




Male Ulama Reinterpretation of the Gender Hadith in Indonesian Socio Cultural Contexts

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Abstract

It is very important to reread and reinterpret of the religious texts related to gender and women's issues by considering the socio-cultural context of Muslim communities. This article focuses on discussing Qira'ah Mubadalah or reciprocal interpretation initiated by Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, a male feminist ulama who was influenced by the empirical reality of Indonesian Muslim society. With a qualitative approach, the data in this article were obtained from the Qira'ah Mubadalah book and the Mubalahi.id website. This article finds that the idea of Mubadalah with the concepts and principles of mutuality and partnership between men and women is based on religious texts which place men and women as the subjects of the text. Narratives about women's involvement at the beginning of Islam in the 7th century and the role of Indonesian women in the educational, social and political fields since the 17th century have become the spirit and inspiration to fight for gender equality. In the hadith of the Prophet, the basic principles of mutuality are based on the values of brotherhood, commitment to doing well, compassion, mutual communication and helping each other. Furthermore, to find the principles and values of mutuality and partnership between men and women in Islamic teachings, a thematic study was carried out by referring to the Quran and other hadiths of the same theme, understanding the text contextually and inclusively, considering the validity of the hadith, and refers to authoritative hadith books. The involvement of men in rereading religious texts is more easily accepted by the Muslim community because it is not confrontational, does not criticize but rather provides alternative interpretation options that are accommodating to differences in interpretation among Muslims. Rereading of gender-just religious texts needs to be done as a prerequisite for realizing a just and equal society for men and women in the Muslim community.

Keywords: Male Ulama, Gender Hadith, Socio-Cultural Context, Reciprocal Interpretation, Qira'ah Mubadalah.

Introduction

Injustice against women is often justified in the islamic faith by misogynistic religious texts and gender-biased understandings that are influenced by patriarchal socio-



cultural contexts (Mernissi, 1991). In religious traditions, male ulemas have the authority to play an important role in maintaining these conditions or conversely, carrying out transformations to realize equality for men and women. Muslim feminists, such as Amina Wadud, revealed that male-biased interpretations of religion influenced by patriarchal culture have strengthened injustice against women (Wadud, 1999). This is reinforced by the popularity of misogynistic hadiths among Muslims (Najwah, no date). A literal reading of the hadiths above gives rise to sexist interpretations not only in the public sphere, but also in the domestic sphere which has an impact on the emergence of a dominated, hegemonic and destructive culture. Therefore, it is important to read and reinterpret hadith texts, as was done by Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, a male feminist ulama as the initiator of qira'ah mubalah or reciprocal interpretation which places men and women equally as subjects of texts based on the principle - universal basic principles of Islam (Kodir, 2019).

This article aims to complement Muslim feminist studies on rereading religious texts focusing on Qira'ah Mubadalah which was initiated by the Indonesian male feminist ulama. To discuss this theme, there are three questions in this research, namely 1) how is the method of reciprocal interpretation related to gender hadiths, 2) how is the application of reciprocal interpretation in hadiths, 3) what is the role of male ulama in realizing gender equality in the Indonesian socio-cultural context? These three questions are used as references in the discussion of this article.

This article argues that Qira'ah Mubadalah is a method of interpreting Islamic texts which emphasizes the principle of reciprocity and partnership between men and women by placing both of them as the subject of the text which refers to the basic principles of Islamic teachings which are in favor of justice, equality, tolerance and peace. Qira'ah Mubadalah was initiated by male feminist ulama in the socio-cultural context of Indonesian society which gives women roles openly in public spaces. Thoughts and ideas those are accommodating to differences in religious interpretations in a society that is heterogeneous in terms of race, ethnicity, religion and belief.

Literature review

Hadith are the words and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad and function as the second source of Islamic teachings after the Quran. They include a number of reports attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, and describe his words and actions and represent the primary source for knowing his authoritative precedent (Sunna). Hadith functions as a guide to life for Muslims, so it has a great influence on everyday Muslim's behaviour (Barazangi, 2016b; Ismail, 2023). Unlike the Quran, which is guaranteed to be authentic, there are hadiths of the Prophet which are shahih (authentic) and some are considered to be dhaif (weak/unauthentic), so some Muslims only accept authentic hadiths as a source of legal determination and put them into practice in everyday life (Usman & Ibrahim, 2014). However, regarding gender hadiths, many dhaif hadiths are popular in Muslim society and have become references in legitimizing gender injustice and subordinating women (Masruhan, 2019). These hadiths are also found in popular hadith books which are the main reference for the Muslim community (Najwah, no date).



