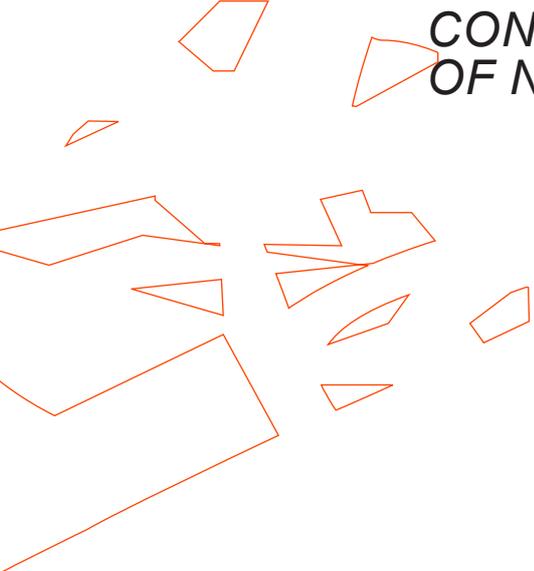


# THE ART OF UNTHINKING A CONVERSATION WITH EPIFANIA AMOO-ADARE AND FISHERFOLK



EURO—VISION is an art-led enquiry that explores the extractivist gaze of European institutions and its policies. The relationship between international relations, trade, economic policy and military operations come into focus through the lens of Critical Raw Materials. In 2008, the European Commission adopted the Critical Raw Materials Initiative, which defined a strategy for accessing resources viewed as imperative to the EU's subsistence. The criticality of resources is measured according to supply risk and economic importance. Policies are drawn up to ensure the continued availability of materials deemed critical. Such policies have led to agreements guiding the biological and geological exhaustion of the Global South. The **current list**, revised in 2020, includes 30 materials, including Silica, Cobalt Natural Rubber, Phosphate rock, and the newly added Lithium and Titanium.

***HOW CAN WE UNDERSTAND EXTRACTION BEYOND THE REMOVAL AND DISPLACEMENT OF MINERALS—TO ENCOMPASS POLICIES, INTERNATIONAL TREATIES AND REGULATIONS THAT IMPOSE CONTROVERSIAL FORMS OF STEWARDSHIP OF NATURAL RESOURCES ON COMMUNITIES?***



EURO—VISION focuses on the inscriptive operations of initiatives such as the establishment of Free Trade Zones (FTZs), fisheries partnerships agreements (FPAs), and de-risking investment tools like public-private partnerships (PPPs). In doing so, FRAUD proposes to consider these agreements through the lens of Critical Raw Materials, as well as to incorporate a wider set of 'materials', such as labour and fish(eries). We argue that the latter are managed as resources to be extracted, and that understanding them as critical raw materials as defined by governmental bodies helps to understand how their plunder is mobilised and institutionalised. More importantly, this framework enables us to look beyond these practices to the possibility of thinking and doing otherwise.

The following text is based on a conversation with Epifania Amoo-Adare and fisherfolk: Nii Ayitey Sackey and Solomon Sampa in the EURO—VISION podcast series.

Previous episodes have focused on certain measures of conservation in fisheries, such as Maximum Sustainable Yield, which were historically put in place to protect domestic industries rather than fish populations. These measures often reinforce legacies of pelagic extraction. The following episode will focus on the situation from the perspective of fisherfolk,<sup>1</sup> whose testimonies are in conversation with Dr Epifania Amoo-Adare.

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Dr Amoo-Adare is an artist, ‘renegade’ architect, pedagogue and researcher based in Accra who is currently engaged in what she describes as the “art of unthinking”.<sup>2</sup> In her article, ‘Who Rules the Waves? A Critical Reading of (An)Other-ed Modern Future’, she discusses Ghana’s depleting marine landscape, framed as the othering of artisanal fishermen, fish mothers and their fishmongers, and she questions the very idea of ‘development’, outlining alternative modes of co-existence.<sup>3</sup> Her understanding of spatial literacy has been very important for our practice and so we are thankful to have a chance to discuss this first-hand with her, and also to the fisherfolk, who have entrusted us with their testimonies.

