

On the Illegal Migration of Sub-Saharan Africans to Europe

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Illegal, or irregular migration has emerged as one of the most important international challenges of our time. Both sending and receiving countries (and transit countries) are significantly affected by this phenomenon. Not only has the situation assumed critical proportions, it is expected to get worse. As conditions in sending countries continue to deteriorate and their populations continue to increase, it is a problem that is not going to go away. It is also a problem which has hit Africa hard, especially countries below the Sahara. Statistics indicate that over the past few years, millions of Sub-Saharan Africans have attempted illegal entry into the European Union. The European Union Police Force (EUROPOL) estimates that there are half a million illegal immigrants within the Union at present. With Africa's population expected to hit the 2 billion mark in the next half-century, European governments are anxious to cut out the trend now, before it escalates beyond control.

Before delving into a discussion of illegal migration, however, it might be useful to acquaint ourselves a little with what exactly the term represents. There is no hard and fast definition. Irregularity or illegality in migration is not an exclusive concern of the destination country, it can occur from the perspective of both the source and destination country. Bimal Ghosh, in Huddled Masses and Uncertain Shores: Insights into Irregular

Migration, indicates that an origin country might impose travel restrictions to regulate the level and composition of control migration outflows. Some South Asian countries, for example Bangladesh and Pakistan prohibit the emigration of females below a minimum to be employed as housemaids or nannies. Thus, emigrating in spite of such restrictions would constitute illegal migration from the point of view of the origin country, but not necessarily that of the receiving country. My main concern in this paper, however, is illegal or irregular migration from the perspective of the destination country, and this happens when:

- Non-nationals have not complied with the required formalities, or have not obtained the authorization required by law, for admission or stay or for their activity during such stay in a country, or
- They cease to meet the conditions to which their stay or activity is subject.

In general terms therefore, illegal migration occurs when any movement from one country to another is carried out outside the regulatory framework of one or both countries.

This paper attempts to assess various dimensions of this phenomenon which has come to represent one of the most important tests facing contemporary world politics. It will firstly attempt to identify what causative factors underline this increasing trend of irregular immigration of Sub-Saharan Africans towards Europe; and the actual dynamics of the migration process itself. It will also assess the European response, and how governmental and civil society reaction has exacerbated the civil/incivil friction. A fourth sections will examine how illegal immigrants, in the face of ever-increasing

repression, have persevered and are even succeeding in establishing communities of trust based on shared values and norms. Finally, the paper will seek to outline how this phenomenon of irregular immigration can be situated within a context of civil/other relationships, and how this dichotomy has perpetuated, instead of redressing the situation.

1. Causative Factors: Push and Pull pressures.

The most obvious driver of illegal migration is the economic factor (see EUROSTAT Working Papers, no. 10). The economic imperative that drives Sub-Saharan Africans to emigrate can be divided into two strands.

These have been elaborated most clearly by R. Utuza, in Population Redistribution Mechanisms. Utuza identifies survival migration, which serves as an escape from economic distress. Thus poverty, unemployment and widespread economic hardship in Africa are the main push factors in this case. There is also opportunity-seeking migration, which is driven out of the need to enhance economic welfare. It is important to note that the latter type of migration is derived from the former, because lack of opportunity is a direct consequence of economic decay. These migrants who migrate for opportunity have therefore lost faith in the capacity of their own states to solve their economic problems. This casts a rather ominous shadow on the situation, because young people now tend to dismiss as worthless the prospect of building a future for themselves in their own countries, and tend to focus exclusively on migration as the means to economic betterment. In discussing international migration from an African perspective, it is useful to identify the nuances in the migratory patterns of survival and opportunity migration.

Opportunity migrants are generally more circumspect in their cost-benefit analysis of irregular migration; when the risks of apprehension and punishment are high, they are less likely to opt for a move through irregular channels (Ghosh 35).

