

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS ELITE IN CONTEMPORARY MACEDONIAN SOCIETY

### Abstract

In contrast to the political parties which are a relatively new social phenomenon, the religiosity is a universal social one which has been incorporated in almost every significant civilization and was established on the grounds of a certain religious component. Regarding the Christianity, this act has been directly bounded to the recognition of the Christianity as an official religion of the Roman Empire which led to an impermissible relationship between the church and the state. The Church began to neglect its holy duties more frequently by turning to secular ones. It was no longer a Church that served the people but, rather, it became a Church aspiring towards power and dominion.

The focus of this paper will be the influence of the political elite on the religious situation in the Macedonian post-communist society. We will do our best to determine both the genesis and the reasons that led to such a firm link between the political parties of the Macedonian provenience and the Macedonian Orthodox Church, as well as the possible negative impact of this "matrimony" between the holy and the secular over the Macedonian multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-confessional society especially in the post-conflict period.

**Key Words:** political elite, religiosity, religious elite, religious tolerance.

The period of Communism, that was essentially a totalitarian political system, based on authority of the party and lining itself on rough collectivism, had strong repercussion on the religious situation in the Macedonian society. The Communism ideology was created in accordance to a reliable antireligious attitude and was directed towards certain radically, new pattern that in its essence had to precede a global identification of all society members. On the other hand, the newly formed social community had to destroy the classical religion integrity that in the previous period was subject of social identification of the society members and somehow it had to erase all differences among the particular social groups.<sup>2</sup>

In the dogmatic Marxist's ideology the religion was interpreted as a delusion and illusion that, step by step, will disappear parallel to the penetration of the scientific knowledge into people's conscience. With the establishment of the new political system, after the Second World War, the process of secularization started i.e. politics'

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2 Compare with: Brankovic Tomislav, *Savez komunista Jugoslavije i religija - sa osvrtom na zakonsku regulative i praksu, Politikologija religije vol.1, no.2* Centar za proučavanje religije i versku toleranciju, Beograd, 2007, str. 81-96.

throwing away from the religion (church). This process was accompanied by certain sanctions that were used by the political elite against anyone that took part in any form of religious practice, especially in the first twenty years after the establishment of the new political regime. As a result of that, declination of certain elements of the religious practice, such as Sunday and holiday liturgies, fast and the pray was pretty evident. The process of secularization of the Macedonian society decreased the number of convinced believers, and the number of traditional believers to a degree, especially in the frames of the Orthodox confession.<sup>3</sup>

But, when Macedonia reached its independency and when the Communism ideology crashed, crises with the individuals' identity in the Macedonian society occurred. The members of different ethnic groups in Republic of Macedonia, simply, felt a necessity for identity that would make them different from the others. Religion and nation are the main elements in the creation of the culture and personality. The religion as identity "provider" was observed from different points of view, depending on the tradition and developing context. But, there is no doubt that in the course of this long period, religious identity was either key element for ethnic identity determination or became a primary identity through suppressing the rest of the r elements.

The transition period that had caused deep structural changes of the Macedonian society revitalization the religion. In that period, the individuals satisfied their necessity of belonging to certain group and identifying themselves with it, in the frames of the church and religion. It resulted with weakening of the process of secularization in the Republic of Macedonia and revitalization of the religion.

In this paper I would present part of the results of the research implemented on the territory of the Republic of Macedonia. Based on the rich empirical material gained from the survey (comprising 552 accidentally chosen examinees, but not neglecting their age, sex and educational structure) and interview (the sample covered 30 professionals, Doctors of Sciences in the area of Sociology, Philosophy and representatives of religious elite) we can present the general conclusions related to the key elements that compose the complex religion phenomena.

Even, most of the examinees stated themselves to be believers (97, 7%); only for certain part of them we can say that they have religious point of view on the world. This primarily refers to the believers who do not accept part of the basic Christian dogma as they are presented in the myth about the world and human being creation, the initial text of the Holy Scriptures, as well as not accepting the idea of life after death, which is the essence of the complete Christian thought. Examinees share high dosage of suspicion towards the attitude that God created the human being (21, 8). The fact that with the increase of the level of education the doubt toward this attitude also increases is very interesting, The examinees who are not educated support this attitude mostly (100%), 83% of those who didn't complete primary education consider that God created the human being, from those with completed primary education 74,1% share the same attitude. Out of the examinees with completed secondary school 50% believe that God created the human being, while 34% of the examinees who completed higher education support this attitude.

