

Identity and memory in relations between ethnic minority and majority

Introduction

The presence of minorities in society, in particular national and ethnic minorities in Europe is closely connected with its political and economic history⁶⁰. It is associated with the formation and disappearance of States and changes in their boundaries, annexation and the assignment of territories, the processes of colonization as well as economic and political migration. The process of European integration, which begun in the mid-twentieth century, has helped to regulate the status of minorities and their relationships with majority groups.

Among the historical and cultural conditions of the treatment of minorities in EU Member States are included the following:

- principle of nationalism as an important rule of political organizing and delimitation of European countries,
- the role of minorities in the construction of most of the national identity,
- familiarity / strangeness of minorities, or cultural distance between national minority and majority,
- historical experience in contacts between European nations (the effect of the treatment of minorities such as the V column)
- vernacularism (long-term presence on the territory of the majority)
- migration of minorities.

Among political and legal conditions of treatment of minorities in the EU are included the following:

- deployment and self-organized minority,
- the importance of the home country of minorities in majority state policy („Proximity of” and „strategy „ of minorities)
- principle of State sovereignty and integrity
- principle of self-determination of peoples.

⁶⁰ This article contains the analysis results conducted in the framework of a research project „In the Footsteps of memory. Strategies for remembering Jewish culture and Galicia” funded by the National Science Centre (decision no. DEC-2012/07/B/HS3/03464).

European integration extends the sphere of public space, shared by societies participating in this process. It allows for nations that do not have physical mutual contact to engage in complicated arrangements of dependency. Decisions taken in individual countries have strong impact on economic, political, social and cultural reality in other countries. Such a glaring manifestation of the relationship between societies participating in the integration process are the EU coordinated common policy. They cover these areas of social life that, through the act of the will, were accepted by all Member States as important and simultaneously subject to Community regulations, regardless of the individual interests of the Member States in this regard. One could say that common policies are a sign of reconstruction in the traditional sense of sovereignty of European nation states. The independence of decision-making has been replaced by a shared responsibility for the consequences of all societies involved in the integration process.

The emittance of some aspect of social life outside the Community regulations means in practice its national, state „jurisdiction”. In other words, what is not subject to the Community is at the discretion of the Member States of the Union. In this regard, they have in practice the freedom of action that is compatible with the historical, cultural, political or economic specificity. Among elements which remain outside the Community’s policy, which are of particular interest to us in this article, among others, is the treatment of social minorities, in particular ethnic or national, and their relationships with majority groups.

Relations between dominant and subordinate groups, and identity.

Social minority - a group of people who because of their physical and / or cultural features are treated differently than others, and this diversity is perceived by members of this group as discriminatory.

See: More: *The situation of minority and identity*, eds. Z. Mach, A.K. Paluch, “Scientific Papers Jagiellonian University”, Kraków 1991.

In the case of ethnic or national minority it is primarily about cultural diversity, however for groups who are also at the same time of different race, physical characteristics as easily recognizable play an equally important role⁶¹. Recognition of any ethnic group as a minority has nothing to do with its size, the area of residence, or if it remains concentrated or dispersed. It is determined by the representation of different ethnic culture other than a majority in a given area, and the resulting impairment in treatment by the dominant group. As we can observe in the very definition, a minority’s position of inferiority exists in comparison to the majority group. With the essence of occurring social relations every minority, including ethnic or national is

⁶¹ We dealt with a similar situation for example in the case of people migrating to European countries from Asia or Africa, carriers of different cultures, belonging simultaneously to other racial groups.

in a position that to a greater or lesser extent, restricts the freedom of its members in undertaking economic, social, political or cultural activities.

This specific situation is in the first part a consequence of the emergence of a Europe of nation states. An attempt to implement this process with the idea of nationalism, understood as the principle of overlapping of the spatial extent of ethnic culture with sovereignty on a given territory, led to certain consequences. In the context of our interest here, the most important is to convince the nation, which is the sovereign of the country, of the right to organize reality according to their own rules. At the same time, the attempt to implement *the idea of nationalism in nation-building it has proved in practice impossible to execute*. The first reason was the inability to delimit the territorial scope of ethnic groups. This is because they were, during the emergence of the modern nation-states, thus in the nineteenth century, mixed especially within their borders, creating in them national borders. The second reason that the process of national building imposed itself on a certain existing political order in the form of existing states and empires in Europe. As a result, the borders of nation-states to a greater extent were the result of political processes, decisions taken in the context of international relations, sometimes with minimal participation of the nations concerned⁶². This resulted in the creation of ethnically heterogeneous nation-states, or the emergence of ethnic and national minorities in European countries. These are historical minorities, whose status and position in the majority society is usually better than minorities who are a consequence of migration processes.