Survival migrants, on the other hand, move as a matter of necessity, as against choice, and therefore are more likely to engage in irregular migration. The risks of apprehension and punishment fail to deter them. Lacking skills, education and often desperate, they would be accept any job in the destination country – and most, though not all, irregular immigrants are found in the low-skill, low wage sectors of the host country's economy. But even more pertinently, this type of immigrant would do anything to actually get into the destination country, as I will describe in more detail later in the paper. The bulk of illegal African immigrants can be categorized as survival immigrants, as economic deprivation throughout the region continues to hit new depths. The United Nations Development Program's Human Development Index (HDI) corroborates this view. The HDI measures three basic dimensions of human development: long and healthy life, as measured by life expectancy at birth; knowledge, as measured by adult literacy rate and the combined gross enrollment ratio for primary, secondary and tertiary schools; and a decent standard of living as measured by GDP per capita in purchasing power parity (PPP) US dollars (UNDP HDR 2005). In 2003, twelve (12) Sub-Saharan countries (out of a total of 18 countries worldwide) registered lower scores on the HDI than they had in 1990. To put it in real terms, those 12 countries are even poorer now than they were about 15 years ago. The 2005 Report reported 44% of global infant mortality as occurring in Sub-Saharan Africa, with a similar drop in life expectancy throughout the region. A

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Zambian today, according the Report, has less chance of reaching age thirty (30) than an Englishman born in 1840, and the gap is widening. The foregoing examples all go to show that most Sub-Saharan Africans migrate because their very existence depends on it.

Clearly, the adoption of the economic models favored by the West and the international financial regime have ultimately plunged the region into further impoverishment. In a recent cost-benefit study conducted by the World Bank to assess the impact of trade liberalization on different regions around the world, Sub-Saharan Africa emerged with a 2% loss in terms of terms-of-trade effects: the only region to have had its economy contracted by free trade, conversely the United States and Western Europe accrued the vast majority of benefits. Almost all of the 540 million people in the world who live on less than one dollar a day live in Sub-Saharan Africa (WDR 2005). The impoverishing effect of the programs forced upon African countries by the international financial regime is put in perspective by Kraus 1991, and Weissman 1990, using Ghana as a case study. They detail an aggressive program of structural adjustment in 1983 that entailed severe cutbacks and other services and the laying off of government workers. These stringent measures just served to exacerbate the deterioration of an economy already crippled by a devastating drought the year before. Cutbacks in health expenditure, for example, resulted in large layoffs, significant reductions in real income (due to inflation), and the closure of many health facilities. The resulting economic deprivation provoked not only a large volume of survival migration, but also a considerable outbreak of opportunity-seeking migration where physicians and other health workers left the country in their numbers in search of better economic livelihoods

in Europe and North Europe (Vogel, 1998). Economic considerations, therefore, are the central motivator of migration.

2. Getting There: the Dynamics of Illegal Migration

Opportunity migrants, by virtue of their relatively stable economic positions, are often able to afford the cost of travel to their destination. Since most of these tend to migrate legally, they are able to accumulate enough savings to cater for their journey. Survival migrants, often unemployed, typically have no funds to pay airfares. Most significantly though, their poverty usually precludes legal migration into Europe in the first place, since Western embassies refuse entry visas as a matter of procedure to African applicants who cannot demonstrate a certain level of economic standing in their home countries. Therefore, migrants of this sort resort to migration through irregular channels. Literature abounds on the dynamics of irregular African migration into Europe. The journey is made in a series of steps. Focusing on Morocco, Libya and the Canary Islands as the principal points of entry into Europe through Spain (and Italy, to a lesser extent), the migrants first move from their countries of origin to these transit countries. For the migrants from the Western coast of Africa, this stage typically involves a trip across the Sahara Desert, by bus, truck or on foot. As can be expected, a lot of migrants do not survive this trans-Saharan journey. Hunger, thirst, exhaustion, and extreme weather conditions are some of the leading causes of death on the road (World News Connection, September 01, 2006). Once they reach the points of transit, they await for an opportunity to cross over into Europe.