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3 Compare with: Jevtic Mirosljub, Political science and religion, Politikologija religije, vol.I, no.1, Centar za proučavanje religije i versku toleranciju, Beograd, 2007, pp 59-69

Consequently, it is evident that part of the examinees have critical attitude towards the Christian dogma. The believer interprets and accepts the religious message by himself and observes and understands it through the prism of his own point of view that is composed of numerous factors of a social nature. It's a fact that the meaning of God's word is changed by the social conditions in which it is read or listened. It changes depending on listener's or reader's mood but also depending on the theoretical frame of the listener's or reader's knowledge. Great deal of the polled individuals are mostly suspicious about the idea of life after death (32,2% of them consider that, in fact, death is the end of the life) and in their conscience there is not place for understanding that death presents beginning of new, eternal life

Very interesting is the opinion of the believers who, on one hand believe that God exists (97% of the total number of polled individuals), while on the other hand great number of them consider that there isn't life after death.

Survey results show that in the modern circumstances the composition of religious beliefs is destroyed. The Orthodox Christian population religiosity in the Republic of Macedonia involves more rationalism and suspicion, what's pretty different from the Islamic confession followers who are more linked to their own religion requirements. Modern believers don't believe in the complete dogmatic content, but they accept or don't accept certain beliefs. However, the modern circumstances compared to the religious beliefs do not characterize only the suspicious or lack of belief in certain dogma, but also suspicious and lack of belief in number of basic dogma such as belief that God created the human being, that life after death exists, belief in Paradise and Hell, award and punishment in the transcendental world.

This situation was greatly influenced by the indifferent attitude of the Orthodox Church regarding theological education of its congregation in the period of Socialism.

Differently from the other confessions, which in their sacral objects organized religious instruction: (the Catholic church, for children in the age of 7 and the Islamic faith community also organized religious instruction for children who are more then 7), the Orthodox religion showed high level of loyalty towards antireligious power.

But, here we have to emphasize that religion depends a lot, also, on the process of socialization (especially in the frames of the family), because without it religious beliefs can not be acquired. The religiosity is not aboriginal, but it is created and developed in the environment in which the individual lives, but the main influence is done by the family. If the person lives in a religious family, s/he will be educated in that spirit and it is normal that s/he will have open attitude towards accepting Christian dogmas. We have completely different situation in the atheistic families. Educated in this direction the individual will become atheist, or influenced by the environment (if we talk about rural environment with high percentage of religiosity of the population) where s/he lives, most probably s/he will accept only certain part of the Christian dogma. Particularly negative effect on the Christian religion in Republic of Macedonia had the fact that in the period of communism, in the frames of the family, as well as in the frames of the system of education, teaching about the faith was marginalized.

With the religion revitalization, after Macedonia gained independency, having in mind the facts that were already explained, it is very difficult to expect the believers to accept all dogmas. It appeared mostly because of the fact that limited number of

people succeeded to acquire certain fundamental information about the religious beliefs and it left a large space, beliefs and dogmas to be explained in different manners. Moreover, to this point are attached a number of paganisms and superstition (belief in spells and fortune-tellers, belief in faith, belief that God can punish the acts of this world that are not in accordance to the Christian ethic principles, etc.) for which the Macedonian Orthodox Church, hasn't found a way to destroy them. Survey results referring to religious practice show that compared to the small discrepancies related to Christian dogma, acceptance or non-acceptance, in religious practice (fast and confession) believers point out even lower level of consistence.

