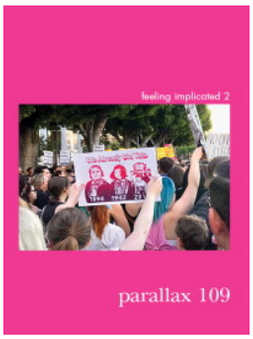

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Born Implicated? The Black Mediterranean, Affects, and Political Responsibility

Stefano Bellin

A long time ago I suddenly realized that the country one belongs to is not, as the usual rhetoric goes, the one you love but the one you are ashamed of.

Carlo Ginzburg, *The Bond of Shame*[1]

When I was in high school, my *Liceo* was heavily politicised. There were political debates, demonstrations, assemblies and occupations. One morning, some students who belonged to *Azione Giovani* (Youth Action), a post-fascist political organisation, were handing out leaflets just outside the school entrance. As I was elbowing my way to the classroom, one of them – head shaven, black bomber jacket, and hectoring gaze – shoved into my hand a leaflet, with a sneer that signalled a mix of pedagogical impetus and disdainful mistrust.[2] The leaflet read, in unmistakable Fascist typography, 'ORGOGLIOSI DI ESSERE ITALIANI' ('Proud to Be Italians'), followed by standard alt-right rhetoric and a series of *völkisch* announcements.

What struck me, and continues to trouble me, was not the underlying message and intentions, for those were predictable, but the strong link between nationality and pride. The latter, I thought, is an emotion that denotes a positive assessment of oneself, elicited by a set of actions and behaviours that are judged favourably by the subject of the emotion. An athlete, for example, could feel proud for winning a competition; a student could feel proud for successfully passing an exam; a person can participate in an LGBTQ+Pride event to fight against discrimination and celebrate diversity; we could feel proud for failing with dignity, for achieving something positive with others, or, vicariously, if someone close to us has done something that we consider good. If pride, in its multiple forms, is connected to action and denotes a positive conduct of the self-assessing subject, how can we be proud of something that simply happened to us?[3] How can we be proud of a condition (e.g., being Italian) that we were born into and received passively? How can we be proud of something that was given to us in the lottery of birth and that we did not contribute to in any way? What is more, the leaflet's heading linked the feeling of pride to a contested concept, that of Italianness, which could be defined on the basis of different criteria, such as residency, language, culture, birth, family origins, and so on.[4] Indeed, Youth Action's message implied a specific understanding of Italianness, a racialised and

discriminatory conflation of Italianness and whiteness that, as I shall argue below, continues to shape Italy's imagined community.

This anecdote offers an entryway into the subject of this article, namely the relationship between implication, affect and natality – which I shall temporarily define as the set of unchosen conditions we are born into. Taking Italy as a case study, I will explore how the givenness of our birth (the subject position we are born into by virtue of our citizenship status, race and socio-historical context) might implicate us in the coloniality of power and in the violent effects of racialised regimes of citizenship and mobility. The 'givenness of birth' should not be understood as an event that lies behind us and is settled once for all, but rather as a set of conditions that influence the rest of our lives. The focus here is not on a fixed identity, but on how given conditions are reproduced throughout one's life depending on the socio-political context.

My discussion of natality builds on a critical engagement with Hannah Arendt, who conceptualised birth as 'the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting'.[5] While I am inspired by the way in which Arendt connects natality to plurality and the potential for political action, I also want to emphasise how a certain givenness and historicity shape our social experience and political responsibility. The concept of natality developed here is marked by this duality – givenness and political potential – and foregrounds the present as the space of encounter between social positionality and projective action. Even though this concept of natality is not biological, it is important to acknowledge that debates around birth and population management are often shaped by a grammar of race. As Angelica Pesarini has shown in relation to the Italian context, white supremacist discourses often weave together anti-immigrant propaganda, a biological conception of the nation, heteropatriarchal visions of women's bodies and their reproductive capacities, and biopolitical anxieties about an ageing and declining population.[6] These discourses are exemplary of the way in which unchosen conditions (e.g., being born Black, from an African country, from migrant parents) reverberate throughout one's life, calling us to respond *in the present* for how our society or political community treat differences linked to our birth.

By analysing how the randomness of our birth places us in different predicaments of power, I will investigate the multi-layered relationship between implication and the feeling of belonging. In doing so, I will address four questions:

1. How and to what extent does our natality implicate us in regimes of structural violence and injustice that we neither originate nor control? [7]
2. How can we feel implicated by the social positionality our birth places us into?
3. How should we take responsibility for structural violence connected to the set of unchosen conditions we are born into?
4. How can the feeling of implication and the political affects connected to it encourage us to take responsibility for our natality and engage in meaningful solidarity work?

By using the pronouns 'we' and 'our' I mean to invite you, the reader, and myself to reflect together on how the lottery of birth might 'fold us into' different forms of diachronic and synchronic implication. However, 'we' is not intended in an essentialised or static way, for our subject position(s) shift according to the contexts in which we are situated and are often entangled in complex ways.[8] Indeed, 'we' is an essentially contested concept: we are not always aware of the 'we's' of which we are part and constructing more inclusive and non-discriminatory 'we's' is a crucial political task. As Brooke Ackerly writes in *Just Responsibility*, '[b]eing responsible means intentionally creating the communities and world we want to live in together and not merely maintaining or working within the present politics of community and "we"'.[9]

A particularly uncertain and questionable 'we' is the one or those ones we belong to, or we are excluded from, because of our birth. In today's world most people across the globe acquire citizenship through either *jus sanguinis* ('the law of the blood') or *jus soli* ('the law of the soil'). The two laws differ in terms of criteria for citizenship acquisition, in one case parentage in the other birthplace, but share the principle of transmission that allocates political membership on the basis of the circumstances of birth. Given that political membership operates 'as a distributor, or denier, of security and opportunity on a global scale', birthright attribution of citizenship institutionalises a morally untenable inequality of life chances and perpetuates structural patterns of disadvantage and discrimination.[10] The widespread reliance on the accident of birth for demarcating who may be included in the polity is simultaneously one of the sources, the vectors, and the amplifiers of systemic injustice. Indeed, in *The Birthright Lottery*, Ayelet Shachar argues that birthright citizenship could be compared to untaxed inherited property:

> a valuable entitlement that is transmitted, by law, to a restricted group of recipients under conditions that perpetuate the transfer of this precious entitlement to "their body", specifically, their heirs. This inheritance carries with it an immensely valuable bundle of rights, benefits, and opportunities.[11]

Together with the racialised global border regime, the state-sponsored apparatus of birthright citizenship works like a quasi-feudal system that seeks to preserve accumulated wealth and power for some by restricting access to resources, democratic participation, and movement for others. The stakes of examining the connection between natality, affect, and implication are therefore high. Far from being apolitical and neutral, our birth raises a set of questions that concern our political responsibility.

