

## The convivial self and the fear of anger amongst the Airo-Pai of Amazonian Peru

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To outsiders, daily life in the kindred-based Airo-Pai<sup>1</sup> community of Huajoya provides a striking example of conviviality in action. People visit one another freely, bringing gifts of food at any time of the day. Neighbours work side-by-side, discussing their dreams, sharing decisions and opinions, chatting and laughing. Heavy work, such as building gardens and houses, is done communally with the help of large amounts of manioc beer and good humour. One soon realises, however, that such harmony is not automatic, but actively fostered by each person. The Airo-Pai are extremely sensitive to conflict and indeed they think of themselves as people who are, as they say, easily inclined to anger. Achieving a highly desired state of communal well-being, which they describe as 'living well', is only possible if men and women learn to fear both their own and other people's anger (cf. Kidd, Lagrou, Overing, Rosengren, Santos-Granero, this volume).

Taking my cue from the anthropological study of 'emotion talk' and its contextualisation within social and embodied practices (e.g. Rosaldo 1980; Lutz and Abu-Lughod 1990; Csordas 1994; Leavitt 1996), I relate Airo-Pai anger talk to daily behaviour and ethnopsychology, especially as manifested in the indigenous approach to child rearing. Following Overing (1985, 1988) and Howell (1988), I place my discussion of the social self within the wider framework of the cosmology and ideas about humankind.

The main thesis of this chapter is that, for the Airo-Pai, 'anger' (*goapëine*) is not solely an emotional state, but a transformational force of key sociological and cosmological significance. It is synonymous with death and acts as an operator of radical alterity. It is also the main drive behind sorcery (cf. Smith 1977; Overing 1985; Ellis 1997; see also Rivière, this volume). So powerful are the meanings and bodily experiences attached to anger, that it is said to dehumanise people and transform their perception of reality so as to make them into murderers. An angry person quite simply is not a true person or a kinsman, but an enemy, a monster, a predator who fails to recognise his or her own kind and therefore treats them as though they were prey. Although amoral *par excellence*, anger is inherently interactional. It is said to be provoked by other people's behaviour and to spread easily from

person to person, causing each other anger (cf. Kidd, Overing, Rosengren, this volume). One of the main preoccupations of all adults, therefore, is to teach their children to 'live well' like themselves, fearing and avoiding anger. This is the source of their daily conviviality.

### The fear of anger

That man has no heart. He has been badly brought up. He is angry without purpose. Against his own kinsfolk he is angry without purpose.

These are typical words said by Airo-Pai men and women to vent their exasperation with troublesome kinsfolk. Augusto,<sup>2</sup> a father of four married to a non-Airo-Pai, was often the object of such reproaches. As a child, he was taken away from his people and brought up to be a servant by a Spanish-speaking trader in forest products. His loud bossy manners meant that he was generally disliked. Yet people put up with his offensive behaviour with astonishing detachment and kept away from him when he was in a bad mood.

'How could he behave well now that he is grown up if he did not learn as a child?', explained Cornea to me. '*Cadaye*', she exclaimed thinking about him. She followed her words with a typical facial expression, as though she had eaten something very sour. *Cadaye* is a complex feeling which is experienced physically and expressed in words meaning fear, shame, shyness and repugnance. In Spanish, the Airo-Pai translate it as 'fear' (*miedo*). In general, they uttered the word '*cadaye*' whenever they were confronted with culturally inappropriate behaviour and anything which may generate an angry response in themselves or others.

Amongst relatives, anger is always said to be in vain or purposeless, even when one allegedly has a good reason to be upset. This is built into the language. The prefix *goa-*, meaning 'without purpose' and 'bad' (Johnson and Wheeler 1987: 113), is added to the verb 'to be angry' (*pëine*) to form the typical expression, 'to be angry without purpose' (*goapëine*). An angry person is one who says: 'I want to kill' (*huasi'i*), and 'mortal enemies' (*pëinequë*) are literally described as 'the angered ones'. A murderous desire defines their cultural understanding of enmity. By contrast, the desire to 'live well' (*deoye paiye*) defines kinship. No matter the circumstances, amongst people who regard themselves as relatives and truly human, anger is always purposeless and amoral.