Survey results show that only 10% of the examinees fast on every date that is marked on the religious calendar, while most of them, 51, 3% fast only during the week before Christmas, Easter. On the other hand, fast is believer's preparation to take the sacrament Eucharist. In fact, through the Eucharist with bread and wine that symbolize Jesus' body and blood, believers unite themselves with the Savior. But, according to the Orthodox Church, besides the fast, the believer has to confess in order to take the Eucharist. The results of the analysis show that we have a high percentage of individuals who hasn't confessed at all (59, 8%) while the number of examinees who understand the lecture of the Christian church, correctly and confess themselves regularly is the lowest (5, 7%). The church tries to pay attention that confession which is regret for the sins is an important instrument for humans' soul saving. But, the believers who don't know enough about the Christian dogma explain that they do not need confession because they have never made a mistake. By doing it they make one more sin because it seems like identifying with God who is a synonym of moral perfection.

An important part of the religious practice is, certainly the participation in the Sunday and holiday liturgies. A bigger percentage of the examinees go to church only on Easter and Christmas (44, 1%), while least of them visit the liturgies (15, 3%). But compared to 1995 when only 7, 44% of the examinees visited liturgies regularly; we have to conclude that nowadays church visits are more frequent. The fact that all of the examinees, even those who declared themselves as atheists, visit sacral objects is pretty interesting. Compared to the results of the researching done in 1970, when 40, 7% of the polled Christian population answered that they never to church, this is big step forward.

According to it, we can make a general conclusion that even after Communism fall believers are actually related to the faith - their relation is still weak and religious behavior is not continuous. In fact, in most of the cases we talk about believers who nominally identify them with the church, but still they haven't acquired the faith in the true sense of the word. This type of believers practice the rituals from time to time (prayers, going to church, light candles), due to practical reasons (if something bad happens or if somebody is ill, only in these moments they remind themselves of God and ask him for help). Theologians share the opinion that believers who confess regularly show the real picture of the part of the Christian population that entered in the sense of their faith and also practice all rituals and ceremonies only due to "purely" religious reasons.

But, if a number of believers who practice religious rituals decreases, it doesn't mean that they stop believing. Religious rituals realization is not an evidence for belief in faith, 'cause somebody can practice religious rituals and not to believe. Somebody

can believe and not practice religious rituals.<sup>4</sup>

Holly killed the society, but not the individual's private significance. If there are fewer believers in the church, than, there are more in their own homes: if they don't pray or confess themselves in public, then, they do it privately. It might be that also, half-century antireligious orientation of the political elite that relies on their communist ideology had negative influence on the ritual i.e. its position. This ideology classified the religion as a conscience that is remainder of the old, already overcome forms of cultural orientation and it put the believer in the position, the rest of the population to qualify him/her as lagging person, not in fit with the new society ratio and as a result of that in a position to prefer limiting of its own ritual on practices that are exclusively in the sphere of the family, even personal intimate.

The issue regarding the type of believers in Republic of Macedonia, their beliefs, their involvement in the religious practice expressed through rituals, as well as the level of their knowledge about the Bible and eschatology, was a topic of discussion with the Macedonian experts in these fields. In this phase of my research I had applied an interview. Here, I would present part of their opinions and thoughts, regarding this issue. All of the examinees (experts in Sociology, Philosophy, Theology) agree that in Macedonia, most of all, there is presence of traditional believers who possess very low level of competence about Bible's dogmatic attitudes and also about the rest of the religious texts. Here we talk about believers who nominally belong to the church, while in the religious practice they are involved only in the part that is directly related to the Macedonian values, ceremonies and tradition. Sociologists try to find the root of these circumstances in the weak organization of the Macedonian Orthodox Church and its focusing towards the saint, at the same time neglecting its own primary role.

The representatives of religious elites consider that the actual problem can't be observed from one point of view, because it is complex, and multidimensional. Lack of serious gospel in our space, in the period of St. Clement of Ohrid is one of the problems that theologians mention. In the period of Turkish occupation, due to number of repressions by the Turks, the church hardly survived. Also, the period of Communism left deep marks on individuals' spiritual life and therefore most of the theologians are convinced that, even nowadays, our intellectuals is greatly influenced by that political ideology. According to the religious elite, after Macedonia gained independency on its territory appeared fashionable religion. The period of this euphoria finished and persons who visit the church today, approach themselves the spiritual life much more seriously, these comments are based on individuals' necessity and requirements for introducing liturgy culture. In their opinion the number of believers who visit churches due to religious reasons increases, what's different from the previous period when going to church was due to personal reasons?