The aforementioned belief of the national majority of its central role in the country, makes the minority, no matter what is the genesis of their inception, limited in the ability to implement the principle of national sovereignty. This state of affairs has a twofold effect. First, in the treatment of minority generally involves the syndrome of an ideal member of the majority population. This means that from an ethnic minority representatives arises an expectation to confirm their loyalty to the state and the society in which they live, to a higher degree than in relation to the representatives of the national majority. Secondly, regardless of the type of official policy of including a minority into the majority society, and minorities are always subjected to assimilation undertakings. These processes of mutual interaction are related to the construction, reenactment of social identity. What interests us here with regards to the relationship between the majority and the minority, it would be appropriate to refer to the two ways this concept is understood⁶³. The interactive model of identity is perhaps the richest, most internally diverse type of understanding of the concept⁶⁴. To a large extent this is a consequence of the existence of many distinct ways of understanding the symbolic interactionism as perspectives of theory and research. Nevertheless, one can

⁶² We had to deal with such as case, for example in the case of demarcating Hungarian borders during the agreements of Trianon after World War I or Poland after World War II.

⁶³ See: A. Piotrowski, *Pojęcie tożsamości w tradycji interakcjonizmu symbolicznego*, "Kultura i Społeczeństwo", vol. 29, no. 3/1985, p. 53-74.

⁶⁴ See: *ibidem*.

reconstruct some issues common to the representatives of this trend⁶⁵. First, identity is a interactive phenomenon, because social self-identification takes place through symbolic resources available within a given culture including in particular, language, a harvested interaction with others. Secondly, assuming of identity occurs during interaction, sending, receiving and interpreting of messages. Thirdly, exploring of ways of identification is not only the analysis of current direct interaction of people. It also requires answering the question about the course of interaction in the biographical dimension, taking into account the way people participate in culture and society. In the model of world-outlook, social identity is understood as „a set of fixed properties characterizing the ways of self-perception formed among the members of a sufficiently large population, where the perceptions of themselves are derived from the features of the social structure or holistically, anthropologically understood culture properly considered community”⁶⁶. Its essence lies in the search for identity in the context of psychosocial situation of people in the contemporary world and existing lifestyles, patterns and standards of conduct.

In the case of relations between the majority and the minority, what interests us in particular is the collective identity. It is a construct comprising of group self-perception, the perception of others and relationships linking with other groups, which is based on a conceptual model of the world⁶⁷. There is no doubt that this identity is constructed within specific cultural conditions, including conditions in the community of ideas and cultural trends as well as social transformation taking place. In the case of the analysis conducted here, composition of society plays a key role in which collective identity is being build. It is, on the one hand, the scope of cultural diversity, which is the distance between the majority and the minority, on the other hand, about the relationship of power between dominant and subordinate groups. It is these factors that determine for the aforementioned minority position in relations with the majority, which are translated into their standards of treatment in European countries. Cultural and spatial factors are also important in this context, namely the position of groups within the scheme of the center - peripheral dimension of political, economic and cultural relations.

An extremely important role in the construction of collective identity of dominant and subordinate groups plays temporal change. The methods of self-identification and identification of others are firmly embedded both in the present, future and past. This is indicated by Manuel Castells⁶⁸, whose typology of collective identities, although formally based on the author (who?), and purpose (why?) of constructing identity, clearly indicates its temporal aspect. We can even point to their temporary orientation. The legitimizing identity serving the dominant groups to maintain the *status quo* is primarily based on the justifications referring to the past. The identity of resistance constructed by subordinate groups is aimed primarily at limiting the marginalization

⁶⁵ See: Z. Bokszański, *Tożsamość - interakcja - grupa*, Łódź: University of Łódź Publishing 1989, p. 32.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 34.