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Of the numerous references available on this particular stage where African immigrants make the ocean crossing into Europe, I refer to an account posted on DanielPipes.org, referring to the crossing between Mauritania and the Canary Islands, which is Spanish soil: “The voyage is perilous and over a thousand Africans have died during the past four months while sailing the Atlantic Ocean in traditional wooden fishing canoes called *pirogues*, normally used for net-fishing expeditions. The vessels are uncovered, are usually powered by a single outboard engine, and rarely carry navigational or emergency equipment. Up to 40 per cent of those who attempt the crossing from Mauritania may not make it. Still, 8,519 Africans reached the Canaries in 2004, 4,751 in 2005, and over 3,500 so far in 2006. The Spanish government has detained at sea more than 1,000 migrants in the last 10 days alone.” (www.danielpipes.org, March 19, 2006). Those who survive this second stage of the journey, having reached Europe’s frontier, would then proceed to a third step in the multi-stage migration process, which involves crossing the actual entry into mainland Europe. This sometimes takes the form of attempts to sneak into the continent in a variety of clandestine ways, such as stowing away on trains; at other times however, they result to forceful means of entry (AFP, October 3, 2006). Several times already in 2006, there have been cases of immigrants storming the border fence that separates the Spanish North African enclaves of Melilla and Ceuta. As part of tightened border security against immigrants, the Spanish government had raised to raised the fence to a height of 20 feet and barb-wired it; yet this has not deterred desperate immigrants from scaling it, using makeshift ladders and sheer force. In August 2006, several Africans died when border guards shot them down as they

overpowered the fences in separate incidents in Melilla and Ceuta (*El Pais* newspaper, September 01, 2006). Until now, the Moroccan Gendarmerie and the Spain's Garda Civil still shift the blame onto each other for the killings; needless to say, no action has been taken against the perpetrators. Out of the migrants who make into Europe, a good number of them would be arrested and placed in processing centers (euphemized term for holding pens), where the majority would be rapidly processed and promptly deported (New York Times, October 14, 2005). Of the number of people who originally set out on survival migration from Africa, only a small percentage of them actually make it into Europe. In all the discourse that abounds on the apparent "invasion" of Europe by African immigrants, precious little is said of the many who are present at the start of the journey but absent at its end. The phenomenon goes beyond a mere question of illegal entry into Europe, the very process by which migration is carried out constitutes a humanitarian crisis on its own.

3. Fortress Europe: the European reaction.

The use of physical deterrent measures, including the construction of barbed-wired and nearly insurmountable fences, the massing of armed troops at borders, the increased armed patrol of the Mediterranean Sea to intercept immigrant vessels and a generally hostile stance towards immigration throughout Western Europe has been likened to the fortifications used by a fortress to ward off the enemy. In discussing the concept of Fortress Europe, the role and significance of the Spanish outposts of Melilla and Ceuta is worthy of mention, since in the last few years, as they have come to

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represent the essence of the friction between illegal migration from Sub-Saharan Africa and Europe's increasing resistance to this migratory inflow.

Ceuta and Melilla: Watchtowers of Fortress Europe.

The Spanish colonial enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla are located on the Mediterranean

Coast of Africa, bordering Morocco. For a long time, the two towns were newsworthy only for the territorial wrangling between the Moroccan and Spanish governments over their ownership. However, in the past few years the two outposts have gained significance for a different reason: the European clampdown on illegal immigrants from Sub-Saharan Africa. With the accession of Spain into the European Union in 1986, Ceuta and Melilla have become the only remaining European territories located within mainland Africa, and this coupled with the fact that they are separated from continental Europe by only 8 kilometers of sea, has resulted in increasing numbers of desperate African migrants targeting the territories as a gateway into Europe. The increasing inflow of irregular immigration and the European Union's recent adoption of a hard-line stance against immigration resulted in Spain constructing border fences to separate the enclaves from Morocco, purposely to prevent illegal immigration and smuggling. Apart from the killings of immigrants that have happened in Melilla and Ceuta, serious human rights abuses have been alleged by various humanitarian organizations to have taken place there especially with respect to the capture, detention and expulsion of immigrants. The overriding preoccupation of European countries and the EU is to keep people out, and to do so at almost any cost (Amnesty International). Under the guise of security and

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managing migration flows, ever tougher controls are introduced. Melilla and Ceuta today represent the most obvious physical manifestations of Fortress Europe.