Also, survey results show that most of the polled individuals are traditional believers. Here we have to point out that the term convinced believer presents a high level of religious that means unconditional acceptance of all of the Christian dogma, but also a high rate of participation in the religious rituals and ceremonies. According to our research 20, 2% of the examinees can be qualified as convinced believers. Compared to the previous period (researches carried out in 1970) when examinees with

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4 Šušnjić Đuro, *Religija II*, Čigoja Štampa, Beograd, 1998, p. 302.

higher education stated themselves to be atheists,<sup>5</sup> today the picture is quite different. High 14, 4 individuals with higher education do accept all Christian dogma and also high number of them participate in the religious practice. Therefore, it is correct to call them convinced believers.

Anyway, religion lies on different mental matrix and not on the rational world. So, each attack on the religion, containing rational arguments is pretty incomprehensible for the convinced believers and therefore, as a rule it is unsuccessful. The thing that makes the convinced believer religious is the faith in the holly and the belief in all dogma summoned by the Christian religion. Education and acquired knowledge remain to be the shadow of the religion. It is indisputable that, today the level of education has its influence on Christian dogma acceptance, but that influence is not as strong as it was in the past. Maybe this phenomenon arises because of the fact that rapid medicine development can make us healthier, but not immortal. Perfectly implemented economy can make us reach, but always deprived of eternal life values. The religion is one and only that offers this possibility (eternal life) through life after death. Due to it, no matter how irrational it sounds, for the believers this option is, psychologically, more acceptable.

Some authors like the Greek sociologist Georgie Mandzaridis,<sup>6</sup> think that as much as the security in the Earth Kingdom decreases, which to the Christians offered certain security in the World, the seeking for transcendental kingdom increased. Ottoman conqueror of Istanbul (1453) formally meant a beginning of a new period for the Orthodox Church. Political crash and slavery of the Orthodox people resulted with the development of introversion and self-gathering, but at the same time influenced the development of the patience and eschatological expectations that made the suffering nation stronger during the long period of slavery.

In the context of Mandzaridis thinking about the Orthodox Christianity we can note that the revitalization of certain beliefs of the Christian dogma are, above all, of eschatological nature turbulences that happened in the Macedonian modern society in the period of transition, helped a lot. Individual's everyday life, faced with the sense of existence fear, sense of continuous uncertainty, lack of perspective, but also fear of death which is result of war psychoses related to political and ethnical conflicts in the area of ex-Yugoslav republics, as well as the conflict in Macedonia in 2001. All of that contributed the individuals to search for their saving in the frames of religion and eschatology. The unstable political and social situation increased the belief in life after death and it gives us the hope for a more attractive life in the transcendental world. It can be interpreted as a protection mechanism of the individuals or as a cross-load against all frustrations that Macedonian population meets in the post communism society.

The Macedonian society was faced with a string of other difficulties. The number of deviant occurrences increased rapidly, especially among the youth (alcoholisms, drug addiction, prostitution, crime, murders, suicides etc). Simultaneous, crises in the basic family relations and crises in the educational system, as two leading socialization insti-

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5 Kostovski Stefan, Religijata kaj selskoto naselenie vo Dolni Polog, Institut za socioloski i politicko-pravni istrazuvanja, Skopje, 1972, p. 81.

6 Manzdaridis I. Georgije, Sociologija hriscanstva, Hriscanski kulturni centar, Beograd, 2004. p. 142.

tutions, resulted with crash of the moral rules and values, especially among the young population. It was followed by the sense of lack of perspectives that resulted with exportation of "young brains" in west European countries and abroad. As a result of the social and cultural cloth pre-conditioned by the social changes stated above appeared the idea that maybe religious education will help the society to come out of the crises in which it penetrated deeply.

Almost all of the religious representatives respected, publicly the following thesis: Religious education can, only help in improving moral situation in the society. Through it "moral panic" that became one of the basic characteristics of citizens' conscience will be ceased. Religious education has to fill in the moral vacuum that appeared in the period of transition, by canceling the values, characteristic of the socialistic moral and slow establishment of the moral values. These ideas were supported by the governing political elite especially by VMRO-DPMNE (wich has a demo-Christian orientation and it resulted with reaching "political agreement" between the church and the state for the interdiction of religious education.

