image of the 'other'; as bodies that are not 'proper' citizens of 'safe', 'civilised', neo-liberal societies.

This reflective focus on distance and proximity was taken from a workshop in Toronto, Canada, named 'Violence in a Far Country: Women Scholars of Colour Theorize Terror', which the editors of this volume convened. *At the Limits of Justice* is the outcome of that workshop

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and aims to contend with the fact that 'violence is *not* a far country' (Perera & Razack 2014: 4) for those who have migrated or were born into sites that are supposedly divorced from the 'sources' of terror and violence. Perera and Razack specify:

For us as convenors, and for many of the contributors of this volume, our origins and histories, as well as our racialized and gendered positioning in our current locations, connect us to places that are popularly conceived as the ground, source, or locus of terror. At the same time, as academics of the global North (Canada, Australia, Israel/Palestine, Europe, the United States), most of us write from locations seen as outside or remote from terror. (3)

In this respect, *At the Limits of Justice* is concerned with formations of place, displacement, and the complex routes that compose where home is and what home could become. In this manner, *At the Limits of Justice* differs to anthologies like *This Bridge Called My Back*, namely because it covers a wider geographical and geopolitical spread. Different locales and spaces of 'home' are drawn on in this volume: the Caribbean, Africa, Canada, Australia, the Philippines, Jerusalem/Palestine, the United States of America, to name a few. Further, while not all of the chapters focus on the post 9/11 context, many of the chapters negotiate with this context as the overarching framework for their analysis. This volume is thus a timely text, which offers important insights into minority and alternative discourses that are effaced in the current 'war on terror' and beyond.

This review aims to outline the major aspects of the volume in order to review its key ideas, themes, theories and messages. For this purpose, this review will be divided into three sections. The first explains the structure of the volume. The second examines the theoretical frameworks used to advance the aims of the volume. The third reviews the contribution the volume makes to existing literature and scholarship. In doing so, I use first-person tense as a strategic way to account for my own subject positionality and how this informs this review. In the spirit of the volume's aim to self-reflexively assess one's own complicities with 'terror' and 'justice', I draw on this use of

first-person tense to acknowledge my role as a reader of the chapters that I review.

1 Structure

The volume has 29 contributors, all of whom are scholars who identify as ‘women of colour’. In addition to including articles by leading scholars in the fields of critical race and whiteness studies, other papers are written by scholars with interests in histories (indigenous, colonial, post-colonial), politics, law, and gender studies. All of the authors are activists in terms of their scholarly and community work and adopt a diverse range of writing styles: testimonials, poetry, and scholarly essays.

In their introduction to the volume, Perera and Razack lay the groundwork for the diverse analyses and remembrances covered in the 30 chapters that follow. These chapters are grouped into six sections, each introduced by different scholars. *Section One: Mundane Terror / (Un)Livable Lives* aims to ‘to bear witness to the limits of justice when it is under law’s relentless authority that life is made (un)livable for some’ (Kwak 2014: 22). The chapters in this section also posit the powerful point that terror pulses through everyday life, wherein the modes of terror become inscribed into normality, so much so that terror itself becomes the norm.

The terror norm is exemplified in Robina Thomas’ chapter, ‘Violence and Terror in a Colonized Country: Canada’s Indian Residential School System’, works as an act of witnessing that takes on the responsibility of listening to, and acknowledging, the accounts of those who were systematically victimised through Canada’s Indigenous school systems. In this chapter, abuse is outlined as part of the everyday operations of disciplining Indigenous children. In part, Thomas concentrates on this issue as a means to ask important questions: where are the stories that uncover the underbelly of systemic abuse on Indigenous children? Where are the stories that assign blame to the institutional and governmental measures that enable these abuses to happen? Why are the stories that are told the ones that blame the victims and position

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indigeneity as something that is always-already suspect? Thomas asserts that it is 'our responsibility' (24) to tell these stories as a way of bearing witness to the 'strength' (36) of those who continue to survive.

Roshan Jahangeer and Shaira Vadasaria's introduction for *Section Two: Violence in a Far Country: Other Women's Lives* specifies that this section strives to 'uncover the messy but precise terror of empire's war' (2014: 146). The chapters in this section trace the routes of patriarchy that create the need to take an interest in and 'save' the lives of women in distant lands. Distance, in this case, refers to non-western, non-white and non-Christian spaces and bodies. Meyda Yeğenoğlu's chapter, 'Sovereignty, War on Terror, and Violence against Women' extends this focus on 'other women's lives' and posits how women themselves become 'othered' within a politics of fraternal friendship that is founded on the exclusion of women. Yeğenoğlu draws on Jacques Derrida's theorisation of the 'canonical model of politics in Roman, Jewish, Christian, and Islamic cultures' (225) as engendering a 'phallogocentric model in which there is no possibility to acknowledge woman as a friend' (226).

