

## THEMATIC ARTICLE

# The organic management of conflicts developed in enterprises formed by women in the solidarity economy: a post-colonialist analysis of a feminist practice of self-management

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## Abstract

This research arises from Martin's (1993) studies of women's management practices. However, it is articulated from the place of self-management within the scope of the Solidarity and Feminist Economy Network (SFEN). Therefore, a new construct to identify some practices that are performed in the Solidarity Economy (SE) was developed: feminist practices of self-management (Bauhardt, 2014; Faria, 2017; Vieta, 2015). The objective is to analyze one of the practices observed in the field: the organic management of conflicts. The main theoretical contributions used to mediate the discussion depart from Martin's approach (1993), from the perspective of substantive rationality in Ramos (1989), from studies on conflicts in organizations in Guerardi (2009) and Putnam (2010), as well as the postcolonialist view that adheres to the context of women in higher education (Lugones, 2008; Mohanty, 2006). Data collection is based on semi-structured interviews with women from the SFEN and direct and indirect observation in the field between 2018 and 2021. The perspective adopted for data analysis is an oral history based on critical discourse analysis (Meihy, 2002; Wodak, 2004). The results point to the following findings: non-concealment of conflict in self-management processes, organically managed conflict based on intense communication, and conflict management as a learning process that prioritizes experiences and differences. For women, conflict is not a demerit. On the contrary, it is managed in such a way as to strengthen reciprocal ties between members of solidarity enterprises.

**Keywords:** Solidary economy. Networks of cooperation. Self-management. Feminist practices of self-management. Conflict management.

## *A gestão orgânica de conflitos desenvolvida em empreendimentos formados por mulheres da economia solidária: uma análise pós-colonialista sobre uma prática feminista de autogestão*

### Resumo

Esta pesquisa surge dos estudos das práticas de gestão de mulheres, de Martin (1993), contudo se articula no lugar da autogestão da Rede de Economia Solidária e Feminista (RESF). Por isso, foi desenvolvido, ao longo do texto, um novo construto para identificar algumas práticas que se performatizam na economia solidária (ES), nomeadas de práticas feministas de autogestão (Bauhardt, 2014; Faria, 2017; Vieta, 2015). O objetivo é analisar uma das ações observadas em campo: a gestão orgânica de conflitos. Os principais aportes teóricos para mediar a discussão partem da abordagem de Martin (1993), da perspectiva da racionalidade substantiva em Ramos (1989), dos estudos sobre conflitos nas organizações em Guerardi (2009) e Putnam (2010), bem como da visão pós-colonialista que adere ao contexto das mulheres na ES (Lugones, 2008; Mohanty, 2006). A coleta de dados se vale de entrevistas semiestruturadas com mulheres da RESF e da observação direta e indireta em campo, entre 2018 e 2021. A perspectiva adotada para a análise dos dados é a da história oral com base em análise crítica do discurso (Meihy, 2002; Wodak, 2004). Os resultados apontam para os seguintes achados: não ocultação do conflito nos processos de autogestão, conflito gerido de forma orgânica sob uma comunicação intensa e gestão do conflito como processo de aprendizagem que prioriza experiências e diferenças. Para as mulheres, o conflito não é demérito; em vez disso, ele é gerido de forma a fortalecer laços de reciprocidade entre os membros dos empreendimentos solidários.

**Palavras-chave:** Economia solidária. Redes de cooperação. Autogestão. Práticas feministas de autogestão. Gestão de conflitos.

## *La gestión orgánica de conflictos desarrollada en empresas formadas por mujeres de la economía solidaria: un análisis poscolonialista de una práctica feminista de autogestión*