In general, there are two methods of understanding the Prophet's hadith: textual and contextual. Conservative Muslims understand this hadith literally textually (Badarussyamsi, 2023; Nikmatullah, 2023) which has an impact on understanding gender bias which subordinates women caused by a patriarchal culture in Muslim society (Damanhuri, 2018). Rigid interpretations of Islamic texts and practices of Muslim communities are contrary to the current principles of human rights and gender equality (Ibnouf, 2015). On the other hand, progressive circles understand this hadith contextually. According to Abdullah Saeed, contextual understanding is an understanding that takes into account the socio-historical context of Arab society when the hadith was narrated at the beginning of Islam in the 7th century CE and the socio-cultural, economic and political context of contemporary Muslim society today. With contextual understanding, misogynistic hadiths can be understood in a gender-just manner, which encourages equality between men and women (Saeed, 2005). This difference is understood to be due to shifts and changes in the historical and sociological conditions of Muslim society (Jafar & Fitria, 2021). Thus, Islamic texts can be used as a source to restrain women or to empower women (Masoud, Jamal & Nugent, 2016).

In the Islamic context, Muslim feminism or Islamic feminism has emerged and developed which is defined as a new consciousness, new way of thinking and gender discourse whose aspirations and demands are feminist, but Islamic in its language and source of legitimacy (Mir-Hosseini, 2006). To realize equality and justice in Muslim society, Muslim feminists do two things: explore and problematize patriarchal religious knowledge that supports gender inequality, and create alternative, egalitarian readings based on ethical principles, Islamic theology (Al-Shar mani, 2014) and the goal of justice in the Quran as well as considering the socio-cultural and historical context of Muslims in Muslim society. In other words, Muslim feminists critically review and dismantle religious interpretations that are biased towards patriarchy and produce knowledge that supports gender equality in Islam.

Methods

This article used a qualitative approach with data sourced from the book *Qira'ah Mubadalah Progressive Tafsir/exegesis for Gender Justice in Islam* by Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, which is the main source for the ideas and thoughts of *Qira'ah Mubalah* and the website *Mubadalah.id* as a medium that disseminates ideas and thoughts on this reciprocal interpretation. Online information was selected based on the theme that is the focus of the research, namely only that which was related to gender hadith. The data was then mapped thematically. Next, the data was analyzed using three stages, namely restatement, description and interpretation. Data obtained through books and online data was then classified and described to determine data trends based on interpretation typologies. The interpretation process was carried out by considering the context of both the book and website. These three stages became a reference in writing this article.



Results and Discussion

Background of Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir as the initiator of Qira'ah Mubadalah

Faqihudin Abdul Kodir is a male feminist ulama who introduced Mubadalah not only as a concept and perspective, but also as a method of interpreting and understanding texts (Maghfiroh, 2021). Kodir is known as ulema at an Islamic boarding school, an academic at an Islamic college, an activist at a women's empowerment institution (Rahima), and a member of the Congress Deliberative Council of Indonesia Female Ulama (KUPI). Formal education began at an Islamic boarding school, then continued his studies at Damascus University and International Islamic University Malaysia, as well as the Indonesian Consortium for Religious Studies (ICRS) Gajah Mada University, Yogyakarta.

Kodir is a feminist ulama who is quite productive in his work. Kodir's thoughts on Mubadalah were influenced by Abu Syuqqah (d. 1996), a contemporary ulama from Egypt. Some of Kodir's works on gender and women's issues include *Manba' as-Sa'ādah fi Usus Husn al-Mu'āsyarah wa Ahammiyat ash-Shihhah al-Injabiyah fi al-Hayāh az-Zawjiyyah* (Lake of Happiness regarding the Principles of Good Relationships and the Importance of Reproductive Health in the Lives of Couples); *Nabiyur Rahma* (Prophet Full of Love), *Sittin' Adliyah* (60 Hadiths on Relationship Justice); *Sunnah Monogamy: Studying the Quran and Hadith*; *Women are not the source of slander: Re-examining Hadith using the Mubadalah method*; and *Qira'ah Mubadalah: Progressive Interpretation of Gender Justice in Islam*. Mubadalah thoughts are not only spread through discussions, seminars, conferences, but also through online media, namely websites including Mubadalah and various social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and TikTok which aim to spread the values of Islam among various groups of Muslims in Indonesia.