⁶⁷ See: E. Litak, *Pamięć a tożsamość. Rzymskokatolickie, greckokatolickie i prawosławne wspólnoty w południowo-wschodniej Polsce*, Kraków: Nomos 2014, p. 35.

⁶⁸ See: M. Castells, *Sila tożsamości*, Warszawa: PWN 2008, p. 23-24.

of the here and now, and so the dominating orientation is focus on the present. Finally, the project identity, as its name suggests, is constructed by groups interested in changing the future, hitherto existing social structure and the resulting relationships between dominant and subordinate groups.

The present time in the construction of identity is interactive time, during which a building of self-identification process of mutual interaction with the other takes place. The past is comprised of experience, knowledge and cultural competencies acquired in previous interactions, and components used in the form of elements of symbolic culture in subsequent interactive situations.

The importance of the past seems to be crucial in the context of constructing identity in relations with „significant others”, which are other nations or ethnic groups perceived as a threat to the nation, its diversity, authenticity, autonomy and independence⁶⁹. It should be remembered that „significant others” are not only groups generating a threat, but also potentially positive inspiration and motivation. Some of these may often be groups whose system of values and norms is the subject of aspirations. „Significant others” are often ethnic groups and national neighbors in the spatial dimension. They can also be a component of a culturally heterogeneous society and this role potentially serve ethnic minorities. In addition, a minority of a historical nature may appear more commonly, than those constituting the effect of migration processes.

History and Memory

For the relations with the „significant others” the experiences of the past are important. Being less important is here the actual course of events. Definitely more important is a subjective belief, an idea of how it was. This means that human attitudes and actions related to the construction of identity and building relationships with others are associated not so much with history, as with memory. This distinction is crucial, because both concepts show a different way of relating to the past⁷⁰:

History is presenting the past in a objectified way. The basis for its creation are the sources presenting the phenomena and processes of the past. Its content is all known facts, which can be reached through intellectual action based upon analysis and critical discourse. At the same time its primary function is to provide facts about the past. History refers to linear time, and organizes events and processes of the past in accordance with timing. Consistently cultivated, it tries to discover any of the so-called white stains in history of a particular social groups. In this context, history is a universal phenomenon, its elements in the cognitive dimension are available to all wishing to familiarize themselves with the findings of historical researchers. It is worth noting also that history presents the events of the past multifaceted. In the

⁶⁹ See: A. Triandafyllidou, *National identity and the ,other'*, "Ethnic and Racial Studies", no. 4/1998, p. 594.

⁷⁰ See: J. Nowak, *Spoleczne reguly pamietania. Antropologia pamieci zbiorowej*, Kraków: Nomos 2011, p. 34-38.

framework of discovered and analyzed sources, it presents different descriptions of analyzed phenomena and processes. This provides the opportunity to assume different ways of interpreting the past.

Memory in turn, although it relates to the past, is in fact a phenomenon of the present. The key is in fact is the current state of the community and its present needs in recalling past events. It is primarily of emotional and mythical nature, because it counts only those facts that meet the current psycho-social needs. The consequence of this is selecting through memory of historical facts, assorting and storage of some and omitting and forgetting of others. This means that memory is a presentation of the past in a subjective manner. In addition, it presents historical events in a clear manner, without taking into account the aspects enabling alternative interpretations. The memory is set in a mythical time, because only then past events can be invoked in the present without taking into account their historical context. In this way, different characters from the past can be invoked at the same time, regardless of the significant time periods separating their life and activity.

Between history and memory, there is obviously a strong relationship, a kind of tension that illustrates well the two phenomena. Firstly, the testimony of their interaction are the so-called places of memory⁷¹. They represent a form of vicarious spontaneous memory that fades and limits our awareness of the important events of the past. Monuments, museums, archives, ceremonies, festivals, cemeteries, collections, etc. are specific relics of the past. They serve the community, a group a role of a sense of permanence and identity. They allow, on the basis of a careful selection of historical commemorated events, to create the illusion of eternity⁷². Secondly, the game between history and memory reconstructions of social identity take place. Whenever a group moves from memory to history, this requires a change to the method of self-identification and identification of others. Moreover, the process of finding ones roots and building on the canvas of identity in practice seems to be characteristic for each social group. And that means reaching out to the findings of history and selectively alerting them of such content, which in a given situation, meets the needs of intergroup connections and builds relationships. It can be seen in this context that the relationship between history and memory is analogous to the relationship between language of reporting, analytical (typical of history), and a poetic and metaphorical (denoting memory)⁷³. This means that memory is not falsification of history but rather, it is like a poetical act which allows for emotional and evaluative experiencing of the past.