### Resumen

Esta investigación surge de los estudios de Martin (1993) sobre las prácticas de gestión de las mujeres, sin embargo, se articula desde el lugar de la autogestión en el ámbito de la Red de Economía Solidaria y Feminista (RESF). Por ello, se desarrolla a lo largo de la investigación un nuevo constructo para identificar algunas prácticas que se realizan en la Economía Solidaria (ES), denominadas prácticas feministas de autogestión (Bauhardt, 2014; Faria, 2017; Vieta, 2015). El objetivo es analizar una de las prácticas observadas en campo: la gestión orgánica de los conflictos. Los principales aportes teóricos utilizados para mediar la discusión parten del enfoque de Martin (1993), de la perspectiva de la racionalidad sustantiva de Ramos (1989), de los estudios sobre conflictos en las organizaciones de Guerardi (2009) y Putnam (2010), así como de la visión poscolonialista que se adhiere al contexto de la mujer en la educación superior (Lugones, 2008; Mohanty, 2006). La recolección de datos se basa en entrevistas semiestructuradas con mujeres de la RESF y observación directa e indirecta en campo entre 2018 y 2021. La perspectiva adoptada para el análisis de datos es la de la historia oral basada en el análisis crítico del discurso (Meihy, 2002; Wodak, 2004). Los resultados apuntan a los siguientes hallazgos: no ocultamiento del conflicto en los procesos de autogestión, conflicto manejado orgánicamente basado en una comunicación intensa y la gestión del conflicto como un proceso de aprendizaje que prioriza las experiencias y las diferencias. Para las mujeres, el conflicto no es un demérito, por el contrario, se maneja de tal manera que se fortalezcan los lazos de reciprocidad entre integrantes de empresas solidarias.

**Palabras clave:** Economía solidaria. Redes de cooperación. Autogestión. Práticas feministas de autogestión. Manejo de conflictos.

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## INTRODUCTION

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The solidarity economy movement is recognized as a space for the generation of income and the promotion of good citizenship. In Brazil, the solidarity economy (SE) transfers the discussion to the social field, given that it contains various characteristics which manifest themselves through the proximity of the relationships with the actors' community, demonstrating the political will to transform social relationships, and as a result, management practices (França & Eynaud, 2020; Soares et al., 2020). Within the context of the solidarity economy, workers own these enterprises which are based on self-management practices and involve a different vision of the formation of proactive good citizenship in the field of economics and a new rationality in the management practices of production and consumption (Pinheiro & Paula, 2014).

Women transfer a series of demands to the solidarity economy that encompass a concern with not only with the production and commercialization process but also community needs, intertwining the economic and social dimensions, as well as stimulating local development (Andion, 2005; Guérin, 2005). Another important aspect that appears in this area's narratives is learning through the collective and shared functioning of these enterprises, based on the development of a capacity for self-management (Barreto & Paulo, 2009; Laville, 2014). This process includes all the potential freedoms of self-management as well as the conflicts and challenges that come from shared management in an economy permeated by values as well as issues such as gender, race, class, and territory.

This study begins with Martin's studies of female management practices (1993, 2006). In terms of organizational studies, the feminist organizational practice model that she proposes is strongly aligned with the values of the solidarity economy. The author's research presents forms of feminist management: asking about women's issues; utilizing practical feminist reasoning; promoting greater awareness; providing community and cooperative ties; making democracy and the participation and empowerment of subordinates viable; articulating valorization and a concern for taking care of each other; and fighting for transformational results. The author's propositions are aligned with the vision of the solidarity economy and not only involve the work dimension, but also the union of work and life. In terms of female self-management practices in solidarity enterprises, there is a significant movement which understands the objectives of work and differentiates it from the traditional social relationship of hierarchical production characteristic of predominantly bureaucratic organizations (Onuma et al., 2012; Soares & Rebouças, 2022).

Based on the self-management developed by the Feminist Solidarity Economy Network (FSEN), Martin developed the term "feminist self-management practices", believing that they do not include some dynamics that occur in the solidarity economy. The objective of this article is to analyze feminist practices in the organic management of conflicts identified during a broader study of feminist self-management practices in enterprises organized by the women of the FSEN, which was founded in 2010, and currently consists of 29 networks, 26 of them in the State of Ceará, containing a total of 222 enterprises.

The organization of these enterprises in networks is a business strategy to favor market access for small producers in various alternative spaces. These cooperative networks make communications and interactions in the solidarity economy dynamic by promoting systems of reciprocity which operate by converting trust into social trust, without requiring mutual direct knowledge, supported by the expectation of a corresponding attitude and the restitution of a balance between contributions and benefits among one another (Gaiger, 2011; Laville, 2014). The proposal of feminist self-management practices led to observations of the collective dynamics of women in the FSEN, constructing reflections for the theoretical and empirical fields concerning the practices of women in Ceará.