Qira'ah Mubadalah was born from the socio-cultural context of contemporary Indonesian Muslim society regarding how Islamic traditions are recognized, referred to and interpreted in the context of relations between men and women. As an idea, Mubadalah is part of Islamic gender justice activism in Indonesia. As an ulama, activist, academic, Kodir often receives questions from various parties about hadith texts which are considered a source of misogynistic teachings on the one hand, but on the other hand, they have become the main reference in the daily lives of Muslims. According to Kodir, the practice of gender inequality stems from an unequal understanding of women, which considers men to be superior and more important than women (Kodir, 2019).

Qira'ah Mubadalah Method

Qira'ah Mubadalah is a perspective, concept, idea and understanding of the relationship between men and women based on the universal principles of Islamic teachings, namely partnership, equality, togetherness, balance, reciprocity, reciprocity, cooperation and reciprocity. In other words, the Mubadalah perspective is a mutual perspective where men are considered to be part of women's lives and women are part of men's lives. There is no superior or subordinate. This method is



applied to texts of verses from the Quran and hadiths of the Prophet related to gender and women's issues which explicitly mention one gender, then it is understood reciprocally by the other party in the gender relationship. Thus, both men and women are the subjects of the text (Kodir, 2019).

The idea and concept of Mubadalah has strong roots in fundamental teachings in Islam, namely the teachings of monotheism, belief in the oneness of Allah (Kodir, 2019). This principle of monotheism contains two aspects: recognition of the oneness of Allah and the statement of equality before Allah. There is no god but Allah, which means there is no intermediary between a servant and his God and means that no human being can be a god for another human being. This strengthens Amina Wadud's (1999) view that monotheism is the theological basis for the equality of men and women. The basic principle of relationships is not to tyrannize, insult and degrade each other, but to respect, support and honour each other as men and women. For that, social change in the perspective of monotheism is from patriarchy to reciprocity, dominance to fellowship, hegemony to reciprocity, and from competition to cooperation (Wadud, 1999).

The perspective of reciprocity departs from social monotheism that insists on equality, justice, love, and respect for others (Kodir, 2019:101). In the Qur'an there are principles of reciprocity namely helping and supporting each other (QS. at-Taubah: 71) in matters of goodness and truth (QS. Al-Maidah: 2); cover each other, guard, warm, protect and complement each other like clothes that cover each other (QS. al-Baqarah: 187). Marriage is a strong bond that must be maintained by male and female together (QS. an-Nisa: 21) based on commitment to do good to each other (QS. an-Nisa: 19), mutual willingness to others (QS. al-Baqarah: 232), and the behaviour of giving sound opinions to others (QS. al-Baqarah, 2: 233).

Knowledge about reciprocity texts and the role of women in the early days of Islam is not widely known and understood by Muslims today. On the other hand, the Quranic texts and misogynistic hadiths are more popular and legitimize gender injustice in Muslim society. Ironically, misogynistic hadiths developed in Muslim civilization and are reflected in books written by classical scholars. Along with global influence and demands for the upholding of human rights, misogynist texts originating from religion are being criticized and re-understood by muslim feminists according to the context of changing times.

How Qira'ah Mubadalah Works

The way Qira'ah Mubādalāh works consists of three steps. First, referring to the universal principles of Islamic teachings, without considering certain genders, for example the principles of balance, justice, equality, partnership, and so forth. These principles are the foundation for the basic meaning of the Koran and hadith texts, by presenting a broad and inclusive meaning (Kodir, 2019:200). Second, find the main idea in the text by paying attention to the subject and object of the text. For relational texts that mention the roles of men and women which are implementable, practical and partial, which are determined by space and time, the meaning and main ideas mentioned previously must be found (Kodir, 2019:201). Third, the idea is that if one



gender is mentioned, it will be interpreted using the Mubadalah method, so that the text includes both genders, which confirms that texts for men are also for women and vice versa. A text that asks husbands to do good deeds to their wives can have a reciprocal meaning; that wives are also asked to well act towards their husbands in a mutually reciprocal fashion that is even though, it is not mentioned literally in the text. This way of looking at the issue is called "mafhum mubadalah" or the perspective of reciprocity that places men and women as subjects for Islamic source texts (Kodir, 2019:123).