The rise of xenophobia and the extreme right

Any careful examination of literature on this topic will reveal that the question now is not whether Fortress Europe exists or not, but rather what has given rise to it. The short answer to this question is xenophobia; more specifically increasing xenophobia among broad sections of the indigenous European populations. The next sub-section examines in further detail some of the reasons underlying the determination of Europe to keep out irregular immigrants using every means necessary.

The first involves the increasing tendency for European governments and populations to equate international immigration with criminality (Albrecht, 2002). As is demonstrated through the creation and implementation of the Schengen treaties, the topic of immigration has become a significant concept in EU policies with respect to crime and crime control; such that control of immigration is now being equated with the control of crime and the creation of stable social conditions. Immigration of Africans further goes to exacerbate already volatile racial currents underlying the relationship between autochthon populations and minorities (who are immigrant based). Xenophobic sentiments are on the rise in European populations as attitudes towards immigration change and shift immigrants into the role of individuals or groups carrying an extreme risk of:

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- contributing to instability and violence either actively as offenders or passively as violence-provoking victims; or
 - exploiting host countries and host societies either through marketing illicit goods and services or through living on social security and property crime
- (Albrecht, 2002)

A second view points to a perception among Europeans that immigrants are “taking over” their space and identity – schools, housing complexes, neighborhoods – as a major reason accounting for the increasing opposition to new immigration (Riding, 1991).

Yet another perspective identifies the worsening economic situations in most EU countries especially within the globalization era as lying at the root of the rising xenophobia in Europe (Martin, 1999). According to him, chronic and rising unemployment, globalization of production and an ever-widening income gap between skilled and unskilled workers have resulted in many Europeans, especially the unskilled workers, becoming increasingly drawn to nationalist and neo-fascist propaganda and political parties opposed to failing state economic policies and what they regard as ineffectual immigration laws. And, as opposed to the 1980s, immigrant populations have swollen in Western Europe in the last decade (WDR, 1995) in a period of rising unemployment and economic difficulties, thus exacerbating social tensions, especially among the lower working class.

It is worth noting that this pervasive mood of immigrant-fatigue is not limited to ordinary citizens, across Western Europe extreme-right political parties have emerged

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and made significant electoral gains campaigning on anti-immigration platforms. In 2000 the right-wing Freedom Party joined the Austrian government after an election. The leader, Jorg Haider, had been a virulent anti-immigration spokesman, citing lost jobs, the loss of Austrian identity, and the overall unpleasantness of foreigners. Italy's post-fascists (lineal heirs to Mussolini), as well as a senior minister in the Franco regime of Spain have been part of their respective governments in the early part of this decade. Like-minded politicians presently aspiring to join their country's governments include Jean-Marie Le Pen of France and Umberto Bossi of Italy (Bookman, 2002).

At the root of this anti-immigrant (specifically anti-African immigrant) animosity lies a visceral self/other relationship in which European governments – and their populations – conceptualize African immigrants as an “incivil” species which represents a danger to their own civilization and identity. French Interior Minister Nicholas Sarkozy sums up this attitude which seeks to vilify and demonize illegal immigrants as follows: “this illegal immigration undermines law and order in the European states and the stability of their social pact” (ambafrance-us.org). To preserve European civilization therefore, more and more abusive controls are being introduced to keep out (and drive out) irregular African immigrants.

What is overlooked in this equalization of immigrants to crime is the fact all immigrant groups share a socially and economically disadvantageous and precarious position which puts them at risk in becoming involved in shadow economies, drug markets and acquisitive crime in general (Albrecht, 2002). Extremist anti-immigration policies, such as the policy of zero immigration declared by France in 1993 (later qualified to zero

illegal immigration) only serve to induce public perception of immigrants as a societal evil, a kind of public bad, such that the ensuing stigma they carry makes their participation in the regular or mainstream economy difficult and/or undesirable, forcing them to resort to illegal or illicit activities, such as “working in extra-legal occupations, or living in extra-legal settlements” (Sen, 2005), which only reinforces their criminalization and stigmatization by the public.