In terms of scientific research, the field of solidarity economy studies is going through a phase of growing breadth and maturity. Various areas of knowledge have conducted analyses of solidarity economy enterprises from different perspectives in order to understand the dynamics of solidarity economy organizations (Costa & Carrion, 2009; Gaiger, 2011; Silva, 2018). There have been studies about the following subjects: the appearance of SE enterprises (Benini, 2010; Gaiger, 2011; Singer, 2008); the SE as a social movement of a popular nature (Costa, 2011; Singer, 2008); the impacts of these enterprises on local economies (Andion, 2005; França, 2013; Silva, 2018); the work relationships of women in the SE (Guérin, 2005; Santos, 2017); SE public policies (Dagnino, 2011; Monje-Reyes, 2011; Taule & Debaco, 2004); the dilemmas of the SE (Barreto & Paula, 2009); the formation of cooperative networks of these enterprises (Mance, 2003, 2006; Scherer-Warren, 2006); organizational dynamics in SE enterprises (Costa & Carrion, 2009; Faria, 2017; Pinheiro & Paula, 2014; Santos, 2017; Vieta, 2015); and the capacity of the SE to emancipate women, observing the limits imposed by the market system (Bauhardt, 2014; Costa, 2011; Soares & Rebouças, 2022; Soares et al., 2020).

We have not identified, however, studies of female management practices within a self-management context. Pinheiro and Paula's study (2014) corroborated this idea, pointing out the need for empirical studies to evaluate the efficiency of SE enterprises using substantive logic. Based on the acceptance of what feminist self-management practices can contribute to the management of organizations in general, as Martin suggests (1993, 2006), this text seeks to fill this gap in the study of self-management practices, especially in terms of female work practices within the context of the solidarity economy.

The theoretical support that we use to mediate and guide our discussion consists of: Martin's approach (1993, 2006) to feminist management practices; the perspective of post-colonial feminist authors like Lugones (2016) and Mohanty (2006); the optic of substantive rationality in organizations in the articles of Ramos (1989) and Serva (1997); studies of the management of organizational conflict, from the point of view of Putnam's communication and discourse (2010a, 2020b); and the point of view of learning in Gherardi (2009). The approach adopted for the data collection and analysis is oral history, with a focus on new history, through interviews and observations, considering that oral history favors voices that have been forgotten or have become invisible (Meihy, 2002; Wodak, 2004).

## THEORETICAL SUPPORT

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### The management of conflicts in the practices of bureaucratic and substantive organizations

According to Kuhn and Putnam (2014), as well as McIntyre (2007), it is common for organizations to resist admitting that conflict exists in their dynamics, because they consider conflict to be dysfunctional and something that should be hidden, which stems from the view that conflict reveals a lack of solidarity and collaboration that should not exist. Putnam (2010a), however, argues that conflicts are inevitable and are driven by individual and organizational growth which stimulates communications and contributes to problem solution, which are inherent to the nature of complex organizations. Ramos (1989) identifies a defensive posture in relation to conflict to be an organizational phenomenon which results in various blind spots in organizational analyses.

To Lugones (2016), the coloniality of gender cannot be interpreted in a single way and it has taken on different meanings over time; the experiences and conflicts of women can vary according to the contexts they find themselves in. Thus, Santos (2017) believes that the way that gender oppression occurs depends on the overlapping of different levels and contexts of inequality in the way that reality demonstrates that inequality is defused in different ways by each individual.

Ballestrin (2017) argues that the way these women deal with the violence of an imaginary economics that excludes them will not be the same, because many of them do not recognize the systems of oppression that they are subjected to, and therefore negotiate conditions of equality in an unequal system. In the same manner, the way in which they will articulate and create strategies to confront unequal relationships inside and outside of their communities will be diverse, given the multiple positions that the conflicts occupy.

Putnam (2010a) points out that the most important part of the conflict management process is the interactions in the negotiations beginning with the identification of the problem or the issue that needs to be resolved, which involves gender issues that are tangential to organizational relationships and are perceived in the order of discourse. The relationships and the interactions contribute to a process of constructing the subjectivity of the participants, their engagement, and their learning in their ways of managing conflict. According to Putnam (2010b), since conflict is an element present in the context of social relationships in the production and consumption of goods and services, one has to face its manifestations and work proactively to construct a new order. Therefore, the problem can be rationalized in various manners – instrumentally or substantively – depending on the context in which it is interpreted.

Instrumental rationality is understood as action driven by utilitarian and economic calculations, as well as formal aspects and market demands (Ramos, 1989). Substantive rationality, in turn, originates in the exercise of a sense of reality in common with the subjects, independent of time or place, organizing actions through rational debate, which seek to achieve a dynamic equilibrium between personal satisfaction and social satisfaction, based on values such as emancipation and self-realization (Ramos, 1989).