Before we delve into how fisheries population management has impacted artisanal fisheries, we begin with Kofi Kinaata’s song, ‘Illegal fishing’, which was commissioned by the Ghanaian Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

## KOFI KINAATA – ILLEGAL FISHING<sup>4</sup>

Fisheries Commission, Canoe Council, well done o!

God created His world.  
And the ocean and everything in it.  
He created sukwe, wiwirw, 3ban  
(herring), 3kan, safor,<sup>5</sup> without rest  
He created *bonsu k3se*<sup>6</sup>  
Senior man  
If fisherfolk are to get money, it’s from the sea  
If we are to eat fish, it’s from the sea  
Even to eat *etsew ni kyinam*,<sup>7</sup> it’s the same sea  
But nowadays because of greed  
for money and selfishness  
Everyone is being individualistic  
in their search for money  
So they do whatever they like to the sea  
And now we, the sea, the way we treat  
it, we should ask ourselves  
what will the future generation do? What will they do?  
And now we, the sea, the way we treat it,  
what will the future generation, who are  
coming, do? What will they do?  
Look  
The light used on the sea  
Let’s stop it  
The dynamite  
Let’s stop it  
The carbide also  
Let’s stop it. Let’s stop it. Let’s stop it.  
The small nets  
Let’s stop it.  
Sika y3 abrantie<sup>8</sup>  
Let’s stop it.  
Calari<sup>9</sup>  
Let’s stop it. Let’s stop it. We should stop it.  
The Tuesday Fishing<sup>10</sup>  
Let’s stop it.  
When the “closed season” comes  
Let’s give the fish time to lay eggs and  
reproduce and grow fat for us  
Listen to what I am saying  
Western  
Central

<sup>1</sup> The fisherpeople are Mr Nii Ayitey Sackey & Mr Solomon Sampa from the Greater Accra area in Ghana, and Mr Solomon Sampa’s testimony is translated from the Ga language by Mr Mac-Darling Nyansa Cobbinah.

<sup>2</sup> Amoo-Adare, “The Art of (Un)Thinking: When Hyper Productivity Says ‘Enough!’, Is a Feast”.

<sup>3</sup> Amoo-Adare, “Who Rules the Waves? A Critical Reading of (An)Other-ed Modern Future”.

<sup>4</sup> Kinaata, ‘Illegal Fishing’. Lyrics sources: “Lyrics: Illegal Fishing”.

<sup>5</sup> These are five types of small to medium sized fish.

<sup>6</sup> A big whale.

<sup>7</sup> A dish made out of fermented corn eaten with fried fish.

<sup>8</sup> This term signifies “money makes you a gentleman”.

<sup>9</sup> This may designate a type of coral.

<sup>10</sup> Refers to the traditional taboo whereby fishing is banned on Tuesdays.

Greater Accra  
Volta<sup>11</sup>  
Diskof  
Kokrobitey<sup>12</sup>  
Our brethren fishermen wonfr3 yie  
Yie mbra  
Ekue kue  
Yieeee<sup>13</sup>  
Sisi nbom tabon mbom bi pa pa pa pa pa pa<sup>14</sup>  
Eating at once is good, but it's better  
to be able to eat always  
Sisi nbom tabon mbom bi pa pa pa pa pa pa<sup>15</sup>  
Eating at once is good, but it's better  
to be able to eat always  
The Fante say  
I haven't seen this for a long time  
Na agzim ase  
F3i3 mu zina hy3 pa pa pa pa pa  
Fo ta t3w b3 ol3 la 3gyi gyi pa pa pa pa pa....<sup>16</sup>  
....Sigya ni  
H3h333  
Let's give the small fish time to grow,  
As they will turn out to be sharks  
The light used on the sea  
Let's stop it  
The dynamite  
Let's stop it  
The carbide also  
Let's stop it. Let's stop it. Let's stop it.  
The small nets  
Let's stop it.  
Sika y3 abrantie  
Let's stop it.  
Calari  
Let's stop it. Let's stop it. We should stop it.  
When the "closed season" comes  
Let's give the fish time to lay eggs and  
reproduce and grow fat for us.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>11</sup> List of regions in Ghana.

