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Emigrants and Emigration States in Historical Perspective

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Abstract: International migration from poorer to richer states gives emigrants resources that they can use to exercise leverage over home states, but also leaves them vulnerable to exploitation and discrimination in host states, conditions that activate interventions by emigration states seeking to influence and protect nationals abroad. This paper traces the changing patterns of interaction between emigrants and emigration states over the past century and a half. Many of the underlying incentives for emigration state intervention have remained stable, yielding similar state responses over this entire period. By contrast, political changes in emigration states have altered the motivations of emigrants seeking to engage with the states and people left behind. Moreover, interactions between emigrants and emigration states are increasingly affected by international organizations and diffusion processes which, while present in earlier periods, lacked the influence exercised today.

To say international migration is to say cross-border connections: the ties linking sending and receiving countries are a salient aspect of the migration experience, appearing during present as well as past eras of migration. Indeed, this theme lies at the heart of research on immigrant transnationalism, a subject that has generated a vast literature over the past twenty-five years..

Although the concept of transnationalism has roots in a variety of sources, its application to the study of migration dates from a conference organized in 1990 by the anthropologists Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Christina Blanc-Szanton (Glick Schiller et al. 1992). The development of social fields linking *particular* sending and destination countries, they argued, represented a decisive break with the past. Contrary to historical patterns and received social science notions, neither settlement nor the severing of home countries ties was inevitable. In the contemporary age of migration, rather, “transmigrants ...maintain, build, and reinforce multiple

linkages with their countries of origins.” In so doing, the long-distance movers of the contemporary age expanded the range of “home” to encompass both “here” and “there,” a change so fundamental that entirely new conceptualizations were required. “Transnationalism” became the label used for identifying the social connections between receiving and sending countries and “transmigrants” denoted the people who forged those ties and kept them alive.

However, right from the start the historians were there to say that there was nothing, or at least, not much that was new under the sun. Although the social scientists typically accepted the dictionary definition of immigration, as displacement from one country with the goal of settling in another, the historians knew better. They reminded their colleagues that the last era of mass migration was characterized by a flood of letters crossing the Atlantic, by the massive sending of remittances, and by mobilization among the emigrants in favor of the country that they had abandoned, in sum, a host of similarities resembling the mass migrations of today (Waldinger, 2008).

For the most part, however, those researchers who have studied historical aspects of transnationalism have focused on the type of everyday activities just noted above (Foner, 2005; Morawska, 2005). By contrast, many fewer have paid attention to emigrants’ political engagements and still fewer to the efforts made by emigration states to maintain ties with citizens living abroad. Consequently, it is to this question that this paper will turn tracing, in a schematic fashion, the interactions between emigrants and emigration states from the middle of the 19th century until today. As I will try to demonstrate in the pages to follow, this history highlights two aspects of phenomenon: similarities *and* differences. Because the situations encountered by migrants tend to resemble one another, emigrants as well as emigration states have tended to respond in similar ways. On the other hand, the political order, in both states of

immigration and *emigration* has changed, reducing the level of transnational conflict and modifying the goals pursued by the migrants and thereby modifying the dynamic between emigrants and emigration states.

Emigration policy and emigrant politics: the underlying causes

The people moving across borders are both immigrants *and* emigrants, retaining ties to the people and places left behind even while putting down roots in the place where they live. What can be understood as a zone of inter-societal convergence – labeled the “transnational social field” by the scholars of transnationalism – results from the *emigrants’* own survival strategy. The newcomers turn to one another for help in order to solve the everyday problems of migration: how to move from old home to new; how to find a job and settle down; how to pick up the skills needed to manage in their new world. However, as *immigrants* searching for a better life the new arrivals also adapt to the new environment and adopt the skills it demands. While over the long-term, these changes complicate their capacity to maintain cross-border connections, in the short to medium term, they increase the emigrants’ capacity to help out their significant others still living in the home society. Because cross-border connections facilitate additional migration as well as an infrastructure facilitating cross-border ties, the transplantation of the home country society onto receiving states turns *alien* territory into a *familiar* environment, providing the means by which migrants can sustain identities as home state *nationals*, even while living on *foreign* soil.