Communal life is permeated by conflicts, which can be regulated or managed in various dimensions. Serva (2023, p. 11) notes that “the political dimension of the development of collective action” is based on the subject of social normativity, in which individuals intervene in the coordination of communal life, negotiating adjustments made necessary by conflicts. The author points out that management organizations focus on political processes of 2 orders: the way of dealing with conflicts and their effects (inside and outside the organization), and in the definitions, changes, and practices of individual and collective engagement in action.

Moretto and Cesconetto (2009) relate success in negotiation with factors such as organizational culture, styles of leadership, the establishment of a relationship network, the development of actions oriented towards a focus on interests, the continual application of creativity, respect for the criteria of justice and the common good, the definition of viable compromises, and fluid and transparent communication. However, conflict is a phenomenon that needs to be managed. According to McIntyre (2007), bad management of conflicts can result in harmful dynamics for individuals as well as the organization, because it creates a hostile work environment and harms performance and effort. Thus, Serva (2023) argues that the way it is managed affects conflicts and the way that the actors engage.

Singer (2008) considers the solidarity economy to be a movement that generates social transformation taking competitive relationships and replacing them with cooperative relationships, while Guérin (2005) points out 2 common characteristics of solidarity economy enterprises: the first consists of recognizing the importance of processes of reciprocity as the way to act economically in cooperation, and the second consists of the elaboration of ways to coordinate and allocate alternative resources that stand out in terms of their joint construction and proximity among the actors.

Under the substantive paradigm, dialogue assumes an important role in the solution of ongoing or latent conflicts when they are conceived of as a two-way street, constructed based on cooperation and deep reflections related to collective errors and successes (Monte-Reyes, 2011; Sá & Soares, 2005). To Putnam (2010b), the parties achieve new understanding in the conflict management process. However, this requires management practices which permit and drive communication, interaction, and autonomy among the parties, so that the conflict becomes a transformation and learning process (Gherardi, 2009).

## Feminist self-management practices and ways to manage substantive organizational conflicts

The self-management perspective in solidarity economy enterprises has been characterized as a requisite for the viability of these businesses. For women, self-management practices are related not only to work, because they develop various forms of relating and producing which favor cooperation and the community, stimulating collective knowledge. The debate about emancipation in the workplace has been employed in organizational studies that discuss forms of rationality that guide management, especially bureaucratic instrumental rationality and substantive rationality and their impacts on organizations (França & Eynaud, 2020; Margoto et al., 2010; Serva, 2023).

In the solidarity economy, the practices of individuals are governed by a rationality motivated by values, which emphasizes substantive rationality in its organizational form, ordering the organization of work and patterns of action, involving the adoption of ethical criteria through which reality needs to be judged (Andion, 2005; Costa & Carrion, 2009). The agreed upon values define the identity of the group, differentiating it from the external environment, and it is reflected in social actions and practices. It is not by accident that feminist self-management practices are molded not only by the values of the solidarity economy, but also by those provided by feminist movements themselves.

To Santos (2017), studies of feminist economics can fall into a homogenous reading of female economic practices, reinforcing stereotypes and a centrist discourse that represents subaltern women in a reductionist manner (Mohanty, 2006). One of the contributions of the post-colonial feminist economics field is rethinking the economic and ontological categories used in the formation and diffusion of the concept of knowledge, especially in terms of instrumental rationality. Self-management dynamics deal with conflicts in various ways, keeping in mind that decision-making processes are shared among individuals. Within this context, the conflict caused by inequality between women and men is neutralized by the appearance of impartiality in the conventional dynamics of bureaucratic management, which ignores any gender conflict in organizations, creating a situation which directly affects women (Hirata, 2002).

Self-management in the organization of work is a self-governing process which articulates more autonomous and participative administrative dynamics within the organization, which in the context of female practices, reflect specific organizational processes, and as a result, conflict management. Self-management is based on fundamentally collective decision-making processes, which require access to information, collective responsibility, and group discipline (Carvalho, 1995). Self-management is guided by substantive rationality, which conducts the experience of managing life itself, going beyond the paradigm of enterprise management. According to Vieta (2015), self-management is an innovative configuration that announces social transformations, because it assumes a dynamism that permits changes in the forms of organization. Self-management is impelled by the material conditions of our time, and not the maturing of previous forms of the same thing (Carvalho, 1983, p. 21). Thus, Soares and Rebouças (2022) believe that context is important in the development of self-management, and they define the form and levels of interaction that will be developed in these enterprises.