In general, the Mubadalah method does not only criticize hadiths that are discriminatory against women related to matan (the actual content of the narrative) but also sanad (the chain of the persons who orally transmitted the narrative through history, attributing it to Prophet Muhammad), by considering the quality of hadith and referring to authoritative hadith books in Islam, as seen in the following table:

Aspect	Method	Form
Understanding hadith	Thematic method	Confirming hadiths to the Quran or other hadiths that have the same theme
	Contextual method	Interpret the text by considering the context of the early days of Islam in the 7 th century and the development of social culture, science and technology today
	Reciprocal inclusive meaning	1) refers to the principles of universal Islamic teachings 2) interpreted reciprocally, including men and women 3) the relationship between men and women is not hegemony and domination, but partnership
	Citing the views of ulemas	Gender-just classical and contemporary ulemas
Authenticity of Hadith	Considering the quality of hadith in terms of sanad (transmission of hadith) and matan (text of hadith)	Prioritizing authentic hadith (sahih) over weak hadith (dhaif)
Book of hadith	Refers to authoritative hadith books	Referring to the six hadith book (kutub as-sittah) as the main reference in Islam
The values to fight for	The basic principles of Islam are universal	1) Grace, benefit, and justice 2) Considering mutual benefit 2) The Prophet and his companions as role models

(Data obtained by the author from the book Qira'ah Mubadalah)

Application of the principle of reciprocity in the hadith

The principle of reciprocity is mentioned quite a lot in hadith texts which provide inspiration about the principles and values of human reciprocity. These texts are related to the values of loving each other, helping each other, covering each other's



disgrace, bringing goodness to each other, and prohibiting initiating and carrying out evil acts and bad things. This principle applies to matters relating to theological-ritual, public and domestic works. Thus, the principle of meritocracy that Islam emphasizes is that whoever acts well will receive appreciation and reward. Those who perform good deeds get rewarded, and those who do bad and sin without considering gender, whether male or female get punished (Kodir, 2016d). In general, this principle is the principle of brotherhood, commitment to do good (mu'asyarah bil ma'ruf), the principle of love, maintaining each other's peace and serving each other/helping each other.

Principle of brotherhood

The first principle of partnership between men and women in the hadith is the principle of brotherhood based on the following hadith of the Prophet:

From Abu Hurairah RA, the Prophet SAW said: "Fellow Muslims are brothers; they should not oppress, deride, or humiliate each other. Piety is indeed here", while pointing to his chest and saying it three times. (The Prophet continued): "A person is bad enough when he insults his fellow Muslims. It is forbidden for every Muslim to defame his soul, his property, and his honor". (Sahih Muslim, no. 6706)

The above hadith text shows the existence of communal mutuality among Muslims (Kodir, 2019: 85) regardless of gender, ethnicity, race and class or what is also known as brothers in faith (ukhuwah Islamiyah). Fellow Muslims are like siblings who are an inspiration for positive mutuality that brings the common good related to basic human rights that must be protected, namely the right to life (blood), economic rights (treasure), and social rights (honor) (Kodir, 2019:263). On the other hand, fellow Muslims avoid negative disagreements related to danger, ugliness and violence that degrade human values which are contrary to the principle of mutuality in Islam and originate from unequal, hegemonic and authoritarian relations. Men and women are likened to twins, which show their relationship as equal partners. To create these conditions, not only the will of individuals and community groups is needed, but also state policies that bring benefits to citizens, women and men and stop all forms of violence and arbitrariness (Kodir, 2016e).

Commitment to do a kindness (mu'asyarah bil ma'ruf)

Behaving well to others is the core of Islamic teachings to increase a person's sense of humanity and raise the degree of spirituality. The commitment to do good is not only between fellow human beings, but also in the family both in the public and domestic realms. Husbands and wives must act kindly towards their partners, as per the following hadith: "The world is jewelry, and the best jewelry in the world is a pious wife." [HR Muslim].