This emphasis on the social processes of migration, and the cross-border links that it forges, leaves out the political dimension. The inherently political character of population movements across boundaries yields sending society impacts that paradoxically stem from the very boundedness of the new environment. In a world characterized by *inter*-state economic

inequalities, simply moving from a poor(er) to a rich(er) political unit gives migrants access to the wealth contained within that new state. As those resources normally do *not* spillover to the country of origin, migrants quickly outdistance their compatriots still at home.

Typically, the emigrants' cross-border involvements are strictly social and highly particularistic, directed at their kin and no one else. However, private actions undertaken *abroad* have profoundly public consequences *at home*, as demonstrated by the flow of migrant remittances traveling from rich to poor countries, now as in previous eras of mass migration.

Because the same movements of population that link societies of origin to societies of destination lead the migrants to move into a new political jurisdiction, international migrations tend to change migrants' political behavior, with corresponding consequences in the society of emigration. Because the immigrants enjoy a core set of rights, political conditions in the countries of destination encourage the development of social movements, built where the migrants reside, but designed to produce change in the societies from which they departed. Moreover, once the migrants have crossed the border, sending states can no longer make use of coercion, whether to extract a portion of the new resources that the emigrants have accessed as a result of living abroad or to ensure that the migrants conform to the political expectations that sending state elites prefer. Hence, in residing abroad, migrants acquire the capacity to exercise political influence in the state where they no longer live.

Although migration is good for the migrants, the newcomers comprise a population at risk. As people living in a foreign country, they are vulnerable, in danger of losing their way; as aliens, lacking citizenship status, their rights are limited and their acceptance uncertain.

This mixture of resources and vulnerabilities triggers the interventions of sending states. On the one hand, they extend their presence abroad in order to protect nationals vulnerable to

exploitation and coercion by receiving states and their nationals. On the other hand, the states of emigration use the one asset that they retain, that is, the capacity to influence nationals, whether to gain access to the rights that the migrants have obtained, keep hold of their loyalty, or influence their political behavior.

The reaction of emigration states

Surveying emigration policy over the past century and a half underlines the similarities across this entire time period. At the beginning of the last century, emigration states sought to remain in contact with the emigrants even as the geographic diffusion of populations produced a deterritorialized conception of the nation, whether understood as *Auslandsdeutsche* or *italiani nel mondo*. Often, nationals abroad were described as if they belonged to a political unit of the state of origin, as signaled by those Polish nationalists who thought of Polish America (Polonia) as the fourth district of Poland (Gabaccia et al in Green and Weil: 77), thus prefiguring similar conceptions of today, for example, the idea of a “fifteenth district” to characterize Salvadorans abroad or the “Quinto Suyu” referring to the Peruvian diaspora (Berg and Tamagno, 2006). Similarly, contemporary efforts to reinforce both home country national identity and links to the country origin, undertaken by a governmental agency – such as *El Instituto de los Mexicanos al Extranjero* – have their precedents among the earlier emigration states that provided schools, library and scholarships in order to preserve the languages and cultural identities of those nationals and their descendants who found themselves beyond state boundaries.

As demonstrated by the historian Mark Choate in a remarkable book entitled *Emigrant Nation* (2009), the emigration policy developed by Italy during the last era of mass migration provides a key for understanding the conditions that lead states to connect with their emigrants as well as a striking resemblance to the models undertaken by the sending states of our times. At

the turn of the last century, Italy's pursuit of an emigration policy led to a considerable expansion of its consular infrastructure. Moreover, the Italian state did not lose sight of its emigrants, as the majority traveled with passports. Those documents also provided the bridge between the consuls and the emigrants as well as the means by which the consulates could keep the emigrants under surveillance. Thus the Italian consular corps compiled information on the overseas Italians, a task, which in 1901, produced a nine volume governmental report on emigration and the colonies, providing detailed information on conditions among the emigrants population. Where the consulates could not directly connect with the emigrants – for example, at Ellis Island in the port of New York where the immigrants initially disembarked and where the U.S. government forbade direct consular ties with the new arrivals – the consulate established relationships with Catholic, Socialist, and Protestant charities, in order to inform the emigrants of the services that the emigrants could expect at the Italian consulate, which was located close to the place where the emigrants would land in Manhattan (Choate, 2007).