Conflict management is part of self-management since it is part of the growth and development process, and therefore the denial or absence of it is unhealthy for individuals and organizations. To França and Eynaud (2020, p. 207), the emergence of self-organization supposes the free interaction of local actors, spaces for the discussion and resolution of conflicts, managed collectively for the greater good of all. Onuma et al. (2012, p. 69) argue that conflicts are reduced because “administration occurs in a democratic manner, with collective decision making” in constant or sporadic assemblies. In this way, communication and information systems are under collective scrutiny, which diminishes conflict or manages it in a more satisfactory manner than heterogenous management. The answers to dilemmas and aspirations are connected to the relationships that members create amongst each other, mutually engaging to deal with the contradictions, disputes, tensions, and conflicts which are inherent in diversity (Wenger, 2001).

The organic management of conflicts, the construct considered in this study, should not be confused with automatic and hasty management, because it deals with conscious action, in the human and social sense, determined by a specific context. Organicity will always be present if there is articulation between the subject of the action (an individual or group) and the mobilizing objectives that are the proposed goal, relating them with systems studies and notions of retroaction (Dellagnelo & Silva, 2000; Figueiredo, 2015). This is an organic part of female practices and consists of the capacity to accumulate information for immediate use.

Putnam (2010a) observes that in the study of conflict it is necessary to observe verbal and non-verbal communication, always paying attention to the dynamic aspects of negotiation: such as the processing of information, how offers are formulated and modified, how power and authority are redefined by communication styles and strategies, as well as the way conflict increases and decreases during negotiations. According to Caldart (2010), Onuma et al. (2012), organicity is distant from the mechanization of actions and is related to the recovery of these impulses which drive action – in this case, the unity of women and their need to deal with their demands as a community.

Caldart (2010) says that the word “organicity” indicates a process in which a given idea or decision advances in an agile and synchronized manner. It is a group of instances that constitutes the organization, which is capable of guaranteeing the effective participation of all in waging the fight in its various dimensions. In the practices of the women of the FSEN, this process occurs rapidly, because the decision-making instances are horizontal rather than hierarchical. In management, organicity is understood as a democratic process, which seeks to involve people in the construction of collectivity, and it is also a way to alter social relationships and guarantee the group’s survival. Once women are introduced into this collective organicity, they seek bases to alter social relationships, acting from the perspective of collective work and solidarity.

The organic quality of the actions of women is linked to true action<sup>1</sup>, which is inherent in their sociocultural context, and therefore it is a specific action for a specific context. Therefore, management practices and specifically the ways of managing conflict are interrelated with a post-colonial and substantive discussion of female enterprises. To Bauhardt (2014) and Costa (2011), Feminist Economic studies can easily fall into a homogenous reading of female economic practices, reinforcing stereotypes and a centrist discourse to represent subaltern women in a reductionist manner (Mohanty, 2006). In this way,

<sup>1</sup> Here we use the notion of true action not as a copy of pre-established regulations like a norm, but rather as being related to the qualities of appropriateness and efficiency in its context, adhering in terms of conduct or behavior to the circumstances and demands of women, which depend on their experiences and their shared repertory (Gherardi, 2009). Thus, the truth is linked to the way in which women respond to their experiences, and in this sense, it is the base for organic action.



feminist economies in dialogue with the solidarity economy, strengthen themselves in epistemological density to the extent that they are more open to different forms of logic and arrangements based on how women organize the various forms of productive life in specific places and contexts (Lugones, 2016; Oliveira, 2008; Silva, 2018).

## METHODOLOGICAL SUPPORT

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The methodological approach for this research problem is qualitative in terms of data collection and analysis. The analysis categories that the collection instruments are based on encompass the macro-topics listed in Box 1: substantive rationality, women and work, and conflict management. The FSEN was created in 2010 and today consists of 22 networks and 222 enterprises in Brazil. In the State of Ceará, there are 26 enterprises formed by 266 women in the areas of handcrafts, apparel, ecological and family farming, and nutrition (Rede de Economia Solidária e Feminista [RESF], 2013). On average, the women are 40 years old, are mothers, grandmothers, or aunts, and have dependents, with some supporting their families. They generally have basic schooling, but there is a certain degree of illiteracy or functional illiteracy, and they have generally been leading their enterprises for at least five years. Fictitious names are used in this study to they pay homage to important women in the discussion of women's issues in Brazil.