In my discussion, I will borrow some concepts from Martin Heidegger and Hannah Arendt and graft them into the theoretical ecosystem of implication.[12] I shall argue that the relationships between birth, implication, and affect can be illuminated by repurposing the Heideggerian concept of *Geworfenheit* ('thrownness').[13] Each of us, by virtue of the arbitrariness of

birth, is 'thrown into' a set of unchosen conditions, which include race, gender, class, citizenship status, and a set of historical legacies and social privileges or disadvantages. This state of thrownness often implicates us into histories and socio-political formations that generate and perpetuate border violence, racial discrimination, and global inequality. Since affect, feeling, and emotion are a fundamental part of the texture of human and social life,[14] our thrownness is always connected to a *Befindlichkeit* (variously translated as 'affectivity', 'emotional situation', 'attunement', 'self-finding').[15] This affectivity is the basis of the feeling of implication but might also be part of the non-material infrastructure that generates the condition of implication in the first place. I contend that not only do we need to take responsibility for our thrownness, for the fact that we might be 'born implicated', but also that the affects that emerge from our *Befindlichkeit* can potentially mobilise differently positioned subjects to engage in political struggles that seek to transfigure implication and reconfigure the politics of belonging that structure our world.[16] Our natality can therefore be understood both as a state of thrownness and as the unchosen ground of our political responsibility. Indeed, by recontextualising Arendt's conceptual vocabulary, I will argue that the process through which we assume responsibility for our implicatedness represents a 'second birth': a secular and collectively produced beginning that embarks us on the steep, rugged road of social and political transformation.[17]

Given that the question of implication depends on one's subject position, I should clarify the 'locus of speech' from which I approach the questions outlined above.[18] As a white, male, European scholar and as a migrant and descendant of migrants, I must recognise the coloniality of the current European models of citizenship and migration control.[19] Indeed, my family history is emblematic of the differential regimes of citizenship and mobility that I question in this article. My paternal grandparents (and some of their siblings) migrated from Italy to Argentina after the Second World War, and subsequently to Peru. Born and raised in Peru, my father migrated to Italy as an Italian citizen thanks to the principle of *jus sanguinis* that regulates Italian citizenship (a person acquires citizenship through their parents or ancestors, 'by blood'). And I, born in Italy, had the privilege of moving first to Spain and then to the UK with relative ease. As a result, I am writing from the standpoint of the (impoverished) structural 'beneficiary', as someone who is implicated in the injustice produced by the global border regime and the racialised notion of Italianness.[20] I write this not to indulge in self-narration but because, as Rothberg and Adebayo have pointed out, the stakes of implication are both political and personal.[21] This even more so when we examine the relationship between affect and implication, which is often mediated by deeply personal experiences, values, and concerns.

Building on these premises, this article explores what it means to be 'born implicated' and how we should take responsibility for the injustices we are implicated in by virtue of our birth. To address these questions, I have organised the paper in three parts. Section one frames the question of implication

in relation to the case study of Italy and the Black Mediterranean. I will outline how the interlocking dynamics of Italy's colonial amnesia, systemic racism, border violence, and racialised citizenship laws implicate white Italian citizens in entrenched structures of violence and discrimination.[22] The second section will explore what it means to feel implicated in regimes of violence and discrimination because of the circumstances of our birth. Finally, section three will discuss how natality is linked to political responsibility and how we might turn the feeling of implication into a politics that upholds and promotes the principles of 'equaliberty', racial justice, and freedom of movement.[23]

The Black Mediterranean: Framing the Question of Implication

The Black Mediterranean has emerged in the last decade as an innovative framework that blurs the boundaries between scholarship and activism in productive ways to foreground questions of race, Blackness, transnational relationality, refugees and migrant struggles, and Black diasporic politics in the Mediterranean region. Drawing on rhizomorphic networks and 'undisciplined' thinking, the Black Mediterranean confronts the pervasive sources and effects of European 'ethnic absolutism'.[24] As a *geographical space*, the Black Mediterranean highlights the profound relationality of southern Europe and Africa. The limits of this region are fuzzy, for they include the Mediterranean basin, the Sahara – the 'second face of the Mediterranean'– and the various routes used by migrants from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East.[25] This fluid, hybrid space has been shaped by a long history of cross-cultural exchanges, flows of capital, people, and ideas, as well as wars, colonialism, enslavement, and persecution.[26] The Black Mediterranean challenges the romanticisation of hybridity and flattening conceptions of *métissage*, pointing to the deep roots and enduring presence of racial violence and (post)colonial formations in the region. Indeed, by locating questions of race and Blackness at the centre of Europe's consciousness, the Black Mediterranean generates a 're-telling of Europeanness'.[27] As a *counter-archive*, the Black Mediterranean displaces the hegemony of the white gaze and fights historical amnesias by uncovering memories of resistance, subaltern narratives, diasporic subjectivities, and practices and lived experiences of Blackness in Europe.[28] As an *analytical framework*, the Black Mediterranean offers critical tools for examining the entanglements of colonialism, national formations, racial capitalism, racialised border regimes, contemporary slavery, discriminating citizenship laws, normative whiteness, patriarchal ideology, and affective cartographies of belonging and nonbelonging. In doing so, it constructs a new language and counter-epistemologies that question the conceptual inadequacy, colonial and racial biases, and theoretical blind spots of traditional scholarship.[29] As a *political praxis*, it fosters transnational affiliations and transgressive solidarities that explore alternatives to the nation-state, racial neoliberalism, and the global border regime. In the context of Italy,

> the Black Mediterranean allows us to connect the seemingly unbridgeable chasm between citizenship mobilisations and refugee rights struggles, situating them both in relation to a much longer history of contestation over the liminal racial identity of a Mediterranean nation whose own whiteness has always been precarious.[30]

Finally, inspired by Paul Gilroy's work on the Black Atlantic, the Black Mediterranean is also a *counterculture* of European modernity that promotes an emancipatory 'politics of transfiguration' that charts 'the emergence of qualitatively new desires, social relations, and modes of association within the racial community of interpretation and resistance *and* between that group and its erstwhile oppressors'.[31]

In what follows, I deploy the Black Mediterranean framework to bring into focus the figure of the white Italian implicated subject. To do so, I interweave telegraphic accounts of Italy's colonial amnesia, intersectional construction of race and whiteness, contested citizenship laws, and racialised border management. The purpose of this overview is not to re-centre white narratives, but rather to clarify how natality folds white Italian subjects into regimes of domination they need to take responsibility for.