Turning now to the contemporary situation, an examination of the policies undertaken by Mexico in order to maintain ties to the 11 million Mexican emigrants who live in the United States provides an example remarkably similar to the Italian experience of the turn of the last century. Like Italy, Mexico has established a vast consular infrastructure with 56 consulates throughout the United States and Canada. As Mexican emigrants have dispersed throughout the United States, moving beyond the traditional concentration in the southwest, the consular infrastructure has followed them, as indicated by the recent opening of a consulate in Alaska, as far from the Mexican border as one can go. Although the consulates occupy a fixed geographic space, usually in large cities, the ministry of foreign affairs has now added an additional service, that of the traveling consulate, which allows officials to provide assistance to emigrants who

have settled in rural areas or in small and medium-sized towns far from the large urban centers (Laglagaron, 2010).

Document provision is everywhere one of the means by which emigration states connect with emigrants abroad. Nonetheless, in the aftermath of the attack of September 11, Mexican immigrants living in the United States – many without authorization – found that demands for identity documents suddenly intensified. Under these circumstances, a consular identity card long provided by Mexican consulates took on new importance. Millions of Mexican immigrants flocked to the consulates in search of this identity card, which they could then use for a variety of purposes for which an identity document was required, including opening a bank account t, which in turn, lowered the cost of sending remittances. For Mexico, providing the consular card provided additional benefits, beyond those of demonstrating to citizens abroad that the home state still card: Mexico gained the capacity to follow a population that would otherwise have disappeared from its statistical registers. Visits to the consulates also gave Mexican officials the opportunity to intensify its efforts to connect with and influence grassroots emigrant activists. In turn, Mexico encouraged these leaders to promote the sending of collective remittances, funds gathered by migrants in the United States for investment in communities at home, thus providing a subsidy to a sending state government that could not, or perhaps would not, take care of the needs of its people (Waldinger, 2014).

A century ago, the emigration policy undertaken by Italy was a pioneering effort with few parallels, with the exception of Japan, another emigration state concerned with the fate of its emigrants in the Americas and especially in the United States. That those efforts were limited to Japan and Italy is hardly surprising, as both were nation states seeking to maintain the loyalty of nationals, regardless of where the latter were to be found, an objective of little importance for the

multi-ethnic empires of the times, whether the Romanov, Hapsburg, or Ottoman, from which the great majority of emigrants stemmed.

That Mexican emigration policy should so closely resemble the earlier Italian experience cannot be attributed to imitation, as the architects of Mexico's policy had no or little awareness of this historical precedent. Rather the resemblance results from the fact that mass emigration confronted each state with a similar problem, in turn, producing a similar reaction. But for a variety of reasons, this model of parallel action, without planning or coordination, is less and less common. On the one hand, several of the emigration states of today have sought to diffuse the lessons learned from their own experience to other emigration states. In addition, emigration policy has become a matter of interest for a range of entities, whether belonging to the world of international organizations, such as the World Bank or the International Organization of Migration or the receiving state agencies charged with aiding the developing states of the world. All these actors realize that the transplantation of migrants in a rich country is a stroke of good, as long as the expatriates don't cut the ties connecting them to the country of origin and continue to channel their money and resources back home, so as to spur development in the very places that the emigrants abandoned. Consequently, those bureaucrats in sending state agencies interested in these possibilities can now make use of a diaspora handbook, published by the Global Forum on Migration and Development (Agunias and Newland, 2012). According to the authors of this Handbook, the fundamental question confronting political leaders in the countries of emigration is not that of knowing whether the diasporas have the capacity to help the country of origin, but rather that of identifying the ways in which diasporas can furnish aid and how best to identify the policies and programs that could promote such ties. Moreover, the implementation of such policies is now the expectation of the international aid agencies, and

hence not to be ignored by the states of emigration. As none of these factors were important at the turn of the last century, one can say that the transition from innovation to imitation is one of the central changes involved in the long-term relationship between emigration states and emigrants.

Emigrant politics

The political boundaries separating “here” from “there” diminish constraints impinging on migrant activists and increase their resources. On the one hand, residence in a different political jurisdiction provides the migrants with political protection against home state interests that might seek to control them. On the other hand, access to more abundant economic resources combined with greater political freedom generates political capacity not possessed before.