Anger, however, is conceived as inherent to social existence, and even individuals fully brought up in the Airo-Pai ways are held to be fallible. In most cases, people are willing to accept their own and other people's failings and make explicit efforts to overcome their grievances. Nevertheless, small outbursts of exasperation towards male and female kin are quite common amongst individuals of all ages and made manifest in verbal complaints.

When gifts of food are not reciprocated, for instance, women complain to their children and close relatives – but very rarely to the offender in person. They speak in a high-pitched voice, only audible to the people standing next to them. Typically, they use the causal voice (cf. Johnson and Wheeler, op. cit., p. 82; also Kidd, this volume) as follows: 'She causes me to be angry without purpose. I always give her meat stews and now she has prepared a whole pot and given me nothing.' Anger is conceived as emerging from social interaction and being provoked by others. For this reason, people are always aware that they may even involuntarily impinge upon and provoke others (cf. Ellis, op. cit., p. 122). Complaints are usually very short-lived because people tend to quickly remind themselves of the need to fear anger and utter a typical expression as follows: '*Cadaye*. I am angry without purpose. I should better not be angry.' As they say these words, they characteristically nod and smile, as if to chase away bad and inappropriate feelings.

Such an explicit 'emotion talk' and bodily feelings are revealing of how community members deal with culturally defined expressions and psychic states in the process of maintaining conviviality (cf. Lutz and Abu-Lughod 1990; Leavitt 1996). Although a person's anger is caused by others, he or she is responsible for controlling it once it is felt. The management of emotional life is articulated upon key formulaic expressions which are used, first, to recognise, and then, to disperse feelings of upset. Rather than to search for explanations, apologies or compensation from others, the Airo-Pai overcome their own feelings by verbally reminding themselves, and the others around them, that anger means death. The psychic act of purposefully chasing away angry feelings is expressed physically by nodding the head and changing one's facial expression into a smile. People who fail to do so are said to be badly brought up. According to Airo-Pai social philosophy, the good outcome of daily life rests on having learned culturally appropriate dispositions throughout childhood. Ultimately, as elsewhere in Amazonia, upbringing is the cornerstone of personhood and kinship.

### Learning fear and thought

The Airo-Pai notion of 'upbringing' (*ai deoye*) means 'transforming into the beautiful and good' (cf. Kidd and Lagrou, this volume). As a child is brought up, he or she is said 'to learn how to think' and acquire a *joyo*, a concept which the Airo-Pai translate in Spanish as 'heart' – although this differs from the physical organ. The 'heart' is the centre of one's 'thoughts' (*cuatsaye*), which are understood as both conceptual and emotional meanings rooted in bodily experience. The 'heart' is the container of one's personal memories and social knowledge, which is sanctioned by Airo-Pai ancestral tradition. This knowledge is acquired from lived experience through the senses and always involves practical situations and social interactions of learning.

In that babies and young children do not know how to think, they are said to have very little 'heart'.

Mario, a man in his fifties, explained about his baby grandson as follows: 'He does not yet know how to think. He touches everything he sees and then throws it away without consideration for the person to whom it belongs. He goes after whatever his eyes perceive, but just in vain.' The ideas expressed here are shared by men and women. Infants ramble and act without regard to others. Adults feel pity for a baby's helplessness (cf. Gow, this volume), but they also fear their inclination towards anger and the reaction this might provoke.

During my stay in Huajoya I was puzzled by the way men and women tease babies: whenever they visit a household where there is one, the visitor holds the baby's fists and repeats several times in a baby voice: 'I am angry without purpose!'; and everybody laughs at the bemused-looking child.

Not only are babies thought to be easily angered when unhappy, they are also said to cause others to become angry. Parents in particular fear their baby's crying, which might end in the violence of a death. In Airo-Pai mythology, there is an episode of a crying baby that managed to infuriate its mother to the extent that she got so angry that she threw her child into the fire. This is the story behind the birth of the sun, a crying baby rising from the flames of his own fury and his mother's exasperation (Cipolletti 1988: 65).

Parents do everything possible to prevent young children from crying, feeding them on demand and entertaining them constantly. Older children are systematically taught to recognise and avoid their own anger. Whenever a child is particularly difficult, he or she is warned that their shouts will attract spirit monsters who feed on human souls. Invariably, the child calms down of his or her own accord at the thought of such a terrifying prospect. In this way, children learn to control themselves and fear the deadly consequences of their bad mood.<sup>3</sup> Adults are acutely aware that children imitate their behaviour, and for this reason they never hit or shout at them. They understand that if they did so, the child in following suit would learn how to be violent and bad-tempered.