Italy's Colonial Amnesia. At the height of their extension, Italy's colonial territories included Eritrea (1890-1941), Ethiopia (1935-1941), and Somalia (1889-1941/1960), Libya (1911-1943), Albania (1939-1943), the Dodecanese Islands (Greece, 1912-1943), and a concession territory in the Chinese city of Tianjin (1901-1943).[32] As Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller have noted, 'although Italian colonialism was more restricted in geographical scope and duration than the French and British empires, it had no less an impact on the development of metropolitan conceptions of race, national identity, and geopolitical imaginaries'.[33] Indeed, Italian colonialism played a central role in the country's national formation, which developed almost in parallel with the colonial expansion.[34] Despite this, Italy's colonial experience has been largely expunged from the national consciousness. The fact that the emigration to the colonies did not result in long-lasting cultural interchanges, the scarce presence of sizable communities of people from the ex-colonies in postwar Italian society, the trauma of the loss of the empire, the fact the Italian colonies did not undergo any real process of decolonisation, the tendency to assimilate colonialism with Fascism and to conceive the latter as an exceptional interlude, institutional erasure and historical revisionism, social willed ignorance, and public indifference, are some of the factors that contributed to Italy's colonial amnesia.[35] In the rare times in which colonialism is the subject of public debate, it is often wrapped in the self-absolving myth of *italiani brava gente* ('Italians as good people').[36] As a result, Italian society has never reflected critically on its colonial past and taken responsibility for the multiple crimes committed overseas. This lack of reckoning has far-reaching effects on contemporary Italy and the Black Mediterranean, which

become evident in Italian society's racialised sense of national belonging and in the unjust and 'necropolitical' treatment of migrants from developing countries.[37] The lingering racial inscriptions of the Black Mediterranean and the current infrastructure of migration control and detention show the discursive and material repercussions of Italy's faltering postcolonial consciousness. As descendants of Italian colonialism, white Italian subjects are therefore implicated in the crimes committed by the Italian state and in the way in which Italy's disavowed colonial history continues to structure the present.

The Systemic Racism of Italian Society. Systemic racism is a deep-seated problem in Italy with a long, violent history.[38] Anti-Blackness, in particular, permeates Italian society at different levels. Black and brown people are often discriminated against, abused, relegated to racialised spaces, and at times killed.[39] The colour line that runs through Italian society makes them feel like '*corpi estranei*', depersonalised 'foreign bodies' that do not belong to the nation.[40] The root causes of Italy's systemic racism are multiple, the lack of cultural decolonisation being just one of them. Situated in a liminal position between Europe and Africa, and being the location of centuries of racial intermixing, Italy has been anxious about its racial status since its incomplete unification in 1861. Italy's self-perceived fragile whiteness deeply shaped its gendered and racialised nation-building process.[41] An element that makes it even more difficult to tackle Italy's systemic racism is white Italians' 'self-reflexive colour blindness',[42] the discursive structure that defaults and normalises whiteness. As a result of what David Theo Goldberg has called 'racial evaporation', the widespread and institutionally sanctioned avoidance of the category of race in Europe in the wake of World War II and the Holocaust, questions of race and racism are foreclosed from the public debate.[43] By cracking open this wall of denial, the framework of the Black Mediterranean reveals how white Italians are implicated in the systemic racism that mars Italian society and the daily life of Black people in the peninsula.

Italy and the Global Border Regime. Italy was, for over a century, a country of emigration with, proportionally speaking, one of the largest diasporas in the world. But from the 1980s, Italy started to also become a country of immigration. Given their geographical position, the Italian peninsula and its southern islands gained increasing prominence within the racialised global border regime, 'a broader system that seeks to preserve privilege and opportunity for some by restricting access to resources and movement for others'.[44] The way in which racialised migrants (not rarely from Italy's ex-colonies) are sifted, marginalised, abused or let die – in the name of European security, humanitarian protection, or stoked up fears of 'ethnic replacement' – brings to the fore the necropolitical entanglements that implicate white Italian citizens. The latter are implicated because of a wide spectrum of positions, ranging from the 'politics of pity'[45] to inaction, complacency, 'violent ignorance', until the extreme of outright racism.[46] The interplay between these positions enables and perpetuates the violent and discriminatory effects of 'white

borders', that is, border regimes that implicitly or explicitly implement a system of racial exclusion that sustains 'a fleeting vision of a white country'.[47]

Italy's Racialised Citizenship Laws. The lines traced by Italy's colonial legacies, migration flows, and racialised conceptions of belonging, find a point of convergence around the question of citizenship. Indeed, as Camilla Hawthorne has argued, '[t]he question of citizenship has re-emerged as one of the key terrains of struggle over the boundaries of race and nation in contemporary Italy, and this question is frequently framed as a referendum on Italy's relationship to the African continent'.[48] Italian citizenship is currently regulated by Law no. 91, promulgated in 1992, which reinforced the principle of *jus sanguinis*. The outcome is one of the most generous citizenship regimes towards descendants of Italian emigrants abroad (even after several generations and if they have never set foot in Italy), and one of the most restrictive regimes for immigrants and their children (who are born on Italian soil or who arrived in Italy at a young age). As a result, the allegedly neutral criteria of blood, descent, and birthplace work as mechanisms of differential inclusion and exclusion. While Italy's citizenship laws do not explicitly mention race, they effectively deploy forms of racialised differentiation that reproduce colonial anxieties over racial contamination and implicitly seek to 'whiten' the body of the nation by disenfranchising Black and non-white Others.[49] Italy's racialised citizenship laws thus create a mismatch between those who *feel* Italian and those who are legally recognised as such. The consequences of this regime are that 'roughly a million people born in Italy of immigrant parents or brought to the country at a very young age cannot benefit from the rights granted by citizenship and as a result live a shadow existence in what is effectively their primary if not only country', at risk of being deported to a country they might have never visited.[50]