This hadith encourages wives to be kind and obedient to their husbands. If understood properly, husbands are also encouraged to do good to their wives. If the husband wants a pious wife, then the wife wants the same thing, a pious husband. What men want for their partners, women also want for their partners. In the context of mutuality,



a pious husband or wife will serve each other, love, reassure and make each other happy (Kodir, 2016a:393).

Principle of Compassion

In the hadith it is stated that humans should love each other, including men and women: "Whoever does not love, will not be loved". (Sahih Bukhari, no. 6063)

This hadith reveals the logic of reciprocity regarding affection. Someone who loves others will also be loved by others. Kodir emphasized that affection is a basic teaching regarding social and human relations, as emphasized in the letter ar-Rum: 21, affection is one of the principles of reciprocal family relations between husband and wife (Kodir, 2016b). This is in accordance with the purpose of marriage, namely creating a *sakinah mawaddah warahmah* family built on the spirit of mutual understanding and helping each other, and mutual love for each other.

Mutual communication

Mutual communication between husband and wife is one of the principles of partnership in the hadith, as mentioned in the following hadith:

"I saw a woman coming to the prophet and asking: O Messenger of Allah, what are the rights of a husband over his wife? Rasulullah SAW replied: the husband's right over his wife is that a wife is not allowed to leave her house except with her husband's permission. When he does it then he is cursed by the angel of mercy and the angel of *ghodob* (anger) until he repents. The woman asked: O Messenger of Allah, even if the husband is unjust? The Prophet answered Yes, even if he was unjust." (HR. Abu Daud)

The hadith above explains that a wife cannot leave the house without her husband's permission and if she violates it, the wife will be cursed by angels. According to Kodir, a wife's permission to her husband is not a form of agreement to do something according to her husband's wishes, but is a form of notification to her partner. This hadith inspires us that the issue of permission should be used for good things and is beneficial for a family's commitment to togetherness so that they can better understand each other (Kodir, 2016a). If necessary, negotiation is also needed to take action which is generally mentioned in Surah Ali Imran (3: 159), which is recommended in order to ensure goodness in the family.

Serve and help to each other

Husband and wife must serve each other based on the hadith:

"I asked Aisha about what the Prophet SAW did in his house". Aishah replied: "He serves his family, when it is time for prayer, he rushes to pray". (Sahih Bukhari, no. 680)

The hadith text above confirms that the Prophet as a husband was involved in domestic work, which until now was only understood as a wife's duty. In this context, there is a principle of communication and mutual understanding based on the principle



of mutuality between husband and wife, which is practiced by both of them to serve and be served, both inside and outside the home.

Based on the explanation above, a text can be understood differently depending on how someone views the text. Hadiths known as misogyny traditions, for example, can be understood differently according to the method used and the way the text is viewed. In Mubadalah, the principles of partnership and reciprocity in the hadith strengthen the principles of reciprocity in the Qur'an which are teachings on monotheism, the principle of justice, benefit, mercy, the willingness of two parties in relationships, consultation, mutual support and mutual help among individuals in the community, or members a family.

Male ulama and Islamic feminism in the Indonesian context

Feminist male ulemas, the same as feminist women, have a very important role in spreading knowledge, ideas, thoughts, understanding and gender awareness through the interpretation of religious texts that are gender unequal in the Muslim community. Therefore, the involvement of male feminist ulama is also important in changing gender-unequal paradigms, perspectives, understandings, attitudes and actions that originate from religious understanding, which do not demean or attack men (Tim konde.co, 2017). In a patriarchal society, male ulama who fight for equal gender relations are more accepted by the Muslim community than women because of their accommodating, non-confrontational and non-resistant approach to traditions that give privilege, superiority and priority to men in various aspects of life. Men also do not feel patronized or looked down upon by fellow men. He realized that one of the failures of feminists so far in providing gender awareness is because they often blame someone's religious understanding or force them to do things.