<sup>12</sup> Refers to Kokrobitey, a fishing area near Accra vs the Kweku Lomitey that is written in the lyrics. Also, Diskof may instead be the fishing village Dixcove in the Ahanta West district in the Western region.

<sup>13</sup> "Yieeee Sisi nbom tabon mbom bi" refers to a call and response: e.g., "Fisherfolk lend me your ears. We hear you. Etc..."

<sup>14</sup> Refers to boat rowing and the use of oars, tapped against the boat, to encourage the rowers.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> The lyrics contain different Ghanaian languages, as mostly melody and rhyme. These have not been translated. See the link at the end for all the lyrics in Ghanaian vernacular language.

<sup>17</sup> Translation by Dame Mrs. Afua Amoo-Adare.

**FRAUD** Could you explain to us what is happening in this song that you include in your article?

**DR AMOO-ADARE** In this 2019 song, the Takoradi-based musician and songwriter Kofi Kinaata serves as a mouthpiece of sorts for the Ghanaian government;<sup>18</sup> specifically for the Ministry for Fisheries and Aquaculture's efforts to popularize the idea of a fishing ban over approximately a two-month period every year.<sup>19</sup> Popularly referred to as the Fante Rap God, Kofi Kinaata was perfectly placed to use his influence to facilitate the implementation of the government's "closed fishing season" policy; thus, consequently, helping to raise awareness on this national issue through the airwaves, on TV and over social media.

In this regard, a major influencer such as Kofi Kinaata was absolutely instrumental for promoting an important aspect of work for the Ghana Sustainable Fisheries Management project,<sup>20</sup> which was basically a five-year (2014-2019) USAID funded project to re-establish marine fisheries stocks through the promotion of responsible fishing practices and, in this case specifically, their mandate to "end the overfishing of key stocks important to local food security."

In the song's video, Kinaata appeals to various social and spiritual sensibilities, beginning by reminding everyone that it is God who created planet earth, including the ocean and its inhabitants that serve as important sources of food and livelihood opportunities. Yet, unfortunately, these divine resources are being drastically depleted, and their marine environment is also being destroyed—due to what Kinaata describes as selfish ways and a love of money that leads to the use of a range of illegal fishing practices. This has got to stop! he says. The exploitative use of dynamite, carbide, light and small fishing nets to overfish the waters: all of this must come to an end, alongside a "money is everything" attitude and the flagrant ignoring of traditional taboos such as not fishing on Tuesdays.<sup>21</sup> In conclusion, the heralding of a "closed fishing season", serves as a key mechanism for halting illegal fishing practices, thus ensuring the rejuvenation of existing fish stock.

<sup>18</sup> "Video: Kofi Kinaata advises against illegal fishing in new song".

<sup>19</sup> "Ghana Fishing Economy" *YouTube*.

<sup>20</sup> USAID "USAID/Ghana Sustainable Fisheries Management Project".

<sup>21</sup> Adjei and Sika-Bright, "Traditional Beliefs and Sea Fishing in Selected Coastal Communities in the Western Region of Ghana".

**FRAUD** When we asked the fisherfolk about whether there was still a fishing ban in August and their thoughts about it, they had the following to say:

**MR NII AYITEY SACKKEY** Yes there is, but not all comply by it. We, the local ones, we try our best to comply by it, because we hope that by the end of the ban, at least the little fishes might have grown for us to go and catch; but some of the *saikos*<sup>22</sup> are still on the waters. So whilst we don't go, they will be there and still catch and store [fish] on their vessels and later sell it to some of the fisherfolks that go to them.

**MR SOLOMON SAMPA** There was a ban on fishing for the month of August by the fisheries ministry. This they said will allow the smaller fishes to grow but instead the fishing trawlers were busy during that month fishing on our waters. During the ban, the local fishermen complied but the bigger vessels continued their fishing expedition on our waters and we complained to government but to no avail. This is because they tax some of these vessels and make monies from them I guess. "When you ask someone to fast, there should be food ready for the person after the fasting". If you ask someone to fast and you did not put food for them after the fast, that means the person will die after the fast. Fisher folks here these days have many of our children in school and so when you ask us to sit home for a month what do you expect us to eat. We have wives and children and our income comes from the fishing business. The politicians have huge vehicles and money and so do not care for the ordinary fisher folks. When they go to the bank, their account is full with money. They asked us to sit at home and go hungry with our families. This is stupidity.