These four brief accounts cannot fully address the questions of Italian colonialism, racism, mobility regimes, and citizenship laws. Yet they provide some basic coordinates to frame the question of implication in relation to the Black Mediterranean. From the moment in which they are born, white Italian citizens are thrown into the *longue durée* of colonial ideology; they are socialised into an imagined community that normativises whiteness and a repository of patriarchal and racial beliefs; they are involved in a violent regime of mobility control that produces violence and sharp inequities of power; and they are granted privileges that are denied to second generation Italians and to most migrants. The passive voice here should not suggest detachment and inaction, but rather a sense of 'foldedness' in diachronic and synchronic structures that demystifies the alleged neutrality and unpolitical nature of birth. Let us now explore how this condition of being 'born implicated' is connected to affect.

Affectivity, Implication, and Natality

As fundamental elements of sociality, affects mediate and mould the Black Mediterranean (both as a geographical space and as a political praxis) in

multiple ways. A postcolonial affective continuum links the obsessive concerns about national prestige, racial and social anxieties, and disdainful aggressiveness of Italy's colonial experience to the white fragility, racial hate, rage and resentment that pulse in the veins of contemporary Italian society. The patterns of racialisation that stubbornly frame Blackness as a symbol of nonbelonging demonstrate the 'affective ankylosis' of Italian whiteness, that is, the way in which the hegemonic common sense has stifled white Italians' capacity to address racial injustice, generating a social body unable to bend its affective habits and stretch its political imagination.[51] Indeed, the lack of reckoning with the cognitive, emotional, and social legacy of colonialism enables the continuation of those affective relations that shape structures of racialisation and discrimination within Italian society.[52] This affective context has a significant impact on the question of citizenship. The latter should not be understood in categorical and binary terms, but rather as distributed on a gradient or slope.[53] Bilgin Ayata has elaborated the concept of 'affective citizenship' to attend to 'the role of affect and emotions in state-subject relations, both from the perspective of states as well as that of individuals and communities'.[54] On the one hand, institutional discourses and policies forge affective relations and habits; on the other hand, citizenship is also *felt* and experienced differently depending on one's positionality within a society. As Ayata points out, states govern also through affect, by establishing practices that prescribe certain affective dispositions toward the country and its political community. Such an affective contract produces social boundaries between 'true', 'proper' citizens and those who are portrayed only 'technically' as citizens, creating the spectrum of insiders and outsiders that defines the affective cartography of the *demos*.

The concept of affective citizenship highlights the nexus of belonging and implication. While essential to our sense of identity, belonging is also deeply enmeshed in dynamics of power.[55] Indeed, belonging plays an important role in the three levels of the relationship between affect and implication identified by Rothberg.[56] Our need for a 'home' and emotional attachments can foster exclusionary forms of socialisation and become a *vector of implication*; they can underpin practices of silencing, denial, and deflection that signal the conscious or unconscious *resistance to acknowledging implication*; and – especially when crimes and injustices are committed 'in our name' – they can *motivate solidarity* work. Yet here I want to focus on those uncomfortable forms of belonging that have to do with the fact that we are born into a context of injustice. What kind of relationship is there between the set of conditions we are born into and our affectivity? What does it mean to feel implicated by the structures that reproduce the random inequality of rights and life chances determined by our birth? And how does it feel to be 'born implicated'?

To address these questions, I propose to make a brief foray into Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* and explore the relationship between thrownness and affectivity. In order to investigate the meaning of being, Heidegger provides a hermeneutic phenomenology of the human, or rather the 'Dasein'

('being-there'), the being for whom the question of Being arises. A fundamental aspect of the Dasein is its 'thrownness', the fact that we are always already thrown into a situation that was not of our making:

> We shall call this character of being of Dasein which is veiled in its whence and whither, but in itself all the more openly disclosed, this 'that it is', the *thrownness* of this being into its there; it is thrown in such a way that it is the there as being-in-the-world. The expression thrownness is meant to suggest the *facticity of its being delivered over*.[57]

There is always something behind us that casts a permanent shadow on our existence, an elemental 'givenness' that saturates our Dasein. As thrown beings, we come into the world in circumstances beyond our control. Yet thrownness 'does not lie behind [us] as an event which actually occurred', as something that happened in the past and is then finished and settled.

> Rather, as long as it is, *Dasein* is constantly its 'that' as care. *As this being*, delivered over to which it can exist uniquely as the being which it is, it is, *existing*, the ground of its potentiality-of-being. Even though it has not laid the ground itself, it rests in the weight of it, which mood reveals to it as a burden.[58]

In his idiosyncratic jargon, Heidegger conveys here the idea that thrownness involves subjection to a set of unchosen conditions. We are thrust into a certain intentional situation by forces outside and behind us.[59] Yet such elemental facticity is paradoxically intertwined with potentiality.[60] It is precisely because we are 'delivered over' to a given situation that the mode of the possible is open to us: we are '*thrown possibility* throughout'.[61]

Crucially, our thrownness is disclosed to us through affects. Heidegger describes this dimension of self-finding through the untranslatable term *Befindlichkeit*. The latter refers to the way we are affected or acted upon, the 'feeling situated' or 'affectivity' that characterises our finite existence:

> Attunement brings Dasein *before* its thrownness in such a way that the latter is not known as such, but is disclosed far more primordially in 'how one feels.' *Being*-thrown means existentially to find oneself in a particular 'affective situation.' Thus affectivity is grounded in thrownness. Mood [*Stimmung*] represents the way in which I am always primarily the being that has been thrown.[62]

The different moods (*Stimmungen*) in which we find/feel ourselves disclose the fundamental affectivity of our being. Such moods 'come neither from "without" nor from "within," but [rise] from being-in-the-world itself as a mode of that being'.[63] These affective states constitute our way of being in the world, they are the irremovable lenses or 'atmospheres' through

which the world is made manifest to us. Yet they themselves are rarely the focus of our attention, for we typically disregard our thrownness.[64] While we are always already thrown into an existential situation we did not choose, we generally overlook such thrownness, failing to apprehend it as a fact.