The chapters in *Section Three: Terror and the Limits of Remembering* chart 'ethical approaches to memorializing violence' (235). These include Merlinda Bobis' meditation on her novel *Fish Hair Woman* and its theatrical productions (237-262), Honor Ford-Smith's discussion of murals painted in working class areas of Jamaica (263 - 288), D Alissa Trotz's tracking of commemorative sites in Guyana (289-308), and Teresa Macias' (309-327) critique of the Chilean Torture Commission's organisation of 'how torture will be known as a national truth' (311) in ways that do not necessarily uncover the complexities of torture, but rather serve the nation-state's interests.

Ford-Smith and Trotz's chapters include images of commemoration: murals, vigils and sites/monuments. These images provide photographic evidence that not only shows diverse practices of commemoration, but contributes to this process of commemoration as well. The images included in this section pay tribute to the commemorative moments that strengthen the need to 'speak back ... from local sites to national, regional, diasporic places and beyond (Honor Ford-Smith 287).

In *Section Four: Thinking Humanitarianism / Thinking Terror*, the chapters ‘ask us to account for what it means to respond to suffering, oppression, and terror and the ways in which our caring comes to be articulated through messy humanitarian interventions’ (Charania 332). These chapters mark how humanitarian and other conspicuously benevolent acts are not necessarily the antithesis to processes of terror. In her introduction, Gulzar R Charania, writes that these chapters suggest that terror and humanitarianism ‘are not as strange to each other as we suspect’ (332). Moreover, Nicole Watson’s chapter, ‘From the Northern Territory Emergency Response to Stronger Futures: Where Is the Evidence That Australian Aboriginal Women Are Leading Self-Determining Lives?’ offers a strong argument in terms of the intimacy between humanitarianism and terror. In part, Watson’s chapter examines the Australian government’s response to a report named the ‘Little Children are Sacred’, which specified 97 recommendations. Watson notes that none of these recommendations were taken up by the government and instead a militarised ‘emergency response’ was actioned for these communities. Watson draws on Michel’s Foucault’s theorisations of biopower and disciplinary power (through the figure of the panopticon) to analyse the ways in which Aboriginal women become regulated and disciplined as a means of ‘protection’. Watson asks whether such ‘protection’ results in empowering Aboriginal women and stipulates that she cannot find evidence that the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) enables self-determination and authentic protection. In this discussion, she acknowledges the diversity in opinion about the usefulness of the NTER, wherein some Aboriginal women see this Response positively, whereas others, see it as a continuation of racism and patriarchy.

Section Five: Terror Circuits includes chapters that examine the visual economies of terror that generate a circuit through which the ‘mobility of images goes hand in hand with the confinement of bodies’ (Perera, 457). For example, Suvendrini Perera’s chapter, ‘Viewing Violence in a Far Country: Abu Ghraib and Terror’s New Performatives’ cites how media and communications technologies (such as mobile phones and online social media sites) become the means through which

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sites of terror become visual events. In terms of Abu Ghraib, Perera specifies that it is 'a visual event that initiates new repertoires, new grammars, and new modalities of terror' (469). Perera also discusses how performances of social justice on social media sites, such as the proliferation of the 'Kony 2012' campaign on YouTube and Facebook, are also situated within the terror circuit that also enables Abu Ghraib's validation of white, western privilege.

Section Six: Theorizing (at) the Limits of Justice concludes the volume with an intriguing parallel between justice, terror and embodiment. For instance, Asma Abbas' chapter, 'In Terror, in Love, out of Time' focuses not on 'terrorism as a tactic but with terror as an emotional state and experience shared by both the doer and the recipient' (505). This shared commonality between doer and recipient paints a picture of terror as an intersubjective and intercorporeal enmeshment, or as Abbas provocatively puts it, as a 'conjugal relation' that ensures that terror comes to 'live with and in us' (503). Denise Ferreira da Silva's chapter, 'Radical Praxis or Knowing (at) the Limits of Justice', posits a different connubial link, that is, the connection between knowing and doing in terms of knowing at the limits of justice (527). She opens her chapter by juxtaposing Hegelian conceptions of slavery and freedom with Frantz Fanon's call for mass support and solidarity to eradicate the ills of colonialism. With this, she envisions 'another horizon' (527), 'that of affectability / relationality' (528). Omeima Sukkarieh's chapter, 'Unsewing My Lips, Breathing My Voice: The Spoken and Unspoken Truth of Transnational Violence' speaks directly to transnational violence. Sukkarieh anthropomorphises transnational violence as a 'zombie', a quasi-humanoid creature that is at once dead, but still mobile. Her description of transnational violence as a zombie creates a vivid metaphor for terror and its necropolitical power that feasts on the living for its sustenance and continuation.