According to a number of authors the link between religion and moral make the individual control his behavior and try to behave in accordance to the basic religious rules that religion presents as an expression of God's will. In fact when the believer identifies himself with the "saint", he accepts all of the rules that the saint imposes to him as personal rules and values. The transcendental of these rules and values gives strength and excuse, while the individual identifies with them maximally. In that case the transcendental becomes immanent i.e. the saint becomes internal, human. In this way social community alters the mechanisms for external control with mechanisms for internal control – conscience. The individual that accepts the religious pattern as its own sustains it with his behavior, not only due to the sanctions that may come from outside, but also due to his own conscience, imposed on him as internal factor. If he step aside the rules that his religion imposes, he will enter in collision with the holly.

On this point is the issue: if religion impacts individual's behavior and in what degree? This is directly linked to the convince of the political elite (especially the actual government VMRO-DPMNE and DPA) that introducing theological education in the world's schools will greatly decrease youth's deviant behavior.

But the issue about the type of theological education that will be introduced in the frames of Earth's education systems is still open. At the moment two opposite attitudes are present. Religious and governing political elite (VMRO-DPMNE) consider that the education has to be of purely theological character and that it should be conducted by trained theologists. In the frames of this approach, the individuals belonging to different confessions will follow lectures that are only about their own faith. The attitude of the science elite is based on the fact that it should be a subject that will teach students about the history of the religion, Anthropology of the religion, Sociology of the religion, Psychology the religion and Philosophy of the religion, but the intention of it is not to make the students convinced believers, but to make them acquire basic culture that would be incomplete without knowledge about these sciences of religion. Apart from the questions connected to the salvation of the youth from moral decadency, to which the political and religious elite, as one of the alternatives, imposed the need of introducing religious education, their co-operation continued in relation to a

string of other questions.<sup>7</sup>

The interweaving of the political and religious began much earlier than the emerging of the political parties on the historic scene. In Christianity, this act has been directly connected to the proclamation of the Christianity as an official religion of the Roman Empire which led towards a close relation between the church and the state. The Church began to neglect more and more of its holy duties in favour of the secular ones. It was no longer a Church that serves but, rather a Church that strives towards power and dominion.

This union between the secular and holy has been entered in order to preserve the social order. However, in the contemporary states in addition to the dominant religion i.e. the religion of the majority, there are also other religions of the smaller ethnical groups. Moreover, a large number of political parties have been established in the Republic of Macedonia at the beginning of the last decade of the last century. Therefore, the mutual forbearance and tolerance are of a significant importance as to enable the different religions and political streams to exist one by another by a mutual harmonizing and restraining.

This strong link between religion and politics i.e. the Macedonian Orthodox Church and the Macedonian State began to intensify during the worsening of the relations between the Macedonian Orthodox church (MPC) and the Serbian orthodox church (SPC). From the moment when the Republic of Macedonia became an independent state, there was a political consensus for the first time. All of the political parties supported the position that the autocephaly of the Macedonian Orthodox Church had to be defended since it was denied by the SOC. This process is still going on regarding both the governmental issues, such as the dispute for the name, and some religious issues (the denationalisation of the Church property, implementation of the religious education in the state schools).

The Macedonian Orthodox Church and the state elite work together in the sphere of reaching a high level of quantity of Christian sacral building and in the field of underlying the Christian religious symbols. After the proclamation of the independence of the State (1991) and especially after the ethnic conflict (2001) the Cross, as the most significant symbol of Christianity, was built widely on various locations in the Republic of Macedonia. Beginning with the Millennium Cross on the mountain of Vodno, today there is hardly any inhabited place where there is not a cross dominating over it. The State also invests in building of Christian sacral buildings even on those locations where it has not been planned by the urban city planning. This link between the Macedonian Orthodox Church and the state authorities plays double role. Firstly, the actual political elite (VMRO-DPMNE) in this way tries to keep the authority in their hands by means of directly courting to the believers whose number increases gradually a year after year. Secondly, this link has been tightly related to the complex social political context in the Republic of Macedonia and to the disputes with the neighbouring countries, while the final goal is strengthening of the national feelings of the Macedonian population. This primarily refers to the dispute with Serbia regarding the autocephaly of the Macedonian Orthodox Church and the dispute with Greece regarding the name.