4. Not Lying Down: Networks of Defiance

Despite the challenges of Fortress Europe (immigration policy and political rhetoric), irregular Sub-Saharan immigration into Europe is on the rise (EUROSTAT). No barrier, (argues *El Pais*) however sophisticated, will overcome the desperation of immigrants for whom migration represents survival. Significantly, perhaps as a result of shared adversity, migrants have begun to link up and build relationships and establish networks of resistance to challenge European immigration regimes.

One technique that appears to have gained currency among immigrant groups is the resort to hunger strike as a means of protest. In January 2001, 700 irregular immigrants from different regions; Sub-Saharan Africa as well as Asia and Latin America, converged and took possession of churches across the city of Barcelona in a hunger strike to protest a tough new Spanish immigration law that among other things barred immigrants from undertaking industrial action and authorized the deportation within 48 to 72 hours of those found without required documents. After 14 days the Spanish authorities revoked the law and began review proceedings (*suite101.com*).

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Similar church sit-ins and hunger strikes have taken place across the Europe, and generate considerable pressure on the government from NGO groups, some political parties and portions of the public.

Apart from uniting for collective action against injustice, underground networks are in place which facilitates the movement and/or integration of arriving migrants. For instance in October 2006, about 1000 irregular Senegalese immigrants who gained entry to the Spanish mainland after having arrived in boats from the Canary Islands made it into Italy with the aid of a network of fellow Senegalese immigrants resident in different European countries (*El Pais*, October 24, 2006). The paper stated the network helped organize the trip by night train from Barcelona to Milan in northern Italy. This example is notable due to the number of immigrants involved. It is more likely that this sort of arrangements take place on a daily basis on an individual or small group basis. Family, friends and kinsfolk who have already made the journey into Europe help facilitate the arrival and integration of new migrants into the their often extra-legal communities, thus forming significant networks of trust whose activities contravene established order in their host countries, because by hosting and facilitating new irregular immigrants they tend to sustain and perpetuate the phenomenon of irregular migration, which flies directly in the face of increased efforts on the parts of their host countries to bring a decisive end to it. In this way, through the activities of the associations and networks which illegal immigrants have had to build in response to the harsh realities they live with; and as a result of the fellow-feeling which binds people together in times of perceived or real

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adversity, immigrant groups are not fading away but rather developing ever stronger communities of interest in the countries in which they live.

Anti-immigration, anti-incivility

In discussing the phenomenon of irregular migratory flow from the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa to the nations of Western Europe, it is a major aim of this paper not only to describe and highlight its physical and visible manifestations, but also to delve into the subtle, less obvious socio-psychological confrontations that are at play. More than being a demographic and socio-economic issue, I argue that irregular immigration, especially seen from the context of the resistance that it has engendered, is also a civilizational issue. In preparing the ground for this argument, I have employed Sen (2005)'s terms "civil" and "incivil", to refer to Europe (as in European government and society) and irregular African immigrants, respectively. In order to launch an effective discussion of irregular migration within a context of civil/incivil conflict, there is the need to discuss in a little more detail what the terms constitute or signify; and in the next paragraph or two, I will attempt to do this.

Civil and Incivil Societies.

Sen (2005) defines civil society, not within the orthodox meaning relating to the realm between the individual and the state, but rather as a social construct; a society governed by the norms of civility, norms which have been defined by the members of society themselves. Civil society sets the conditions for "civility", i.e., the rules one must follow to be considered "civilized". In short, members of civil society have arrogated on to themselves the qualities of "civility". In this sense, civil society necessarily excludes

anyone who does not observe its norms or follow its rules. Such a person would then necessarily fall into the incivil category, and is then victimized and oppressed for not going by society's book. Consequently, people categorized as incivil are seen by civil society to represent disorder, lawlessness and disobedience; people who are detrimental to peace, security and order in society. This perception leads civil society to attempt to "civilize" people of the incivil realm, i.e., to inculcate in them the norms of civility, a move that, according to Sen (2005) is motivated by fear: "... the civilized feel threatened by those who do not conform [uncivil society]..., and they seek to subjugate it, convert it, tame it, civilize it..."