Consequently, entry into a foreign political environment can trigger aggressive forms of long-distance nationalism. A common outcome is the *exo-polity* (Dufoix, 2003) in which emigrants challenge the home state. In some cases, this involves *state-seeking* nationalism targeted at an existing multi-ethnic state, in which the goal is that of creating a state for a “people” that doesn’t yet have one. Other cases entail *regime-changing* mobilization, undertaken with no thought of changing the territorial order but rather directed at changing the government of an existing state.

That the environment encountered abroad proves so protected explains why emigrant politics has so repeatedly and consistently taken these two forms. The Irish comprise the paradigmatic case of state-seeking nationalism: no sooner did they escape from the colony that England had established on the Emerald Isle, than they used their new refuge as a platform for encouraging revolt in the home they had left behind, continuing to do so up until relatively recent times. Emigrants in the United States founded the first two major Irish nationalist organizations,

which, in one form or another, continued to existence until Ireland gained independence in 1922. From the safety of the United States, Irish nationalists raised the money needed to buy arms and to a lesser, though not insignificant extent, provided the men needed to use those weapons, efforts that played an important role in the unsuccessful, armed insurrection of 1867 and the later, ultimately successful 1916 Easter Rebellion in Dublin which culminated in independence six years later (Hanagan, 1999).

The Irish cut a path that many subsequent long distance nationalists followed. In the late 19th century, emigration from the Hapsburg and Russian empires gave birth to nationalist movements among Poles, Slovaks, Czechs, Armenians and other nationalities living in the United States. Perhaps less well known, but no less revealing was the very similar development occurring among Punjabi immigrants in the United States on the eve of World War I, when the Pacific Coast Hindustan Association was converted into the Ghadar Party, which quickly gained support from Indian expatriates in the United States, Canada, and Asia. The Ghadar Party's newspaper as well as its pamphlets were disseminated throughout the world, including Japan, China, Hong Kong, Burma and the Philippines. And it was soon joined by other U.S. based organizations, including the India Home Rule League based in New York, which advocated "home rule" for India and the [Friends of Freedom for India](#), which sought "to maintain the right of asylum for political refugees from India" and "to present the case for the independence of India." Incidentally, all three groups – the Ghadar Party, the I.H.R.L., and the F.F.I. – enjoyed support from Irish nationalists, and published articles from Irish/Irish-American supporters (Ramnath, 2005).

In the early twentieth century, these Punjabi emigrants sought to establish a single, multi-ethnic state for all Indians living under the British Raj. By contrast, conditions during the

last quarter of the 20th century spurred emigrant Punjabis towards separatism. Ethnicizing experiences in destination countries – often produced by controversies related to the wearing of the turban – reminded the emigres of their lack of a national state, leading the émigrés toward a de-Indianized, separatist, Sikh orientation. At home, transformations in the Punjab produced by the Green revolution produced greater Sikh radicalism; in the mid-1980s, a group of Sikh radicals occupied the holiest Sikh shrine, which in turned triggered a brutal intervention by the Indian Army. In October 1984, two Sikh guards assassinated Indira Gandhi, producing anti-Sikh riots through the subcontinent. The result, both in India and in the diaspora, was a militant effort to create a separate state – Khalistan – for the Sikhs. While over time, Sikh leaders in the Punjab reached a modus vivendi with Indian authorities, nationalist sentiment in the diaspora remained strong, leading to divergence between Sikh leaders still in the subcontinent and those abroad (Tatla, 2010).

Thus in this case, emigrants’ substantive goals changed over the course of the 20th century, but the preconditions of independent political action remained much the same: with the home state unable to exercise repression abroad, the migrants enjoyed greater opportunities for political action, facilitated by the greater material resources found in their new home.

In contrast to the state-seeking nationalists, wanting to break-up an existing state for a nation lacking a political unit for its own, regime changing nationalists don’t aspire to a change in political geography but rather to a transformation in the nature of the regime. But as shown by the experience of Turkish guestworker migration to western Europe, the conditions facilitating the mobilization of state-seeking nationalism serve equally well to trigger regime changing nationalism. Migration to the west allowed for mobilization of all sorts of political currents outlawed in Turkey. Some, as among the Kurds or the Alevis, entailed state-seeking

nationalism; others, whether on the right, as among the Grey Wolves, or on the left, among a range of organizations, sought to transform the nature of the regime, without any thought of concessions to ethnic or religious minorities (Ogelman, 2003).