Each group feels the need to have a memory of the past, and in the name of the group's continuation to pass it along within the framework of intergenerational

⁷¹ P. Nora, *Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire*, „Representation”, no. 26/1989, Special Issue: Memory and Counter – Memory (Spring), p. 18-19.

⁷² See: J. Nowak, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

⁷³ See: A. Szpociński, *Formy przeszłości a komunikacja społeczna*, [in:] *Przeszłość jako przedmiot przekazu*, eds. A. Szpociński, P.T. Kwiatkowski, Warszawa: Institute of Political Science PAN, Scientific Press Scholar 2006, p. 20-24.

transmission. In writing about this, Maurice Halbwach⁷⁴ stressed that in fact this memory is a result of creation and in each case depends on specific social context and the dominant thought structures. This context and structure make it so that some content from memory are rejected and others accepted. In other words, the past of a group is not a state of reality that as an entity remains in an unchanged form. It is, above all, the structure of memories formed during the interaction between members of the community, which takes version of an overview of the past in accordance with the interests of the group in a given situation. This change of memory is to preserve the internal balance of the group by removing from it anything that might divide individual units, and remove them from the community. This in essence is collective memory⁷⁵.

Of course, the key question is what in essence is intergenerational transmission? Answering this question requires a reference to the distinction between communicative memory and cultural memory⁷⁶. The first concerns the memories of an immediate past. Its emanation is generational memory, which is the basis for the formation of the generation understood in the Dilthej tradition of defining this concept, which is characterized by common destiny determining the specificity of cultural attitudes and human behavior⁷⁷. A generation, in this tradition of thought, is a group of people with attitudes appointed by the mutually lived historic event. Because of its importance to ways of thinking, the types of attitudes and behaviors presented can be described as a generational experience⁷⁸. One should guess that this memory is formed and is being developed by members of a generation, and passes with the extinction of its members, meaning the carriers of this memory. Of course, at least in part it is passed in a relaxed, usually informal form in daily contact between generations. Most often this happens as oral communication in small informal groups. After some time, the communicative memory fragments are part of the cultural memory. It is a sign of a sense of connection with previous generations, the ancestors possessing an objectified character, abstractive from direct ties with them, characteristic of communicative memory. Cultural memory is an important factor in shaping the collective identity. This happens because, being collective memory includes the beliefs about the past and all forms of its commemoration⁷⁹.

⁷⁴ See: M. Halbwachs, *Spoleczne ramy pamięci*, Warszawa: PWN 1969.

⁷⁵ See: *Ibidem*, p. 421-422.

⁷⁶ See: J. Assmann, *Pamięć kulturowa. Pismo, zapamiętywanie i polityczna tożsamość w cywilizacjach starożytnych*, Warszawa: University of Warsaw Press 2008; K. Kaźmierska, *Współczesna pamięć komunikacyjna i kulturowa. Refleksja inspirowana koncepcją Jana Assmana*, [in:] *Kultura jako pamięć. Postradyjonalne znaczenie przeszłości*, ed. E. Hałas, Kraków: Nomos 2012, p. 43-62.

⁷⁷ M. Ossowska, *Koncepcja pokolenia*, "Studia Socjologiczne", no 2/1962, p. 47-51.

⁷⁸ See: J. Garewicz, *Pokolenie jako kategoria socjologiczna*, "Studia Socjologiczne", no. 1/1983, p. 77.

⁷⁹ See: B. Szacka, *Spoleczna pamięć polskiej przeszłości narodowej w latach 1965-1988*, [in:] *Czas przeszły i pamięć społeczna. Przemiany świadomości historycznej inteligencji polskiej 1965-1988*, eds. B. Szacka, A. Sawisz, Warszawa: Insitute of Sociology, University of Warsaw 1990, p. 8-19.