**FRAUD** It was striking to hear the two-tiered system described by Nii Ayitey and Solomon that the fishing ban created. Could you explain Epifania in what way Kinaata's song speaks to the neo-colonial gold rush that you and the fisherfolk have identified in Ghanaian waters (and the Global South at large)?

**DR AMOO-ADARE** What this song highlights, for me, is the dire straits that a hyper capitalistic landscape produces, with its unevenness of

development and increased social inequality. In this case, Ghana's *apopofo*<sup>23</sup> have been driven into a desperate battle for income to be generated by any means necessary—to the extent that even their traditions are being flaunted. To cap it all, this proverbial late capitalism struggle, with more losers than winners, occurs within an extremely rigged competition for dominance over an ocean that has already been overrun by large-scale actors with extensive financial resources and greater political clout than *apopofo*. It is this hyper industrialization of many agricultural industries that has us now in the thick of a profit obsessed society, where big business squeezes almost everyone out of even their everyday subsistence practices. So, while huge profits are made through monopolization, privatization, extraction and other challenging practices, the environment suffers, other species become extinct, and the least amongst us fall into poverty, depression, hardship and in the worst circumstance, death by starvation or suicide.<sup>24</sup> And yet all of this is considered as our pathway towards civilization and progress.

**MR SOLOMON SAMPA** I started working as a fisherman 45 years ago in Accra. Yes, there is some shortage of fish in the system and fisher folks are complaining. Currently we only get smaller fishes and only a few bigger fishes such as Red fish and more. There are no fishes in our sea. You can come around here to witness the complaints from the fisher folks. It is all over the coastal and fishing towns across the country. Meanwhile, boats and vessels from Togo and Cote d'Ivoire [Ivory Coast] are plying our waters. Yes, the government notice this and so asked us to sit at home for a month so the fishes will grow. Very sad how our government encouraged us to sit at home for a month when they know our livelihood depends on fishing business to take care of our family. We just complained to the authorities if there is something they can do to assist us, but they did not care much because we're just fisher folks. The government should have given some monies to the fisher men. They rather gave the monies to our bosses who do not fish themselves, and to their families. They did not give us anything. This is one of the saddest [things] for the fishermen.

They told us that the fishing trawlers will also sit for a month, but they did not. The trawlers

<sup>23</sup> Apopofo designates artisanal fisherfolk.

<sup>24</sup> Sengupta, "Every day, 28 People Dependent on Farming Die by Suicide in India".

<sup>22</sup> Saiko usually designate large scale industrial fishing fleets and trawlers.

make life difficult for our fisher folks. These started after 1983, after Ghana went through hunger and starvation. Fishes were available for people who have no money for food to eat fish and be satisfied. There is no kenkey<sup>25</sup> available but fishes are common for the people. After 1983, they brought Chinese boats and trawlers to compete with us. Before the coming of these trawlers, there is enough fish for everyone and no scarcity of fish like it is today. Those days we go to Togo, Benin and Nigeria when there is shortage in our waters. Togo is a smaller country but have no fishing trawlers there. They rather clean them there and bring them to Ghana to fish. There are millions of such trawlers in our water. You should be on our beach this morning and you will notice there is no fish.

We have a strong challenge with fish on our waters, and the big ships and vessels bully us on the sea using horrible strategies such as the use of electric bulbs in fishing known as “light fishing”. They also harass those of us using the smaller and lighter boats. They use nets that have smaller holes and catch all fishes in their reach. They also use a bigger metal to destroy our nets when they pass by our fishing area. Sometimes the waves from their boats affect our smaller boats. No one to speak for the fisher folks here. Everything is politics these days.

**MR NII AYITEY SACKEY** In the past, we, the local fishermen, for some time now, we have realised foreign fisher folks (Chinese and some foreign fishermen from other places) have ruined our waters. So it makes it difficult for us to catch the kind of fishes we used to. In most cases we have some of these big vessels coming into our waters, you know we the local ones have smaller boats, smaller nets, they come with bigger ship, bigger nets and all kinds of devices to trap most of the fishes in the waters, that has been one of our challenges. For now there is little we can do—the local fisherman, some of these are in the hands of government—to put in some programmes and policies that would regulate how we fish on the waters here, at least if they can allow we the local ones, to go beyond where we used to go. If they can also reduce some of these big vessels that come into our waters, we think that it will have a balance for both of us.