From this brief account of thrownness and affectivity in Heidegger we can extrapolate some useful insights for thinking the condition of being born implicated. First, since we are 'thrown beings', there is no such thing as a neutral or apolitical standpoint. There is no clean slate from which to think and act, no pure state to go back to.[65] We are always already compromised, contaminated, and enmeshed in a set of unchosen conditions, even if the latter often go unnoticed and unacknowledged. In fact, we do not exist in a container called 'world'. Our being-in-the-world means that we are embedded in a complex web of relations or, more accurately, we *are* those relations. These relations mould the different 'folding processes' that constitute our implicated condition.

The second point that we can take from Heidegger's phenomenological study of existence is the fact that we access our thrownness affectively. Affectivity discloses our situatedness within the world, the way in which we are 'delivered over' and affected by a set of unchosen conditions. In feeling ourselves in moods, we discover the givenness that qualifies our being from the beginning. Yet, for the most part, people ignore their state of thrownness and live in affective states that reveal their disavowal of the condition of being born implicated.

Finally, the link between thrownness (*Geworfenheit*) and projection (*Entwurf*) – both involve a 'throw' (*Wurf*) – suggests that our unavoidable thrownness is also the ground of our political responsibility. In a sense, to live is to *respond* ethically and politically to our thrownness. It involves taking responsibility for the socio-political implications of our natality. Precisely because our thrownness is 'with us' for the whole of our life, we need to 'take charge of' ('*hacernos cargo*') the set of unchosen conditions we are born into.[66] If we link the concept of thrownness to the Black Mediterranean, we realise in what sense being born as a white Italian citizen puts us in certain predicaments of power. While unchosen, our whiteness, citizenship status, and national belonging are woven into our existence in the form of privileges, asymmetries of power, historically and socially constructed hierarchies. They demand us to 're-cognise' our natality and reflect critically on the social and political implications of our situatedness. We feel implicated by our birth when different affects disclose the burden of our thrownness, the fact that the conditions we are born into have far-reaching ramifications that involve us in regimes of violence and injustice. Yet, we typically conduct our lives in the mode of an 'evasive turning away' that helps produce and propagate histories and social formations such as those outlined above.[67]

Our brief foray into *Being and Time* allows us to recognise the Janus-like nature of natality. On the one hand there is the face of thrownness, the set of unchosen conditions that shape our whole lives. On the other hand there is the face of projective understanding and action, our capacity to 'take charge' of our thrownness and begin something new. Our political responsibility is marked by this duality, which forces us 'to respond to a predicament of power both as an individual and as a member of a collectivity and […] to face the burdens of acting and thinking as a participatory member of a collectivity'.[68] Far from being depoliticised, the condition of being born implicated emphasises the element of response, the need to *take responsibility for* one's position within the folds of power, the reverberations of past violence, and the social assemblages to which we belong and from which me might structurally benefit. Located between the past and the future, our natality calls us to decide how to inhabit our thrownness and our belonging to a group, exploring the web of challenges and possibilities opened by our social positionality.

The expression 'born implicated' should not be misinterpreted as a sort of original sin that locks us into a given identity, nailing us to something that simply *happened* to us. It is not a question of biological birth or ontological guilt, but rather of subject positions and political responsibility. It has to do with how a set of conditions we have no control over *become* political through structures of reproduction (social and political institutions, border regimes, racial ideologies, group attitudes) that give differential value to pure contingencies of life. To put it in another way, one is not guilty for being white (or male, Italian, and so on), but one is *responsible* for how these accidental circumstances may grant them certain opportunities, privileges, and rights while excluding others (say a Black Italian or a migrant) by virtue of how a given society evaluates conditions related to the random givenness of birth. As Iris Marion Young writes, 'one *has* responsibility always *now*, in relation to current events and in relation to their future consequences'.[69] The double structure of natality links the unchosen conditions of our birth to their present sociopolitical significance. Political responsibility is therefore historically grounded and forward-looking.

In this sense, drawing on Arendt, we could define the assumption of our political responsibility as a 'second birth'.[70] Such a second birth is the moment in which we take responsibility for what our original birth entails *in the present*. It involves challenging a condition we have come to accept as neutral and apolitical, the givenness of our birth, and addressing the implications of our thrownness by joining others in the collective task of changing the social and political formations to which we belong. Put differently, political responsibility as a second birth entails acknowledging the historically constructed character of our natality and taking action for disrupting the difference machine that produces dominant groups and marginalised, oppressed outsiders.[71]

Since we are social beings and we dwell on the stage of history, we have an imperative to monitor our social and political institutions to make sure that a pure accident (e.g., being born white or black, of a given sex and nationality) does not result in radically unequal life opportunities.

In the context of the Black Mediterranean, the second birth of white Italian citizens involves coming to terms with the material and cultural legacies of colonialism, fighting anti-Blackness and border violence, and reforming the current citizenship laws. This requires maintaining a productive tension between the two faces of natality, thrownness and projective action. Engaging in collective action without considering one's thrownness can weaken or obstruct a political struggle, as exemplified by the case of Giorgio Agamben who rejected signing a petition in favour of *jus soli*, claiming that citizenship is the problem, not the solution, thus overlooking the privileged position he was born into and the tangible benefits that citizenship would bring to the children of immigrants in Italy.[72] Conversely, dwelling on the self-reflexive examination of one's thrownness without using it as a springboard for differentiated solidarity is also sterile. Forgoing the projective, politically constructive side of natality leads to autotelic, performative, and ego-driven practices of confession that are more concerned with relieving the implicated subject's feelings of discomfort than with changing a context of oppression.[73] Our second birth is therefore a delicate balancing project of transfiguration, which demands situated thinking and ongoing work, as well as accepting the durable discomfort that derives from the recognition of our compromised positions.