As long as a child is unable to understand well, he or she is allowed to move around freely, but under the protective eye of the mother or an elder sibling. After 3 years of age, they are exhorted to imitate their same-sex parent and acquire gender-specific handicraft skills and knowledge. Formal instruction is given in well-structured 'pieces of advice' (*yéhuoye*). Such advice, which is said to be housed in the 'heart' of the young person, constitutes the bedrock through which he or she may autonomously make correct decisions in life. On a daily basis, parents give advice to their children before dawn, in the privacy of the hearth. Advice is also given during the teaching ceremonies of puberty and marriage. Young adults are no longer given advice by their parents because they are expected to have developed their own thoughts

which grew from their elders' wisdom. The following is an example of advice given just before dawn by a couple to their children aged 16, 13, 10 and 6.

How do you think? One must live slowly. One must live well. Think ahead. Do not think behind. Do not speak quickly about other people. Think knowledgeably to make many useful things. Do not wait for other people to work for you. Do not touch other people's things. You will cause them to be angry at you. Having knowledge, you can make all sort of things by yourself. Behave like the good bird, sitting still. Do not behave like the crazy bird which goes from branch to branch. This is how my elders advised me. Listening to them, I have lived tranquilly until this day.

This piece of advice stresses the need for children to become self-reliant, respect others' belongings, avoid causing anger in others and develop a peaceful attitude. Children are also encouraged to be still 'like a cooking pot' – 'sitting on its bottom' – 'not like a vine swinging in the air, letting the wind take it from one side to the other'. This attitude of centredness is epitomised amongst both sexes in erectness of posture and physical endurance (Belaunde 1994: 106). A thoughtful person is therefore someone whose conceptual and emotional life is manifested in a calm and secure bodily disposition. The erectness and stillness of posture encapsulate the values of personal autonomy and sociability which, as Overing (1988) has demonstrated, are characteristically Amazonian, and which are also exemplified amongst most of the other peoples studied in this volume. Cultural values are experienced and internalised in people's 'hearts' and exteriorised in their physical embodiment.

Other formal instruction assumes a harsher tone and warns young people about death and the after-death alienation anger creates.

Young man, young woman, do not live with your tongue hanging out of your mouth. Do not live in this way saying bad things about others.

You say: 'Such and such a person has said such a thing.'

Do not speak in this way.

You say: 'I want to kill!'

Do not speak in this way.

If you speak in this way the worms will be asking for your skin. Your heart will be lost. It's bad.

If you are angry, people will kill you and then your own kinsfolk will drag you to the forest and abandon you there to be eaten by worms. The worms will be working in your body.

When I was a young man I heard these words of advice from my elders.

Thus, the desire to kill paradoxically ends up in one's own death and, more significantly, the deprivation of a proper burial. This is the worst form of

abandonment and breakdown of kinship. Deprived of a proper funerary ritual, a deceased person would be unable to undergo the transformations which would lead to their rebirth in the upper world amongst their dead relatives and the divine beings (cf. also Cipolletti 1987).

The harsh warnings of this piece of advice contrast with the detached attitude of men and women in daily life towards the rare people who actually act out their anger, such as Augusto whom I mentioned earlier. One villager explained to me that although they disliked Augusto and avoided dealing with him as much as possible, they did not consider him a real threat. Having been taken away from his kin in childhood, he had been deprived of his elders' advice. He had therefore been unable to grow a solid human 'heart' and lacked the fear of anger. Nevertheless, his bad mood was only occasional, and particularly evident when he was drunk, which was relatively rare, because in Huajoya drinking was limited to occasional working parties and never involved strong commercial alcohol.<sup>4</sup> Most importantly, Augusto had not been initiated into shamanic practice as a teenager. Consequently, he could only kill physically, which his kin knew to be very unlikely. From their point of view, the important thing was that, lacking a spirit companion, he could not kill with sorcery, and was therefore relatively harmless (cf. Overing 1985). Only individuals who had been fully initiated into the Airo-Pai ways, and specifically its shamanic practices, and yet possessed an angry personal character, were held capable of sorcery.