The analysis of memory often emphasizes the entity responsible for its creation⁸⁰. This distinction seems to be important in the context of a collective memory of majority and minority groups. Collective memory is the domain of institutions of power in the social system. They can of course be located at different levels from the local community, to the central government. In the case of a heterogeneous society, ethnically or religiously, it applies to both leaders and institutions of power of dominant groups and group subsidiaries. It is in the context of this kind of memory that it comes to shape the identity legitimizing the dominant group and marginalizing the minority group. Social memory however, is a product of the civil society, different actors usually operating on local and regional levels of collective life. It may possess an alternative nature towards collective memory as a functioning civil society aims at reducing and replacing institutions of power in meeting the needs of the community. It seems that it may play a key role in shaping the memory of dominated groups who are trying to build identity of resistance or an indemnity which projects against the identity of the majority group. Finally, biographical memory is formed by small informal groups, circles of acquaintances, friends, even family. Often, it gives a basis for shaping social and collective memory. As the communicative memory, it may in the process of objectification promote the construction of cultural memory by civil society or institutions of power.

For analysis of memory with regards to the relations between majority and minority groups, it is important to identify the actors responsible for the design of memory policies. It can be said that people in the construction of collective identity are dependent on those who help them decide about forgetting and remembering. Choosing, which of the experience to let go into the past, and which and how to remember, meaning what interpretation they should undergo⁸¹. The search for shared memories is, on the one hand, necessary for building your one's own collective identity, on the other hand, it requires the selection of the past. In this process it naturally comes down to the emergence of the leaders of memory who are responsible for agreeing, and negotiating the meanings of the past in the context of current interests of the community.

The role of memory in relations between dominant and subordinate groups

From the previous considerations it can be inferred that a significant function of memory is the participation of its meanings in the construction of collective identity of the majority and minority ethnic groups. In the case of both groups this applies to both, convictions relating to the phenomena and processes of the past, as well as the forms of their commemoration in the form of various memorial sites. Interpretations of the past can play an important role in shaping of content constituting the cultural basis for the process of self-identification and identification of others. Among other

⁸⁰ See: M. Ziółkowski, *Pamięć i zapomnienie: trupy w szafie polskiej zbiorowej pamięci*, "Kultura i Społeczeństwo", no. 3-4/2001, p. 3-22.

⁸¹ See: D. Thelen, *Memory and American history*, "Journal of American History", vol. 75, no. 4/1989, p. 1117-1129.

things, they seek to build an invented tradition⁸² by teaching people in the rituals or symbolic values and norms, through constant repetition suggesting a continuation of the past. In the case of dominant groups, constructing a legitimizing identity can aim to strengthen the justifications for the duration of the existing institutional and social relations. In the case of subordinated groups, the motives rather relate to the construction of the project identity, which is seeking justifications for the changes in the prevailing *status quo*. Memorial sites which are a form of commemoration of the past are mainly the domain of the majority groups. This is because they are in the hands of legal and economic mechanisms in the social space to place institutional and material signs of the past in the form of museums, monuments, plaques etc.

For the majority groups that dominate the past in the form of collective memory, it is an important element determining the boundaries of the community. It is these participants that belong full-fledged to a group, who are carriers of the elements of a common culture rooted in memories of the past. It is therefore primarily about the limits of symbolic community. The others may exist in the physical space of its functioning, but their status and position, as understood in social terms, is marginalized. Memory often determines the rules enabling others to become a part of the societal majority, thus it defines the rules of crossing of borders. It is worth noting that the formal basis of citizenship in the European nation-states is often knowledge of the history of the country and the nation being a sovereign state. It would be more appropriate to say that in fact it is about the knowledge of the past, since it is a „version of history” widely recognized by the nation. It is often subjective history of interpretations of the past, a characteristic phenomenon of collective memory.

There is no doubt about the fact that the memory is used by the majority groups as an instrument of cultural homogenization. In the case of Europe, its turbulent history makes the lands belonging to the modern nation-states have had periods of completely different cultural development. This means that only the interpretation of the past, which is the collective memory enables connection of values and norms shaped by different historical phenomena and processes. The most important culturally homogenizing instrument is historical policy. Despite its name, referring to an objectified world history contains a number of subjective elements of the past, which is characterized by collective memory. It is implemented in accordance with the principle of dealing with cultural decline, taking into account the contents of the material and symbolic communication (what is passed on?), as well as the treatment of this heritage, a kind of testament (how should it be passed on?). This causes, in the first place, that we are dealing with selective treatment of heritage, and secondly, with its interpretation serving certain current interests of the community. It is worth noting that the historical policy creates a collective memory understood, as already noted, as the domain of institutions of power.