Since we access our thrownness affectively and feelings can constrict or expand our sense of what is politically possible, affectivity is a critical arena of political struggle and solidarity. I would therefore like to link the argument developed thus far with Deborah Gould's work on affect and activism.[74] In *Moving Politics*, Gould shows how affect, the nonconscious and undetermined, but nonetheless registered, capacity to affect and to be affected, is 'bursting with potential', in the sense that it contains within itself 'multiple possible unfurlings'.[75] Our affectivity can thus open or foreclose political horizons, as well as stir, intensify, and modulate associative political action. Yet the sense of political (im)possibilities is influenced by what Gould, drawing on Bourdieu, calls 'emotional habitus':

> Operating beneath conscious awareness, the emotional habitus of a social group provides members with an emotional disposition, with a sense of what and how to feel, with labels for their feelings, with schemas about what feelings are and what they mean, with ways of figuring out and understanding what they are feeling. An emotional habitus contains an emotional pedagogy, a template for how and what to feel, in part by conferring some feelings and modes of expression an axiomatic, natural quality and marking other feelings states unintelligible within its terms and thus in a sense unfeelable and inexpressible.[76]

By providing 'axiomatic inclinations toward certain feelings and ways of emoting', the emotional habitus works *through* us, orienting a social group's common sense and shaping its modes of thinking, feeling, and acting.[77] In this way the emotional habitus becomes our 'natural' way of being, the incorporated and taken-for-granted filter of feelings and experiences. In doing so it conceals our thrownness and its far-reaching consequences, thus obscuring our potentially implicated position. Indeed, implication and a social group's hegemonic emotional habitus are often in a dialectical relationship: they produce and reinforce one another. This represents a major challenge for social and political change, for the interplay between the dominant emotional habitus and implication tends to dampen our sense of political responsibility.

Yet the emotional habitus is not totalising, and I would argue that the framework of the Black Mediterranean generates what, building on José Medina and Mihaela Mihai, we could call 'affective friction' between white Italians' (and Europeans') sedimented 'structures of feeling', on the one hand, and diasporic, anti-racist modes of belonging and engaging with otherness, on the other.[78] Such affective friction is instrumental in transfiguring implication because it can engender novel schemas of perception, political sentiments, alternative emotional dispositions – a dynamic affective substratum that might lubricate the relationship between a subject's thrownness and projective action, thus creating the preconditions for social and political change. Indeed, by puncturing the dominant emotional habitus, the Black Mediterranean framework can, among other things, highlight white Italian citizens' condition of implication, urging them (us) to take responsibility for the entanglements of (post)colonial disavowal, systemic racism, border violence, and exclusionary citizenship laws. This 'emotion work' can nurture a counter-hegemonic emotional habitus, which, albeit hard to achieve, can *potentially* shape new practices of belonging and alternative visions of politics.[79] The Black Mediterranean can therefore be seen also as a *politics of differentiated affective solidarity*, whereby differently situated subjects '[develop] more capacious political formations that are not oriented on descent-based, identarian claims but rather on shared political visions, intertwined histories of struggle and resistance, and nonlinear diasporic entanglements that disrupt state systems of categorization'.[80]

A reality check is in order here. How does Black Mediterranean politics work? Isn't there a contrast between the openness suggested by the Arendtian notion of natality and the social obduracy implied by the Bourdieusian concept of habitus? How can we nurture a counter-hegemonic emotional habitus? First, I do not believe that the theoretical frameworks that I derive from Heidegger, Arendt, and Bourdieu (via Gould) are incompatible. Heidegger stressed that, for the most part, we are not aware of our moods and of the thrownness that they disclose. In fact, it is precisely those attunements/moods that go through us unnoticed, that shape our assessment of the world while we ignore that we are 'in them', that are the most powerful.[81] Arendt, on her part, always developed her work 'against a background

of both reckless optimism and reckless despair'.[82] In *The Human Condition* she pointed out that '[t]he miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal, "natural" ruin is ultimately the fact of natality, in which the faculty of action is ontologically rooted'.[83] Far from being a naïve optimist, Arendt believed that the natural course of social life tends towards ruin, and 'action' is a rare process that navigates its way upstream, as a 'counter-movement to the normal and "natural" course of things'.[84] And for Bourdieu the habitus is a system of durable dispositions that conditions very heavily our capacity to act, think, and feel in counter-hegemonic ways. All three frameworks that I interweave in this essay therefore offer sobering insights regarding the difficulty of transforming the feeling of implication into genuine political action. Yet, they also point us to unstable and oft-overlooked cracks in the dominant structure of social life. What I am seeking to do here is to pay heed to those cracks, give them space, and explore how we can work on them to advance progressive struggles.

One of the ways in which the Black Mediterranean framework can help with this is by foregrounding how certain subjects are implicated in the interlocking structures of violence outlined above. If our 'presentist' political predicament is characterised by a general feeling of powerlessness and obstructed agency,[85] implication enables us to follow the threads of power and find where they hook into our daily lives.[86] I therefore see implication as an opportunity for reclaiming political agency. The question of being 'born implicated' is virtually universal, although it applies to each of us in different ways and degrees. And, importantly, natality engages us in multiple ways: as individuals, as members of a collectivity, and as members of a species. By politicising our thrownness, which we typically take for granted and consider as neutral, the feeling of implication can disrupt the appearance of 'natural order' and reveal the historical and social significance of our natality. In doing so it gives us traction for wrenching open the field of struggle, indicating the fissures where our individual conditions connect to large structures of oppression as well as the pressure points where collective political action might be more effective.

Black Mediterranean politics could consist in, for example, political declarations and acts of citizenship that do not have prior authorisation of the state apparatus, but that claim and put into practice a 'right to have rights' for disenfranchised Italians and migrants. I am thinking here of political practices like those enacted by the *sans-papiers* movement in France and conceptualised as inventive practices of founding human rights by Ayten Gündoğdu.[87] Another example is the 'Black Mediterranean diasporic politics' analysed by Hawthorne in *Contesting Race and Citizenship*, who looked at the mutual aid projects and strategic mobilisations of 'a group of Italian-born Eritreans in Milan who self-organized in response to the arrival of large numbers of Eritrean refugees and asylum seekers to the Porta Venezia neighbourhood in 2015'.[88] These activists engaged in solidarity work 'oriented on shared trans-Mediterranean histories of racial dispossession rather than on naturalized notions of citizenship, birthplace, descent, culture, or territory'.[89] A politics

of differentiated affective solidarity could also take the form, hypothetically, of a boycott of activities and events that perpetuate a racialised understanding of the nation. For example, given that black football players and black Italians are recurrently racially abused and discriminated against during public events, and given that the Italian national team often naturalises descendants by blood of Italian emigrants to South America (so-called '*oriundi*'), a boycott that calls attention on how sport activities sustain a racialised and discriminatory conception of citizenship and national belonging could help to open a discussion on the racial boundaries of the nation.