Establishing civility and incivility with respect to illegal migration, drawing from the discussion above, becomes relatively simple; The European Union has set down its laws and rules governing the ways in which foreigners gain entry into its territory. The civilized way to do so would be to go through normal immigration protocol; it is not expected that people would attempt to enter Europe without going through this protocol, and because that is exactly what irregular immigrants attempt to do, they are perceived and categorized as incivil. Muto Ichiyo (2004) has this categorization in mind when he asks: "Are 'illegal' migrant workers part of civil society?" The term "illegal" itself, connotes incivility and criminality.

We therefore see that there is a necessary friction between civil and incivil realms, and this tension, I argue, is present in the dynamics of irregular immigration and immigration control.

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This animosity is evident in Europe's border control techniques, for instance. At Melilla and Ceuta, mentioned above, immigrants have been shot and killed; several times (*danielpipes.org*). No action has been taken by Spain or any European government to bring the killer border guards to justice. In fact, while NGOs, human rights organizations and some leftist political groupings have condemned the persistent violation of the human rights of the immigrants by border control authorities, the issue of justice and human rights does not come up when the European political leadership discusses irregular immigration, the focus is on keeping out immigrants and almost any method of doing so, as Amnesty International has noted, is considered necessary. The AI statement is reflective of the situation: "Western European countries' attempts to address the demands of increased migration often led to more restrictive immigration ... laws, with little concern for the rights of vulnerable migrants Detention conditions for migrants were grossly substandard in a number of countries, and many detainees were denied basic procedural guarantees in the detention and deportation process." (Amnesty International, WR, 2002).

The undesirability of African immigrants in Europe is also a function of race relations. As Sen (2005) notes, the self-proclaimed "civil" societies of the world are in general white and middle to upper class, and these societies perceive as uncivilized people of color in general and black people in particular. This is a dichotomy that is brought to the fore by the phenomenon of African immigration into white conservative societies such as Western Europe. Racist EU propaganda and policies are employed to

marginalize such immigrants and portray them as social, political and economic threats to the society; that their presence sullies the national identity.

A useful case in point: the government of Ireland proposed a referendum in 2004 denying Irish citizenship to any child born in Ireland to parents who were not Irish citizens (www.justice.ie). Reasons cited included the need to prevent “citizenship tourism”; curb “massive inflows” of non-nationals to maternity hospitals; and arrest a situation “snowballing out of control”. These arguments were subsequently revealed to be either false or greatly exaggerated (<http://struggle.ws/wsn>). The increase in non-national births in some major hospitals had increased 2% from the previous year, and the majority of foreign mothers were living and working in Ireland entirely legally, including women from the UK, the US and other EU countries. The spirit behind such a policy was that Irish national identity was white and Catholic, and this homogeneity was been threatened by the birth of babies of black African and Asian origin. The referendum passed. This is just another illustration of an increasing trend for European countries to use ethnicity to define membership in the community (Morrison, 2004). Illegal African immigrants are consigned to the incivil sphere in Europe not only because of their unauthorized legal status, but also because of their ethnic origin.

Conclusion: control is not solution

Despite the distressing situations African immigrants have to go through in their bid to reach Europe, as well as the increasing anti-immigrant hostility currently coming out of European governments and societies, the migratory flow has not trickled off. More

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immigrants continue to risk their lives on a daily basis to reach what they consider as economic salvation in Europe, and unless the economic problems that force them out of their countries are solved at that level, the trend will continue and increase. Fortress Europe policies are a reaction, instead of a solution, to the problem. When migration cross the line from opportunity seeking to survival imperative, then it should be realized that no level of deterrence will succeed. What the European Union, and the developed North in general, needs to do is to commit concretely to poverty eradication in Sub-Saharan Africa, to build the economic capacities of the region to such a level as to eliminate the need for its peoples to migrate illegally into Europe or elsewhere for reasons of economic survival, for it is when these people regain confidence in their own economies and begin to re-orient themselves towards the prospect of making a decent living in their own countries that illegal immigration will be minimized. The problem of migration will be solved only when it is addressed at its base, until then Fortress Europe will keep getting infiltrated.

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