The concept and thoughts of Mubadalah are present in the context of the reality of the plural, multicultural and open Indonesian Muslim society, which is one of the reasons the concept of Mubadalah is easily accepted by the Muslim community. Understanding religious texts cannot be separated from the context of the socio-cultural reality of society. Kodir revealed that the dynamics between text and reality are important things to discuss in order to realize things about mutual benefit, goodness and justice. Indonesian traditions provide freedom and opportunities for women to participate in various fields in the public sphere since the 17th century and continue to this day. Apart from that, the intellectual work and social work of previous Indonesian ulama contributed to the perspective and methodology of Mubadalah. The social foundations of Indonesian Islamic thought have opened up free space for the birth and development of Islamic ideas that are more balanced, fair and generally more empowering for women (Kodir, 2019:181) and which have provided a solid foundation for the growth of various solutions to the complexity of contemporary reality.

The Mubadalah interpretation method is more easily accepted by the Indonesian Muslim community. The dissemination of ideas, notions, and the concept of Mubadalah is carried out in various ways, both through book publications, social media, and through the Indonesian Women's Ulema Congress (KUPI), where the Kodir has a very strategic role as a member of the deliberations in the organization



(Maghfiroh, 2021). KUPI's membership is quite diverse from various groups of Muslims from various levels and types of education, religious organizations, non-governmental organizations, based in Islamic boarding school communities, and also the government makes it easier to spread the concept of Mubadalah in Indonesian Islamic society.

Mubadalah's ideas have made a major contribution to the development of global Islamic feminist thought and production. Muslim feminist studies focus on rereading and reinterpreting the Quran and hadith because there has been misreading of the Quran and hadith about women and gender in general (Barazangi, 2021). According to Barazangi, the fundamental problem with the use or misuse of hadith among Muslims, is not only the focus on the narrative of hadith or the authenticity of hadith but the perception of hadith by Muslims towards the authority of hadith which ignores the fact that some of it contradicts the Quran (Barazangi, 2016a) or other hadiths that are valid (authentic). Therefore, in the context of reconstructing patriarchal gender and providing an alternative approach to tradition by a gender-just religion, Muslim feminists such as Shaikh use feminist hermeneutics in studying gender ideology in hadith texts and critically discuss the dimensions of androcentrism and patriarchy in those hadith texts as well as offering a counter narrative to dominant gender constructions (Shaikh, 2004).

Kodir carried out rereading by changing the way Muslims view religious texts related to gender and women's issues. An equal perspective is in accordance with Islamic principles and the social values and traditions of the Indonesian Muslim community. The development of Muslim feminist thought to study Islamic texts originating from the Quran and the Prophet's hadith cannot be separated from the socio-cultural reality of Muslim society which is confined by patriarchal culture, although having different levels of influence in different areas. So, text and reality have a significant influence on the relations between men and women. Gender dynamics in Muslim-majority societies and indeed as an almost revolutionary process in Islam in recent years, serves to make women knowledgeable, self-reflective and 'literate' in relation to their roles (Liebelt & Werbner, 2018).

Conclusion

This article concludes that male feminist ulamas reread religious texts originating from the Prophet's hadith by considering the local context by providing a new perspective on understanding the text. The reciprocal interpretation or qira'ah mubadalah initiated by Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir is a model of reading Islamic texts sourced from the Quran and hadith in dialectics with the reality of an open and multicultural Indonesian society. With the Mubadalah reading, men and women become the subjects of the text on the basis of mutuality and partnership based on the Islamic principles of monotheism, justice and equality. Specifically, the principles of mutuality in the Prophet's Hadith include the principle of brotherhood, commitment to doing well, the principle of compassion and mutual help. In misogynistic hadiths, the reading is done by referring to authentic (authentic) texts of the Quran and hadiths, which come from authoritative hadith books in Islam. Mubadalah provides a new perspective on the production of gender equality in religious texts that is accommodating to the traditions and local



wisdom of Indonesian Muslim communities in order to counter rampant male-biased religious interpretations in patriarchal culture. The involvement of male feminist ulemas in fighting for gender equality is easily accepted by Indonesian Muslims because they do not criticize, do not patronize, and are not resistant to men. This article is of course limited by the data source which only focuses on one feminist ulemas' thoughts. For further research, a comprehensive study of Indonesian Muslim feminist thought is needed in order to strive to realize gender equality and justice in Muslim society.

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