Akin to the mythic figure of the zombie, transnational violence can only re-animate itself through devouring the flesh of human bodies. Humans, in this context, are the source for the evocation of terror. Sukkarieh also personifies the enactment of terror by naming

herself as Israel: 'I am the state of Israel who has no respect for international borders and states...I am the state of Israel who couldn't care less if a man like Anwar Khalil Balusha suffers from mental health problems after having his five daughters killed during a routine midnight bombing' (541). This mournful account of the loss of care and compassion is demonstrated in the final chapter. This chapter shows postcards from Sukkareih's art installation wherein 450 'body bags' were lined in Martin Place, Sydney Australia in 2006. These 'body bags' visibilised the physicality of death and terror, as well as displayed the anonymity of the dead body when it is covered in a body bag. Sukkareih specifies that this installation attempted to show that every human being matters as 'death and war do not discriminate' (549). Here, the plea is made for a more caring response to death in spaces that are not normatively inscribed as sites the West should care for.

2 Theories

This volume uses theory to elucidate the personal, political and philosophical implications of 'terror' and 'justice'. While the chapters refer to a variety of theories, many of them reference theories familiar to practitioners and students of Cultural Studies, Critical Race Studies, Peace Studies, Philosophy, Sociology and Gender Studies.

For instance, Foucauldian theories of disciplinary power, biopolitics, and governmentality, as well as Michel Foucault's conceptualisation of discursive analysis are used. For example, Sunaina Maira's chapter, 'Surveillance Effects: South Asian, Arab and Afghan American Youth in the War on Terror' and Amina Jamal's chapter, "'Collateral Violence': Women's Rights and National Security in Pakistan's War on Terror' draw on Foucault's concept of disciplinary power. In Maira's case, she draws on the figure of the panopticon – the model of constant visibility and self-disciplining – to analyse how Muslim youth in the Fremont/Hayward area in the USA negotiate with political culture in the 'War on Terror'.

Andrea Smith's chapter, 'The Biopolitics of Christian Persecution' draws on Foucault's dissection of governmentality as it relates to

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Christian biopolitics. According to Foucault (1991), governmentality is the 'conduct of conduct' built upon a trinity of power, 'sovereignty-discipline-government, which has as its primary target population, and as its essential mechanism the apparatuses of security' (102). Foucault asserts that this triad of power is focused on a biopolitical target: population. According to Foucault (2003), biopolitics is the 'power to make live' and consists 'in making live and letting die' (247). The focus of this 'power to make live' is centred on the population and therefore what is at stake is life itself: how it can and should be lived and how life can be made more productive in and through power relations. Smith's chapter engages with this conception of power by outlining how the amplification of a carceral system provides the ground through which 'evangelical Christianity has been shaped by a logic of biopower' (108) that is focused on shaping the population. This is an interesting point to make as it argues for a kind of biopolitical power that is formed through Christian agendas.

Malinda M Smith's chapter, 'Africa, 9/11, and the Temporality and Spatiality of Race and Terror' (in Section Four) develops a discursive analysis of how citizens across the African continent were affected by the September 11 2001 attacks on American soil. Here, Smith discloses that what is colloquially known as '9/11' engenders a discourse that elides other events that happened on September 11 2001 and other moments that occurred during September 11 at different times (386-389).

Foucault's focus on historical analysis is also taken up by many of the writers. Meyda Yeğenoğlu, for example, argues that recognising the 'importance of historically conditioned social and cultural forces, and on the ideological frames that shape war and political violence, is useful when we examine the racist and religious ideologies of today's sanctioned War on Terror' (223).

Giorgio Agamben's work on bearing witness to trauma is another key theorisation that fleshes out many of the chapters. In particular, the introduction to Section One specifies that bearing witness is one of the key points that connect the chapters contained in this section.