The idea that asocial behaviour is exceedingly destructive when associated with spiritual powers is shared by many cultural groups. Amazonian people do not have a 'natural' idea of death independent of a notion of spiritual causation, and all death and serious illnesses are attributed to sorcery. As Overing (1985: 274) has shown for the Piaroa, murderous sorcery results from uncontrolled knowledge of spiritual matters. Great emphasis is put upon distributing and restraining the learning of spiritual powers in order to prevent shamans losing control over a knowledge beyond their capacities. Smith (op. cit., p. 103) argues for the Amuesha that sorcery is also triggered by anger. 'A witch works by meditating angrily about his enemy.' To be angry with someone and to bewitch someone are interchangeable ideas expressed by the same term. In a similar vein, Ellis (op. cit., p. 107) demonstrates that amongst the Tsimane, 'the invariable equation of angry behaviour and sorcery is frequently drawn'. These and many other ethnographies suggest that there is a need to go beyond an emotion-based approach to the question of anger in order to look at the indigenous cosmology and aetiology of death (cf. Gow and Jamieson, this volume).

### The monster of people's hearts

The emphasis on tranquillity and fixity for teenagers of both sexes goes hand in hand with the fact that during puberty boys and girls learn to deal with

spiritual beings called *huati*. Contact with these spirits is necessary to conduct adult social life, to reproduce and to look after oneself and others. However, they are also dangerous. The *huati* are pure strength, moving air – whirlpools of power – and their visible shape, when manifested, is monstrous: two heads, burnt skin, extreme hairiness.

When a woman has her first menses, it is said that she has a *huati* inside which is causing her vagina to rot and bleed – thus enabling her to carry a child. If the girl moves around, it is understood that she could die of a haemorrhage. She would also become as unsettled and roving as a red deer, which, according to the Airo-Pai, 'jumps from one side to the other and goes nowhere'. This animal epitomises the idea of craziness and boredom – restlessness – typical of women who have not learnt to think well. It is repulsive and its meat is never eaten. The Airo-Pai say that women can even kill men when they are menstruating, because menstrual blood causes damage to a man's head and lethal nose bleeds. A woman who knows how to think fears the *huati* of her menstruation and keeps it at bay by respecting the menstrual confinement.

Young men<sup>5</sup> also enter into contact with *huati* at puberty, during the ritual of their initiation into shamanism, when they take powerful hallucinogenics such as *Banisteriopsis caapi* and *Brugmansia* (Vickers 1989: 168). There are many types of *huati* in the Airo-Pai cosmos, but the most feared by far are the kind called 'huati of people's hearts' (*pai joyo huati*), which accompany shamans. Young men inherit their spirit companions from a dead relative, through dreams. The 'huati of people's hearts' is said to look like a person but to have a transparent chest like a glass window, through which one can see all the internal organs moving and the heart beating. I was told that the most terrifying vision is when the monster opens the window of its chest and takes its heart in its hand.

The destructive power of anger is fully displayed when associated with the practice of shamanism, as stated in the following pieces of advice.

When a young man does not know how to think, when he is an angry person, he should not drink [the hallucinogenic] *yaje*. If he should take *yaje*, his *huati* will approach him to keep him company. The *huati* will tell the boy: 'Come with me. Let's go hunting birds [i.e. from the spirit's perspective, people] with my blowgun.' If the boy does not know how to think, he will accept and send illness and death to his own kin. When a young boy knows how to think he does not allow the *huati* to come too close to him. He refuses his invitation and tells the *huati*: 'Go back to your house, do not stay here.'

The blowgun mentioned in the dream is a spirit weapon, part of shamanic paraphernalia. Sorcery is described as a mystical form of hunting birds. These 'birds' are the sorcerer's victims who are said to be killed with a

mystical dart. These images are drawn from a rich cosmological fund of shamanic metaphors. Elsewhere (Belaunde 1994), I have demonstrated that Airo-Pai shamanism plays upon multiple scales of perception of reality. Each different being in the cosmos is held to have a different point of view on the world. For instance, living people are seen as birds by the spirits. A similar idea of 'perspectivism', as Viveiros de Castro calls it (1998), has been reported for many other Amazonian groups (cf. Gow, Lagrou, this volume). Amongst the Airo-Pai, cosmological perception is loaded with moral implications. The bird shape of people, for instance, signifies the human's capability for caring for offspring.