**FRAUD** According to these testimonies, the ban is a performance of governmental intervention which is not helping the fisherfolk. One of the

reasons why it was important for us to speak to fisherfolk is also because, like Donna Haraway (and others), you, Epifania advocate the importance of anecdotal observations, as an expansion from scientifically certifiable evidences. The fisherfolks’ testimonies clearly put into question the validity of conservation measures such as maximum sustainable yield, which is something that we discussed in the last episode.<sup>26</sup> You have also discussed in other articles how un-thinking science may be useful (and even necessary!). So, with this in mind, how could this help us to strive for social and epistemic justice,<sup>27</sup> and what modes of creative practices of decolonial doing, knowing, loving and becoming might this engender?

**DR AMOO-ADARE** So, bearing this rigged landscape in mind, and if we are also to become *nnipa ampa*—a Twi term that I like because it denotes the idea of someone being a truly humane being—then our task is two-fold. First, we have the grander—and perhaps even impossible—task of imagining an alternative way of being on this blue-green planet. More specifically, there is now an urgent need to seek new ways of becoming consciously human; to identify new modes of being that would certainly require of us a paradigm shift from ME to WE consciousness;<sup>28</sup> to adhere to differing cosmologies and epistemologies that demand of us a shift away from the human-nature split into other more relational ontologies, i.e., ones which do not see the environment and other species as fodder for our very peculiar, skewed and flawed notions of progress.

In other words, we must engage in what critical educator Paulo Freire described as “conscious practical work”.<sup>29</sup> This being for our imminent delinking from the *colonial matrix of power*, a rather apt concept derived by Anibal Quijano<sup>30</sup> to elucidate a very long and tragic colonial history, with continuous and ongoing effects. Delinking must result in definitive moves towards the reconstitution of many *worlds otherwise*.<sup>31</sup> After all, our ultimate imperative is to enable social and cognitive justice the world over.

At the same time, we have the not so mundane second task, which is to ensure that the

<sup>26</sup> Samson and Gallardo, “Liam Campling: Terraqueous Territoriality.”

<sup>27</sup> Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*.

<sup>28</sup> Keating, “Transforming status-quo stories”.

<sup>29</sup> Freire, “The Importance of the Act of Reading”, p. 144.

<sup>30</sup> Quijano, “Coloniality of Power”.

<sup>31</sup> Escobar, “Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise”.

<sup>25</sup> Kenkey is a local fish-based stew dish with corn.

least amongst us are also able to obtain a basic and decent standard of living, within the very system that we wish to dismantle totally. In effect, we are tasked with rebuilding the Titanic, while we are in a guaranteed process of also drowning with it at sea.

These two scopes of work are indeed complex, complicated and contradictory tasks that require from us a form of *border consciousness*;<sup>32</sup> that is, an ability to dwell in the discomfort of in-betweens, to reside in the risk of the certain ambiguity that there are in fact many unknown unknowns waiting for us within the precarious safety of life as usual. A clear example of this is our current post-Covid predicament, within which conditions change as rapidly as our days disappear in anxiety, fear and a paradoxically busy kind of wait-and-see. We are at a crossroads, literally and figuratively. We are on a precarious perch between life and death, an intersection that even Èṣù—the Yoruba keeper of the crossroads,<sup>33</sup> might very well shy away from. We are caught between the comfort of our tried, tested and failing past ways and the vast uncertainty of this other world that has arrived largely without our consent, but certainly all because of our stubborn adherence to years of exploitative business-as-usual.