Laura Kwak specifies: 'Bearing witness is then a critical methodology that returns to the violence of the law itself' (22). However, the chapters which 'bear witness' do so in a different way to how Agamben theorised the act of bearing witness. The literature on witnessing dominantly attends to the forms of testimony presented by survivors of wartime trauma (Agamben 1999; Langer 1991; Smith 2007). Here, witnessing addresses the atrocities inflicted through war, and brings these atrocities to account for their traumatic influence on survivors. Agamben draws on this form of witnessing and testimony to question whether the violences executed by the Holocaust camps can be represented through testimonial evidence. In thinking through this question, Agamben asserts that the 'true' witness to violence is the one who cannot testify. Their silence is witness enough to the unspeakable horrors one has lived through. For instance, Agamben suggests that survivors can only provide testimonial evidence of the horrors they experienced because they survived. Here, Agamben makes a distinction between those who survived and those who were killed or traumatised to the point that they are rendered mute by their horrific experiences. Agamben specifies, 'the survivors speak in their stead, by proxy, as pseudo-witnesses; they bear witness to the missing testimony' (1999: 34). Bearing witness, in this case, signals towards what is not there and what cannot be vocalised.

For Robina Thomas, bearing witness to trauma is not simply about acknowledging and offering a testimonial about wartime trauma. Rather, her focus is on the everyday mutations of trauma. In this case, witnessing the everyday banality of trauma is about bearing witness to the strength of those who survived, those who can and cannot speak, as well as accepting the responsibility to ethically voice such trauma. Bearing witness, here, is not necessarily gesturing towards what is not there and what cannot be vocalised; rather it is about what *must* be vocalised in order to remember, 'stories remembered – stories told' (Thomas 36).

Hannah Arendt's work is also used in this volume. Razack, for example, draws on Arendt's conception of race thinking, 'which is a structure of thought that divided the world into the deserving and

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the undeserving' (60). Razack interrogates this divisive structure through the example of Omar Khadr, who at 16 years of age was interrogated at Guantanamo Bay by the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service. For this analysis, Razack draws on the history of blood narratives and how they deployed racialised and religious scripts that formed a structure of thought that divided the world into the 'deserving' Catholic citizen and the 'undeserving' Muslim. Razack points towards how events such as the Spanish Inquisition enabled such a blood narrative. 'Developed in 1478 by King Ferdinand II of Aragon and Queen Isabella I of Castile, both of whom were Catholics, the [Spanish Inquisition] attempted to discipline the movements of Jewish and Muslim convertors to Catholicism. Such discipline was enacted to prevent *conversos* (those who had converted to Catholicism) from practicing their former religions and to ensure the supremacy of Catholic rule' (Laforteza 2015: 35-36).

In terms of charting visuality in terms of war and terror, the works of Nicholas Mirzoeff, Julia Kristeva, Barbara Creed, and Edward Said are used. For example, Sunera Thobani's chapter, 'Fighting Terror: Race, Sex and the Monstrosity of Islam' draws on Creed's use of Kristeva's theorisation of abjection in order to map out the 'monstrous-feminine' in relation to the 'Muslim-as-monster'.

More theories and theorists are used in this volume, but I bring up the aforementioned to specify that these theories and theorists are used in many of the chapters. The work of these theorists represent a particular canon in the humanities and social sciences. At first, this seems at odds with the intention of the volume to represent minority voices. Robina Thomas herself articulates this fear of being subsumed by academia: 'And because our old people are worried that once we work our way into academe we will lose our way, I introduce myself this way' (24). However, this is not the case. While many of the theories used by some of the authors tread familiar ground in the humanities, social sciences, as well as analyses on political, media and governmental operations, this very familiarity necessitates the need to keep questioning, challenging, and keep in conversation with the

theorisations that probe beyond the surface. Drawing on Foucauldian theories, for example, does not suppress minority voices. The authors' use of various theories merge with personal experience and perspectives for the purposes of social justice.

For her part, Thomas calls on Indigenous ways of being, becoming, knowing and sharing that creates a synergy with the theoretical tapestry woven by the chapters in the book. Merlinda Bobis puts forth a similar strategy in engaging with 'local philosophizing' derived from her natal home, the Philippines (243).