I am aware that these examples of Black Mediterranean politics might look limited or improbable in relation to the structural problems mentioned in section one. We need to be cautious regarding the prospects of racial justice in the Mediterranean region. In fact, as Nasar Meer argues building on Lauren Berlant, racial justice activism is often contaminated by a 'cruel optimism' 'in which "an image of a better good life available" creates an impasse that does not easily allow us to "detach from what is already not working"'.[90] I hesitate to offer more concrete examples of Black Mediterranean politics not only because this is being competently explored by the scholars of the Black Mediterranean Collective, but also because knowingness (knowing what is to be done to advance a political cause) can foreclose a genuine fight for social transformation. As Gould argues, both establishment knowingness – the condescending and seemingly pragmatic 'there is no alternative' discourse – and armchair liberal or leftist knowingness act like disciplinary regimes that often 'generate feelings of powerlessness, despondency, cynicism, resignation to what is, and consequent political withdrawal'.[91] Inhabiting the uncertainties entailed in activism, on the contrary, can be generative for it encourages healthy debates and opens spaces of collective brainstorming, reflective doing, principled experimentation, and coalitional work. This position involves affective registers that steer clear of establishment dismissiveness, purist blueprints, or negative forms of unknowingness. As Gould puts it,

> not knowing what is to be done is full rather than empty, brimming with unpredetermined potential. Attuned to the conditions of the moment and pulling from accumulated wisdom, not knowing here entails sensing your collective way into, around and through a plethora of possibilities, with all the unpredictability therein, and figuring it out as you go.[92]

The Black Mediterranean politics of differentiated affective solidarity cannot and should not prescribe us what to do. But when it is accompanied by cultural work that educates the members of a political community on the different meanings and potential of their natality, this active, generative unknowingness can foster a counter-hegemonic emotional habitus that is instrumental for working towards a politics that promotes freedom of movement, racial justice, and a more equitable distribution of resources and opportunities.

Each of us is born into a set of unchosen conditions, but we typically overlook the political significance and potential of our natality. The first step to put the feeling of being 'born implicated' to good use is to generate countermoods that enable us to assume a critical distance from the taken-for-granted affective atmosphere in which we live, thereby opening the possibility for feeling ourselves and structures of oppression differently. This affective 're-attunement' requires a persevering and long-term cultural work that transforms the 'structures of (un)feeling' of our societies.[93] Only by doing so can we take ownership of the racial inequalities of our societies and explore ways of building political communities in which the lottery of birth does not throw us into radically unequal and socially determined life chances.

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Notes

[1] Ginzburg, "The Bond of Shame," 1.

[2] Incidentally, I should note that the member of Youth Action who handed me the leaflet is currently (August 2023) an MP in the Italian parliament, within Giorgia Meloni's extreme right-wing party Brothers of Italy.

[3] See Taylor, *Pride, Shame, and Guilt*.

[4] See Filippi, *Prima gli italiani! (sì, ma quali?)*, ix-xvi.

[5] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 9.

[6] See Pesarini, "Africa's Delivery Room," 199-220.

[7] On the concept of implication, see Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject*.

[8] Ibid., 8.

[9] Ackerly, *Just Responsibility*, 8.

[10] Shachar, *The Birthright Lottery*, 5.

[11] Ibid.

[12] There is of course something paradoxical in using an author who has been affiliated with Nazism for an antiracist project. I recognise this, but I think that when it is recontextualised, *Sein und Zeit*'s 'existential analytic' of *Dasein* offers useful tools for thinking about the affective predicament of the implicated subject. In fact, there is no way of engaging with a sizable amount of twentieth century critical theory without coming to terms with Heidegger's magnum opus.

[13] See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 130-136, 169-173.

[14] See *Affective Societies*, edited by Slaby and von Scheve.

[15] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 130-138, 178-184.

[16] On the struggles for 'transfiguring implication', see Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject*, 199-203.

[17] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 176.

[18] See Ribeiro, *Lugar de fala*.

[19] On the relationship between Europe's border regimes and colonial mentality and structures, see Mellino, *Cittadinanze postcoloniali*; Mellino, *Governare la crisi dei rifugiati*; and De Genova, "The European Question," 75-102.

[20] I add the adjective 'impoverished' to qualify Robbins's conception of the beneficiary, as developed in *The Beneficiary*. While we must examine how the material, social, and political benefits afforded by one's subject position may be causally linked with the suffering of distant others, we should also recognise that, from a holistic perspective, the beneficiary may also stand to lose from a situation of structural inequality. In other words, if on an individual level a subject might be a beneficiary, from a global, collective perspective that very subject might be 'impoverished' by virtue of the same structural conditions that make him or her a beneficiary because the society as a whole is damaged. This is not to deny or flatten sharp inequities of power, but to highlight

how a context of injustice and oppression mars everyone's condition, affecting negatively even the environment in which beneficiaries live.

[21] See Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject*, 17-21; and Adebayo, "Complex Implication".

[22] Following Hawthorne's "*L'Italia Meticcia*," 173, I use the expression 'white Italians' to denaturalise the normative whiteness that permeates Italian society and 'disrupt the normative teleology of whiteness → Italianness → Italian citizenship.'

[23] Balibar, *La proposition de l'égaliberté*.

[24] Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 2-5.

[25] Braudel, *The Mediterranean*, 171.

[26] See Chambers, *Mediterranean Crossings*; and Otele, *African Europeans*.

[27] The Black Mediterranean Collective, eds, *The Black Mediterranean*, 15. See also Romeo, *Riscrivere la nazione*.

[28] See Proglio, *The Horn of Africa Diasporas in Italy*; Hawthorne, "Black Mediterranean geographies," 484-507; and Hawthorne, *Contesting Race and Citizenship*.