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7 Compare with: Ribic Biljana, Relation between church and state in Republic of Croatia, *Politikologija religije*, no2. vol. III, Centar za proučavanje religije i versku toleranciju, Beograd, 2009, pp. 297-207

The aim of stirring certain draught of nationalism, by means of linking the religious and national, is to encourage the Macedonian population to direct all their forces towards defending of their national identity. The religion can help in resolving certain political issues by directing the people towards the common values, but this refers only for those societies where there does not exist any religious heterogeneity. However, this phenomenon of supporting only one religion by the official authorities, in the Macedonian multi-cultural and multi-confessional society, can intensify the ethnical and religious tensions, and the religious tolerance may be seriously endangered. All above mentioned leads towards a religious particularism and, at the same time, creates fertile grounds for intensifying of the ethno-centralism and emerging of the religious fundamentalism. Such situation may lead towards mobilisation of the social groups, which find themselves to be marginalised in the Macedonian society, to realise certain power and influence. Therefore, the state authorities have to be focused on the religious universality where all of the religious communities would be treated equally and they should also point out the similarities between the different religious teachings.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, while at the level of the religious teachings some common features can be found as well as a similar scale of values regarding the human life (peace among people, respect towards the family and the property) as the basis to postulate rules for coexistence of people belonging to different religions (if they follow the teaching of their religion), one can easily notice the sources of conflicts at the level of the religious organisations that follow the logics of their interests. The religious organisations have their own secular interests and striving towards power especially with regards to the other groups i.e. religions.<sup>9</sup> By observing these interests and goals, they also estimate the position of their own group with regards to the others. In accordance with such estimations and interests in preserving the identity as well as to get the power or share in the government, sometimes even the religious teachings, and quite often even the preaching and the acts of the preachers, encourage and stir the aggression and the conflicts regarding the secular interests. Consequently, the official Church persons in the Republic of Macedonia should effort for the genuine original religion and religiosity and to prevent it to become an ideology and to get dirty with these worldly interests. By no means and above all, should it be insisted on those characteristics of the religion that are in a positive correlation with the principles of tolerance, pluralism and multi-culturism?

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8 See more Matevski Zoran, Religious dialogue and tolerance-theoretical an practical experiences of differences and similarities, *Politikologija religije* vol .I., no.1 Centar za proučavanje religije i versku toleranciju, Beograd, 2007, pp 43-57.

9 Compare with: Serafimova Marija, Religion and attitudes of political parties, *Politikologija religije* vol.I, no.1,Centar za proučavanje religije i versku toleranciju, Beograd, 2007, pp.27-38.

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Душка Матевска

## ОДНОС ИЗМЕЂУ ПОЛИТИЧКЕ И ВЕРСКЕ ЕЛИТЕ У САВРЕМЕНОМ МАКЕДОНСКОМ ДРУШТВУ

### Резиме

За разлику од политичких партија које су релативно нов друштвени феномен, религиозност је универзалан друштвени феномен, укључен у готово сваку значајну цивилизацију, а који је настао на бази одређене религијске компоненте. Што се хришћанства тиче, овај поступак био је директно повезан с његовим прихватањем за званичну религију Римског царства, што је довело до недопустиве везе цркве и државе. Црква је почела да занемарује своје духовне и све чешће се окреће световним дужностима. Више то није била црква која служи народу, већ црква која је тежила моћи и доминацији. Овај рад фокусира се на утицај политичке елите на религијску ситуацију у посткомунистичком македонском друштву. Учинили смо све да утврдимо и генезу и узроке тако чврсте везе политичких партија македонске провенијенције и Македонске православне цркве, као и могући негативан утицај овог „брака“ на духовно и световно у македонском мултикултурном, мултиетничком и мултиконфесионалном друштву, нарочито у постконфликтном периоду.

**Кључне речи:** политичка елита, религиозност, религијска елита, религијска толеранција.

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