3 Conclusion

Reviewing this volume took me somewhere unexpected. While I knew I was going to read the perspectives of a variety of authors and situations, I did not anticipate that I was not simply going to review these various perspectives, but that this volume would initiate a review of my own subject positionality. For this reason, the volume is not an easy read. This is not because of the plethora of voices and narrative styles, but because of what each section compels readers to do and what it encourages us to unpack and strive towards, that is, social justice at the limits of justice itself.

In the Introduction of this volume, Perera and Razack write the key questions that each chapter will be haunted by:

How do we name, remember, and respond to atrocity and terror?

How do narratives and spectacles of violence and terror take shape in diverse regions, disciplines, and forums, and how they travel from one domain to another?

How we might transform these responses into a collective politics for social and political action, to reshape what Arundhati Roy describes as the unequal geographical distribution of suffering and violence? (5).

It is this sensation of haunting, or more precisely, of being haunted, that informs my review. I am haunted by Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian's chapter, 'Terrorism and the Birthing Body in Jerusalem'. In her chapter, she charts the harrowing journey of pregnant women who attempt to cross the border that divides Palestine from Israel. Mothers

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make this journey to ensure that their unborn child is documented and given citizenship rights. This journey is a treacherous one and involves physical pain, detainment, humiliation at the hands of those who patrol the border, and sadness for leaving other family members behind (including other children and husbands who have been detained at the border). I am haunted by Miriam TickTIn's chapter, 'Humanitarianism as Planetary Politics' wherein she lists how the 'war on terror' is sustained through observing non-human animals in order to finesse the technologies of war. TickTIn specifies: 'emergent sciences and technologies are at the frontiers of this war. They are part of new arsenals of technology such as those funded by DARPA [The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency], which researches robots modelled on insects, including cyborg insects ... that see, hear, and potentially attack in remote battlefields' (41). I am haunted by Sukkareih's art installation; in particular, I am haunted by a question that informs my reception of her art. If these 'body bags' were not in Martin Place, Sydney Australia, would people care? Would people see and acknowledge these 'body bags' as exposing the limits of justice and the true tenor of terror? By this, I mean that terror does not solely manifest itself on large battlefields, but as many of the chapters in this volume attest, the tenor of terror gains ubiquity through its operative function as an everyday (and necessary) occurrence.

I am haunted in a similar way to how some of the authors in this volume explain how haunting creeps at the limits of justice. For instance, Honor Ford-Smith draws on Avery Gordon's description of 'haunting' as a reference to 'moments in which something suddenly reminds us that the trouble we thought had been resolved is still clearly around' (269). D Alissa Trotz also engages with Gordon's account of ghosts and haunting as a means to look beyond the 'surface of things' (296). Yet, Trotz cautions that the '...active summoning of ghosts will not necessarily lead to resolution; instead it keeps alive the "living effects," which will return again and again to remind us that we mark time in the same place and that it is not "over and done with"' (297).

'It is not over and done with'. I repeat this claim to bring home an

integral point to this volume. As Gordon herself writes in her book, ‘... the ghost is alive, so to speak. We are in relation to it and it has designs on us such that we must reckon with it graciously, attempting to offer it a hospitable memory *out of a concern for justice*. Out of a concern for justice would be the only reason one would bother’ (2008: 64).

‘It is not over and done with’. This volume is testament to the ongoing violences and solidarities that inform everyday lives. Like Gordon, each chapter is preoccupied with justice, but also extends this focus to interrogate and make the limits of justice accountable for their (im)positions. In light of this, how do we, as readers of these chapters, contribute to building activist networks that continue to name and challenge terror without adding to terror’s project of sustaining the annihilation of diversity and solidarity?

D Alissa Trotz offers a solution. Her chapter has a subheading named ‘hopeful interruptions’. This book is largely about activating hopeful interruptions from situations that are continuously leached of hope through systems of governmental and communal oppressions. This is not a naïve hope, but is instead a hope that respects the blood shed through war, through birth, through border crossings and through the act of surviving the limits of justice.

In this manner, this volume would be useful for scholars and students of law, justice and governance. The volume would also be relevant for Gender Studies, Peace Studies, International Relations, Cultural Studies, History, Sociology, Politics, and Diaspora Studies. It is a book for people interested in textual activism through a variety of perspectives and narrative styles.

At the Limits of Justice weaves a complex, passionate, and thought-provoking tapestry developed by women of colour feminism. It contributes to the power and importance of sharing stories that are excised from public and dominant discourses. Most importantly, the volume asks us to account for own complicities and how we are implicated in ongoing relations of power, terror and justice.

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Notes

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