[29] Several scholars and activists have pointed out the deficiencies and shortcomings of the Italian language for dealing with questions of race and Blackness. See, for example, the campaign "Le parole che ci mancano" ["The words that we lack"] where writers and activists creatively seek to remedy these problems: http://www.razzismobruttastoria.net/progetti/le-parole-ci-mancano.

[30] Hawthorne, "*L'Italia Meticcia*," 187.

[31] Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 37.

[32] Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia were merged under the administration of "Italian East Africa".

[33] Ben-Ghiat and Fuller, eds, *Italian Colonialism*, 1.

[34] See Labanca, *Oltremare*; and Calchi Novati, ed., *L'Africa d'Italia*.

[35] See Lombardi-Diop and Romeo, eds, *Postcolonial Italy*; Hom, *Empire's Mobius Strip*; and Filippi, *Noi però gli abbiamo fatto le strade*.

[36] See Del Boca, *Italiani, brava gente?*.

[37] On the concept of 'necropolitics', see Mbembe, *Politiques de l'inimitié*. On border violence and necropolitics, see Sanyal, "Race, Migration, and Security and the Euro-African Border," 326.

[38] See Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop, *Bianco e nero*; and Scego, "Italy is my country – but it must face its racist history".

[39] See Hawthorne, "In Search of Black Italia," 152-174; Merrill, *Black Spaces*; Hawthorne and Pesarini, "Making Black Lives Matter in Italy".

[40] Obasuyi, *Corpi estranei*.

[41] See Njegosh, "Gli italiani sono bianchi?", 13-45; Giuliani, *Race, Nation and Gender in Modern Italy*; and Pesarini, "When the Mediterranean 'Became' Black," 31-55.

[42] Portelli, "The Problem of the Color-Blind," 35.

[43] Goldberg, *The Threat of Race*, 151-198. See also Mellino, "De-Provincializing Italy," 83-99; and Pesarini and Guido, "Mixed Identities in Italy," 349-365.

[44] Jones, *Violent Borders*, 5.

[45] Danewid, "White innocence in the Black Mediterranean," 1681.

[46] Jones, *Violent Ignorance*.

[47] Jones, *White Borders*, 5.

[48] Hawthorne, "*L'Italia Meticcia*," 180.

[49] See Pesarini, "Blood is Thicker than Water".

[50] Fiore, *Pre-Occupied Spaces*, 187.

[51] Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, 119. See also Mihai, *Political Memory and the Aesthetics of Care*, 50-51.

[52] 'Structures of racialisation' refers here to a widespread and embedded system that establishes dominant narratives and defaults certain identities: being white, heterosexual, Catholic, with certain social habits and cultural values. The assumption that these identities are simply standard and appropriate, rather than structurally privileged, is fed by dangerous political myths that need to be deconstructed. See Malik, *We Need New Stories*, 144-145.

[53] Cohen and Ghosh, *Citizenship*, 3.

[54] Ayata, "Affective Citizenship," 331.

[55] See Guibernau, *Belonging*.

[56] Rothberg, "Feeling Implicated".

[57] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 131-132.

[58] Ibid., 273.

[59] See Richardson, *Heidegger*, 106-112.

[60] See Stapleton, "Dasein as being-in-the-world," 44-46.

[61] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 139.

[62] Ibid., 324 (rev. trans.).

[63] Ibid., 133.

[64] See Elpidorou and Freeman, "Affectivity in Heidegger I," 661-671.

[65] I draw here on Shotwell's critique of 'purity politics', in *Against Purity*.

[66] See Cruz, *Hacerse cargo*.

[67] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 133.

[68] Vázquez-Arroyo, *Political Responsibility*, x.

[69] Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 92.

[70] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 176.

[71] See Isin, *Being Political*.
[72] See Agamben, "Perché non ho firmato l'appello sullo ius soli". I agree that citizenship is a dispositive of exclusion and that we should devise a politics beyond the nation-state, but gaining citizenship would be materially significant for almost a million second generation Italians. Moreover, many Black Italian activists today are approaching the struggle over citizenship in creative ways, seeing the latter as a 'stepping-stone' to outer-national politics. On Agamben's open letter, see Hawthorne, *Contesting Race*, 51-52.
[73] See Smith, "Unsettling the Privilege of Self-Reflexivity," 263-279.
[74] Gould, *Moving Politics*; and Gould, "Affect and Activism," 95-108.
[75] Gould, *Moving Politics*, 20.
[76] Ibid., 34.
[77] Ibid., 32.
[78] See Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance*, 27-55; and Mihai, *Political Memory*, 9, 49-63. 'Structures of feeling' is a term coined by Raymond Williams to describe social forces that mediate and orient our affective lives. For a useful analysis of the term, see Flatley, *Affective Mapping*, 24-27.
[79] Gould, *Moving Politics*, 28.
[80] Hawthorne, "Black Mediterranean geographies," 18.
[81] See Flatley, *Affective Mapping*, 22.
[82] Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, x.
[83] Ibid., 247.
[84] Young-ah Gottlieb, "Hannah Arendt: Reflections on Ruin," 111.
[85] I draw the concept of 'presentism' from the work of Hartog, who in *Régimes d'historicité* defines presentism as the 'regime of historicity' that emerged after 1989: an expanded, perpetual present absorbing in itself both past and future. Presentism corresponds to the neoliberal belief that 'there is no alternative' and that the political-economic order within which our societies operate is natural and immutable. This insuperable, eternal present paralyses the utopian imagination and hinders a critical engagement with the past. On the idea of presentism, see also Traverso, *Left-Wing Melancholia*, 7-9.
[86] Taylor, "Afterword(s)," 121.
[87] Gündoğdu, *Rightlessness in an Age of Rights*.
[88] Hawthorne, *Contesting Race*, 22.
[89] Ibid., 182.
[90] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 264, cited in Meer, *The Cruel Optimism of Racial Justice*, 5.
[91] Gould, "On (not) knowing what is to be done (in 17 affective registers)," 26-27.
[92] Ibid., 34.
[93] Ingram, "The Politics of Affective Transformation," 33.

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Recent Publication

Stefano Bellin, 'Disorienting empathy: Reimagining the Global border regime through Mohsin Hamid's Exit West', *Literature Compass*, 12, no. 12.

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