It is a threshold such as this (a veritable liminal space) that requires of us much unlearning, plus what I would describe as an (un)thinking of science as we know it. By this I refer to the need to move beyond fixed “either/or” binary modes of being into more open-ended “both/and”<sup>34</sup> relational ways of becoming. In my nascent conceptualization of just one example of a way forward, I would argue that this brave new world of ours needs many forays into the creation of art and beauty; into an embracing of healing, dreaming and other regenerative modes of being; into a daily practice of meditation, gratitude and prayerfulness; into constant cycles of affirmation and visioning towards conscious manifestation; into enabling the communal to preside over intense privatization; into “I do not know” taking precedence over “I know”; into honouring more cyclical modes of simple existence, as opposed to linear ideas of continuous growth and expansion (i.e., our supposed progress); into sensing our way deeper into (and through) the many transformations this post-Covid predicament brings, more so than trying to quickly think our way out of it; into imagining a world in which not everyone works their way up

to become a senior administrator, as it appears that we have managed much of this planet into oblivion—while simultaneously squeezing out the joy in leading an unambitious and ordinary life; plus ultimately, into trusting that it is now very much time to work toward making the impossible (other world) possible—particularly when we have a global crisis that threatens to instantly dismantle the security of what counts as normal.

We will find that there are many clues, mechanisms, tools, modalities, perspectives, theories, philosophies, practises, etc. for enabling this *art of (un)thinking*:<sup>35</sup> many of them can be found within radical endeavours such as decolonial feminism, anarchist geographies, critical pedagogy, Indigenous knowledges, wisdom traditions, and so on. In fact, there may well be one too many options, especially for a world that is still obsessed with developing singular proofs of concept for the purpose of scaling up and other such formations of monopolies, generalizations, homogenizations, and heaven forbid, even grand narratives. But this is exactly what we need right now: a pluriverse of alternatives that are also, somehow, equally yoked in value—as well as being available for each-and-every one of our particular (individual and collective) needs to know, do, love and fully become as we so envision.

**FRAUD** Thank you Epifania, for this inspiring call to action, namely for the communal over privatisation, and honouring cyclical modes of existence over continuous growth, and thank you once more to Nii Ayitey Sackey and Solomon Sampa for entrusting us with their testimonies.

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<sup>32</sup> Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/ La Frontera*.

<sup>33</sup> “Eshu.” *Wikipedia*. An orisha also known as Exu, Elegguá or Papa Legba in the African Diaspora.

<sup>34</sup> Keating, *Transformation Now!*, p. 225.

<sup>35</sup> Amoo-Adare, “The Art of (Un)Thinking”.

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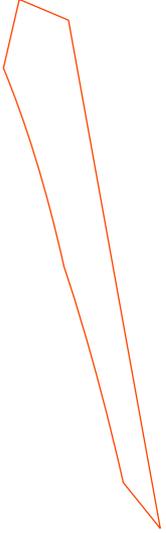
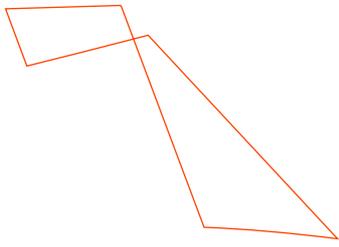
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**DR. EPIFANIA AKOSUA AMOO-ADARE** is an independent scholar and founder of Biraa Creative Initiative (BCI) Ltd, a social enterprise that seeks collaborations with diverse stakeholders to engage in (un)learning, research, storytelling and advocacy, so as to “transform how we become and think of our development for a just and shared future.” She has a Ph.D. in Education from UCLA and is also a RIBA part II qualified architect, with over 25 years of experience working within the fields of education, international development and social housing in countries like Afghanistan, Germany, Georgia, Ghana, Qatar, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Her current scholarly focus is on what she describes as the “art of unthinking”; that is, a call for a paradigm shift in how we view, study and engage in knowledge-making about this world for our pluriversal and entangled becoming. Additionally, she is deeply interested in topics to do with the creative arts, critical spatial literacy, epistemology, feminism(s), decoloniality, and spirituality.

**FRAUD** (Audrey Samson & Francisco Gallardo) is a London-based duo of artist/researchers which develop modes of art-led enquiry that examine the extractive gaze of the European Union’s institutions and policies. Through their practice, FRAUD cultivate critical spatial literacy and cosmogony building. [@la\\_fraud](#)

**FRANCISCA ROSEIRO** is a multidisciplinary designer, keen on using graphic design as a methodological lens to explore social-political and contemporary matters. 



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