⁸² For more about the subject see. E. Hobsbawm, T.Ranger, *Tradycja wynaleziona*, Kraków: Jagiellonian University Press 2008.

Collective memory for dominant groups is also undoubtedly an instrument of shaping relations with minorities. Firstly, it serves to define the cultural distance that separates the two communities. Keep in mind that historical experience between minority and majority are a key factor in the position of the first in the societal majority. These experiences, because interpreted in accordance with the principle of the collective memory, suggest the extent of majorities and the manner of admission of minorities, to the public sphere, in the country where it is sovereign. Secondly, collective memory helps to determine the ideal member of the majority group. In this case, too, it is important that this standard is met by members of that community. It is expected, however, that it should be fulfilled by any representative of a minority who wants to be incorporated into the dominant group in an equal manner.

As already mentioned, the collective memory is of paramount importance in building self-identification of an ethnic minority, and as means of identifying others. Moreover, in their case, a greater importance has the identity context of the significant other. Typically, this role is undertaken by a majority ethnic group. This means that selective and subjective assortment of historical phenomena and processes, an essential component of constructing identities must take into account the collective memory. In this set of selected and commemorated past events of the past, only those must be recognized of course, that will justify their own existence. And this existence in the context of that dominant group.

Created by ethnic minority identity of resistance is in fact, an attempt to defend against assimilation. In this way subordinate groups are trying to keep their own distinct culture, an important element is adapted to the interpretation of the past. It can be assumed that the memory of minorities play a key role in this process. It can provide historical minorities a sense of identity, despite prolonged exposure to the culture of the majority group. In the case of an ethnic migratory minority, it leads to the respect of values and norms of their own culture in a more categorical manner, than it does in the home communities of origin. In rare cases, it even leads to the revitalization of the culture of origin in exile⁸³. This is required for maintaining of one's own identity in a situation where, a dominant group pursues to assimilate the subordinate group.

Minority groups also use memory to justify their own subjectivity and the possession of related rights in the majority society. Engagement in this area forms a continuum of action⁸⁴. The most defensive of them are unconscious or not fully conscious „ethnic practices” in the areas missed by the dominance of the majority, and withdrawal to areas where expansion of the ethnic majority culture has not been reached. Next we should act within the framework of cultural syncretism, which is open

⁸³ See: F. Van Tubergen, *Religious Affiliation and Participation among Immigrants in a Secular Society: A Study of Immigrants in The Netherlands*, "Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies", vol. 33, no. 5/2007, p. 747-765.

⁸⁴ See: J. Mucha, *Dominacja kulturowa i reakcje na nią*, [in:] *Kultura dominująca jako kultura obca. Mniejszości kulturowe a grupa dominująca w Polsce*, ed. J. Mucha, Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa 1999, p. 26-53.

participation in the cultural practices of the majority and hidden in their own, as well as a critique of the culture of the dominant group, while attempting to advance within it. Finally, among the most offensive would be the creation of an alternative minority culture related to the revitalization of their own ethnicity, and creating countercultural ideology on ethnic grounds. In all of these types of activity, the possession and use of collective memory by a minority group is a prerequisite for achieving efficiency. At the same time, the described a continuum of actions illustrates the evolution of the identity of a minority group, from resistance identity to the project identity, in which reconstructed collective memory plays a key role.

Conclusion

I have no doubt that collective memory as a specific set of beliefs about the past and the forms of its commemoration, play an important role in relations between dominant and subordinate ethnic groups. For it is an extremely important factor in shaping and reconstructing their identities, and thus, building of boundaries, justifying their status and social position, shaping relations as well as internal and external relationships. Subjectively reconstructing memory of the past allows for finding in the group's history, instruments of action in the present, as well as seek answers to the challenges of the future. Even if particularly the latter are not sufficiently effective, at least it allow for the ability to maintain a sense of continuity serving as the basis of the subjective sense of security. Consequently, regardless of the changing contemporary forms of socialization of collective life, I am convinced that the past in the form of collective memory will play within them, an important role.

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