Men and women are associated with two different species of birds. Men are related to the oropendola (*Icteridus chrysocephalus*) and women are linked with the green parrot (*Amazona farinosa*). Both species are intensely social but differ in their natural habits of nesting, feeding and defence. Oropendolas weave fibre nests, pierce through fruits and insects and defend their nests with the help of associated insects, such as wasps and ants. Parrots root in cavities, grind seeds and protect their young by remaining quietly vigilant inside their nests. Like the oropendola, Airo-Pai men produce fibre woven objects, such as hammocks and baskets. They hunt and protect their families with shamanism, using spiritual darts. Women are like parrots in that they harvest and transform crops, carrying their babies inside themselves or in a sling wherever they go. According to this imagery, both genders have equal responsibilities towards their young but their procedures differ. Each is autonomous and responsible for his or her own work. In marriage, the spouses unite their capabilities and complement each other's fertility. Their idea of conviviality is understood as the union of gendered and autonomous persons who raise their children together.

These metaphors are used to guide and teach people and to transform them into the human replicas of these beautiful birds. They also express an aesthetic sense in social relations that the Airo-Pai attempt to realise in their lives. At the same time, these images give expression to people's vulnerability. Birds that are breeding are an easy prey for hunters; and such is also the fate of peaceful humans. The *huati* spirits feed on human 'birds'. Nevertheless, these spirits can carry out their murderous deeds only if in association with a sorcerer. This is conceived of as involving a spiritual temptation and fall. The spirits 'invite' a shaman to 'hunt'. If he accepts, he is said to adopt the spirit's interests as his own, and hence loses sight of a proper human point of view on reality. He therefore sees his own kin as his prey. It is understood that anger motivates a shaman's acceptance of sorcery and a view of the world from a man-eating perspective. Cosmologically, such a transformation signifies that a radical alienation of kinship is being acted out through sorcery.

Death through either intentional or inadvertent sorcery is treated very seriously. Despite Airo-Pai efforts to render people fixed and thus capable of controlling the power of their spirit companions, sometimes the individual

*huati* is far too strong, its air considered too powerful. For this reason, men are advised to refuse the spirit companions of dead sorcerers. The following is an account of a dream which Mario had as a young man. His dead grandfather, whom he had never met when he was alive, came to him in a dream to offer him his spirit companions. The grandfather was a sorcerer of renown who intimidated his in-laws and had accumulated five wives. He was murdered by his brothers-in-law.

One night when I was very ill, my grandfather came nicely dressed with necklaces of beads and a crown on his head. He had a small gun in his hand, a very red and small gun. 'You have called me, this is why I have come,' said my grandfather. 'What's going on, grandson?,' 'Nothing,' I answered. Then he shot his gun in the air and it made a loud noise, like when you pour water into hot frying fat. If I had taken his gun, I would have taken his *pai joyo huati* ['*huati* of people's hearts'], and I would have become a sorcerer like him. If I had accepted, I would have died young because people would have murdered me as well in retaliation for my sorcery.

Once again, it is clear that to kill is to bring about one's own death, for to accumulate too much power will cause one's demise. As Mario explained, he preferred to abstain from shamanism rather than exposing himself to the danger of becoming the object of sorcery accusations.

Until recently, retaliations against perceived sorcerers were usual, although it is difficult to assess how many actually took place. All adults know of two or three cases which they vividly narrate, describing how not only the sorcerer but also his immediate kin were mercilessly put to death. Such retaliations were exacerbated during the recurrent epidemics of disease, such as flu, measles and yellow fever, which are an ongoing cause of morbidity amongst the Airo-Pai communities (Belaunde 1997: 132). Although the aetiology of contamination is understood, the ultimate causality of death is held to be that of sorcery, for which a shaman is always held accountable. The idea that epidemics are created by intense sorcery activity against one's own people is fairly common in Amazonia (Ireland 1988: 168; Erikson 1996: 208). Amongst the Airo-Pai, psychology, morality and cosmology come together in the cultural understanding that death is produced by the radical alienation of angry relatives. With this view in mind, we can better appreciate their efforts to create a convivial community, that is, a place where people fearful of anger can 'live well' and raise their children together.