Historically, emigrant politics took yet another form: proletarian internationalism. From the mid-19th century on through the third quarter of the 20th century, no small proportion of the international movers understood themselves to be “workers of the world.” So they were also accepted – as shown by the role of migrants in transmitting laborist, socialist, or anarchist ideas from one national setting from another, not to speak of their simultaneous or successive participation in several national movements. As the solidarities generated by the migration process often provided the underpinning for labor movements of various kinds, labor internationalism and home-country allegiances continued to prove compatible well through the first part of the 20th century (Hobsbawm, 1988; Buhle and Georgakas, 1996). Of course, some immigrant radicals – like the anarchists -- abhorred nationalism and renounced any home-country allegiance. But for a broad variety of reasons, having to do with the commonalities and barriers put in place by language, as well as the ways in which migrant social networks enveloped the radicals along with the rank and file, the labor internationalists were not rootless cosmopolitans. Rather, to borrow the felicitous phrase of Sidney Tarrow (2005), they comprised “embedded cosmopolitans,” oriented toward humanity and yet part and parcel of immigrant populations delimited by language, national origins, and sometimes even, religion. Case in point is Emma Goldman, an anarchist through and through, but whose principal political community was comprised of other Russian Jewish radicals with whom she communicated in the common lingua franca of Yiddish.

However, proletarian internationalism is no more, having been universally replaced nationalism as the ideal informing emigrants' imagined community. The only remaining approximation of the earlier proletarian transnationalism is to be found among today's Islamic internationalists for whom the relevant imagined community is not a particular people in a particular part of the world, but rather the *umma*, found above and beyond place (Dalacoura, 2002).

While emigration continues to present conditions favorable to emigrant political mobilization, politically oriented emigrants confront a different world. The multi-ethnic empires of the past are gone. While the Hapsburgs and the Romanovs disappeared a hundred years ago, the Soviet empire, with its greatly improved repressive capacity, kept restive nationalities in place. But once that empire collapsed, nationalist movements, aided by diasporas in the west, quickly resurfaced. However, Yugoslavia could only be dismembered once; twenty years after the fall of communism, the map of eastern Europe and the former Soviet lands seems a good deal more stable, though nationalist fires still burn strong in Armenia and Chechnya. While the United Nations continues to expand – having admitted its 193 member, South Sudan in 2011 – the pace of growth has significantly declined since the new millennium. And any further increase in the number of nations seems more likely to come from the peaceful break-up of long-established nations, like Belgium, Spain or the UK, as opposed to the more violent separatist efforts assisted by diasporas abroad.

Moreover, democracy has replaced the dictatorships that emigrants repeatedly sought to overthrow. Guestworker migration to western Europe was a boon to Spaniards opposing Franco, Greek refugees from the Generals, and Portuguese seeking to get rid of Caetano (Miller, 1981).

But those dictators are long gone as are almost all of their counterparts in Latin America, with the notable exception of the Castro brothers in Cuba.

Furthermore, conditions in the societies of reception are increasingly hostile to forms of long-distance nationalism that might promote conflict or violence in the home societies. Case in point, the Irish-American lobby, whose relationship to Irish Republicans in Northern Ireland turned around after 9/11/2001. Whereas Irish American politicians had long turned a blind eye to the violent tactics pursued by at least some Republican factions in Northern Ireland, that tolerance vanished along with the twin towers. The most ardent Irish Republicans found an increasingly chilly welcome, whether in the White House, the Congress, or among corporate chieftains of Irish descent. Nor were rank and file Irish immigrants exempt from the security-driven changes in migration control policies: non-citizen Irish immigrants – especially, but not only the undocumented – worried about their ability to remain in the United States; Irish American organizations viewed the Patriot Act as “potentially harmful to the interests of the Irish community across the United States (Cochrane, 2007: 227).