## Conclusion

As White and Kirkpatrick (1985: 221) argue, in agreement with Briggs (1970) and Le Vine (1980) amongst others, a heightened perception of the

fragility of infants is associated with a highly elaborated developmental phase of infancy and puberty. Like many forest hunters, in both Amazonia and other regions, the Airo-Pai are acutely aware of children's affective and cognitive growth and its influence upon adult sociability. This is also the case with other Amazonian groups examined in this book. The Uitoto's poetical instruction of youth in handicrafts and sociability (Echeverri, this volume) strongly echoes the Airo-Pai's giving of advice. The Cashinahua concern with moulding young people through designs and fixity (Lagrou, this volume) elaborates upon a similar stress on spiritual empowerment, personal growth and the creation of true kinship.

It has often been claimed that tropical forest peoples have an exogenous idea of anger and sorcery – as something that belongs outside the community of equals. This is the case for Howell's (1988) analysis of the Chewong, who see anger in their Malay and Chinese neighbours but reject it among themselves, inside their own Chewong 'truly human' society. As with many other Amazonian peoples, the Airo-Pai perceive outsiders as dangerous, and their influence is seen as harmful, especially with regard to children. Nevertheless, the art of dealing with anger is at the same time an intrinsic part of daily community living for all kinsfolk (cf. Smith, *op. cit.*; Ellis, *op. cit.*; Overing 1988). Like other Amerindian peoples who figure in this book (cf. Kidd, Lagrou, Overing, Rosengren), the Airo-Pai conceive of anger as relational, and they stress the moral responsibility of both the one who causes anger in others and the one who becomes angered by others, with the greater emphasis upon the former. This is true for situations I observed such as the giving and receiving of food. Moreover, at a deeper level, the fear of anger is rooted inside the social group itself, since it is Airo-Pai shamans – and not foreigners – who are held responsible for diseases and death in their communities.

We need to go beyond a theory of the cultural construction of emotions and take into account the indigenous morality and cosmology in order to arrive at the full significance of anger. More than an emotion, anger is a transformational force which lies at the core of their understanding of human nature and death. The Airo-Pai convivial self is socially produced through childhood and enacted every day in practices of self-control through which the character of adults is traced back to their upbringing. If fear is an expression of one's thoughts – that is, an expression of one's purposeful listening to the advice of elders which is embodied in feelings and physical posture – then anger is, by contrast, the negation of thought and the destruction of human companionship. As Leavitt (1996: 523) argues, emotions are both conceptual, having meaning that can be expressed through talk, and also felt, and as such experienced in people's bodies. This idea of affective life also holds for the Airo-Pai, but it is necessary to go one step further to truly see the full picture. Anger is understood as a deeply rooted desire to kill which can be satisfied either through physical murder or through sorcery. It is the ultimate cause of

all death amongst fellow human beings. So powerful are the meanings and embodied feelings associated with anger that it is conceived as having a performative power that can transform people's perception of reality, alienating them from their relationships and altering their social and cosmological identity. Anger draws the boundaries of alterity. Angry people, as the Airo-Pai say, 'are not people, they have no heart. They are *huati* spirits.'

## Notes

- 1 The Airo-Pai are a Western Tukanoan-speaking people who are also known as the Secoya. There are approximately 400 Airo-Pai living in the Alto-Napo region of Amazonian Peru. There are seven nucleated villages, most of which have a Spanish-speaking primary school and basic medical care, but no other institutional infrastructural development. Their hunter-horticulturalist subsistence economy is supplemented with occasional paid labour in local agricultural and forestry businesses. The data for this chapter was collected during an intensive period of fieldwork in the community of Huajoya in 1988–9, which had a population of approximately seventy people.
- 2 All names have been changed.
- 3 Children who have recurrent tantrums are considered to be ill and are cured with shamanism.
- 4 At the time of my fieldwork, Evangelical Christianity had gained some acceptance in Huajoya, and several men had decided to stop taking hallucinogenic drugs. However, they continued to drink home-brewed manioc beer for special occasions. As Vickers reported (1989: 193), when heavily drunk men and women tend to argue and sometimes exchange blows over past grievances, especially those involving infidelity and unreciprocated love.
- 5 Some women learn shamanism after the menopause.

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