For all of these reasons, long-distance, emigrant politics increasingly focuses on the goal of gaining rights, formal membership, and opportunities to participate, even while remaining abroad. As of today, over 100 countries allow emigrants to vote. Though important to emigrant activists, emigrant voting is a fundamentally symbolic activity, since there is relatively little that emigrant states can do for emigrants. Consequently, expatriate voting appeals to a relatively small elite, which is why participation rates are generally depressed. As noted in *Voting from Abroad* (Ellis et al. 2007:31), “rates of registration and turnout among external voters are almost always lower than they are in-country,” a generalization that holds true in long established systems with well-known rules of the game, such as France’s or Sweden’s, or newer systems,

such as those sprouting elsewhere in Latin America. The pattern holds even when the expatriate electoral system is relatively friendly – as demonstrated in the 2004 election for President of the Dominican Republic, when migrants cast less than 1% of votes (Itzigsohn and Villacres 2008: 672)..

On the other hand, the extraterritorial nature of expatriate voting entails the non-trivial costs of establishing an infrastructure *de novo*, in a place where the price of doing business exceeds the comparable levels found at home. As noted by the *Handbook on Voting from Abroad*, “External voting processes involve logistical arrangements that often cost more per voter than elections organized in the home country (Ellis and Wall, 2007: 262)”. Mexico’s initial experiment in expatriate voting was indeed highly costly, involving an expenditure of \$27.7 million, or \$1200 per expatriate vote cast (Ellis and Wall, 2007: 266). While start-up operations are always expensive, other experiences, such as Canada’s, where the costs entailed in each expatriate voters are four times those disbursed for in-country votes, demonstrate that external voting imposes significant financial demands (Lesage, 1998). And whereas Canada and other developed states allowing external voting are rich countries whose expatriates live abroad under conditions comparable to those at home, the same does not hold for the emigration countries of the developing world. Moreover, efforts by Mexico and other developing countries to invest in infrastructures facilitating emigrant voting effectively reallocate resources from more deprived stay-at-homes to more prosperous migrants, living in more secure societies with more abundant public goods.

Conclusion

Almost a quarter of a century ago, the founders of the transnational perspective insisted on a fundamental gap between the migrations of today and those of the past. But that hypothesis

took for granted what needed to be explained, namely, periodization, as none of the proponents of this perspective ever indicated where the boundary between the “past” and the “present” was to be found. As suggested by the history of the migrations discussed in this paper, that boundary is difficult to find. Emigration from Italy began in the late 19th century to continue until the middle of the 1970s; even today, the ties between Italy and the descendants of Italian immigrants remain important, especially in Latin America. The same continuity characterizes Mexican migration, which dates from the beginning of the twentieth century and has persisted to our times.

The dangers to avoid are those of saying that nothing has changed – as might the historians – as well as those of saying that the contemporary situation has no parallel in the past – as the social scientists are apt to contend. As I have noted, continuities in the interaction between emigrants and emigration states abound. Nonetheless, those relationships have also evolved. While the policies that the scholars now describe as “diaspora engagement” prove recurrent, that involvement has not been constant; instead it has often changed, both in intensity and in content. The paper similarly shows that emigrants consistently sought to transform political conditions in the homelands that they had left behind. Yet their capacity to do so varied from one time to another, affected both by long-lasting developments, such as the spread of democracy, as well as short-term, unpredictable events, such as changes in the relationships between sending and receiving states or international relations, more generally.

Yet there is one fundamental change not noticed in the pages above: namely the fact that the very same actors whom the researchers study pay attention to the results of that very same research, a statement that certainly could not apply to the migrations of a century ago. Thus, there is another danger to avoid: that of an infatuation with diasporas and transnationalism, a

tendency all too marked among the scholars who have worked in this field. While one never wants to advise cynicism, there is nonetheless a harsh reality that has to be noted: in engaging with diasporas, the developed countries seek to encourage the emigrants to pay for the costs of development in the countries that the developed world has abandoned. For their part, emigrant political activists are not beyond reproach: comprising a small, sometimes, tiny proportion of the emigrant population, they often present themselves as members of the community left behind without actually understanding the needs of the people living in the places that the emigrants, have abandoned. As emigration states, emigrant activists, and development agencies all draw lessons from scholarly research, it is time for the researchers to pay closer attention to their own attitudes toward the phenomenon in question. Since researchers cannot control the activities of international organizations producing diaspora handbooks for use by emigration states and development agencies, a distant and more skeptical attitude would be better, both for scholars and for those of their readers who find themselves in the same world that the researchers study.

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