The data collection was based on 2 strategies: non-participative observation of female practices in their work contexts in commercial fairs, production processes, management, and periodic meetings of production groups with a structured script which were conducted between 2018 to 2021 and generated 55 hours of reports; and semi-structured interviews with 5 producers, who selected based on their sector, with two of them representing handcrafts, one apparel, one ecological and family farming, and another nutrition. These interviews led to over 18 hours of transcribed recordings (Meihy, 2002). To Godoi et al. (2006, p. 182), oral history favors the voices of the forgotten or invisible and makes it possible to identify complaints, anguish, suggestions, and criticisms, and present points of view that can contribute to the understanding of contemporary organizational life.

In our observations and analysis, we tried to identify dynamics, appearances, situations, conflicts, and behaviors in meetings and production and commercialization activities. Based on this, it was possible to understand the complexity of the field in a broader manner, in order to reflect more directly on the processes and problems which are particularly relevant to our research question, generating evidence and examples of types of practices and processes (Creswell, 2007; Flick, 2009). The most elaborate analyses of feminist organic conflict management practices were based on data from the field diary.

We also performed documental research to find written material, internal organization texts, and other administrative documents related to self-management practices. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the interactions took place in a remote manner.

The data was collected through critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Wodak, 2004) and the oral history perspective, with a special focus on new history. Oral history favors forgotten or invisible voices and aligns itself with the post-colonial perspective of organizational studies (Meihy, 2002; Soares, 2019). CDA adheres to research on women, given its approach which is oriented towards the historical and political perceptions of discourse. This study conforms with the framework proposed by Wodak (2004) based on the elements listed in Box 1:

**Box 1**  
**Structuring of the CDA Data for organic conflict management**

DATA MODELING (theoretical lenses)	MACRO-TOPICS (large theories based on central concepts)	SUBTOPICS (medium-sized theories based on the data)	DISCOURSE (small theories)	Analysis of the study's corpus (discursive strategies which are products of linguistic action produced by people: perspectivation, self-representation, argumentation, referential nomination, and predication)	
	Management of substantive rationality (França & Eynaud, 2020; Ramos, 1989; Serva, 1997)	Ways of managing	Excerpts from texts used in the analysis (interdiscursivities and intertextualities)		
		Forms of cooperation			
		Ties of reciprocity			
Women and work (Guérin, 2003; Hirata 2002; Martin, 2003; Saffioti, 2013)	Occupations and work				
	Productive and reproductive work				
Conflict management as a communication and learning process (Gherardi, 2009; Putnam, 2010a, 2010b)	Ways of identifying conflict (in the human and social senses)				
	Ways of processing conflict (in the human and social senses)				
	Ways of solving conflicts (in the human and social senses)				

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on Wodak (2004).

Wodak (2004) points out that once the data is collected, the theoretical concepts and the empirical information should be organized, fragmenting what begins using a broader logic into a more specific logic, beginning with small theories – excerpts from the text itself and the discursive context – and then extending this to medium-sized and large theories. The author's approach adheres to the research perspective due to its historical discursive analysis, observing the situations in which its subjects speak. To her, individuals use strategies as mechanisms which generate persuasion and conviction. The perspectivation strategy is used when the speaker makes it clear that what she is saying is based on her point of view. Self-representation arises when the speaker is describing herself, expressing how she sees herself. Argumentation is a strategy that intends to convince the interlocutor of something, which can be expressed by the justification of positive or negative elements. Referential nomination occurs when the person wishes to distinguish us from them, indicating the construction of internal and external groups. Predication, meanwhile, occurs when the speaker labels other social agents in an appreciative or deprecating manner.

Gill (2002) says that descriptions and the evaluation of narratives are not separate activities; they occur simultaneously during CDA, because they involve both the text and its context. By virtue of the adoption of thematic oral history, some functions of the analysis were already defined, and it kept our perspective open to empirical codes and functions which helped in the proposing of feminist self-management practices. However, we have no pretension of a broad empirical generalization, because we did not seek to identify universal processes, given that this analysis depends on an interpretive context. Wodak (2004) points out that this does not stop CDA from being representative of its context, which in this case is the study of feminist self-management practices.

**DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

Feminist self-management practices promote organic conflict management. In the observations, we have identified a specific way of managing conflicts, because even if women establish solidarity relationships in which cooperation and the search for the common good predominate, conflict exists, and it is addressed in a characteristic manner in the interactions of the women of the FSEN. They consider conflict to be a part of the self-management practice, with the solution being a collective task which requires participation. More horizontal and decentralized communication in decision making makes the conflict management process a shared responsibility (Moretto & Cesconetto, 2009; Pinheiro & Paula, 2014).

The FSEN arose as a network integrating these enterprises and strengthening local networks, seeking visibility and an exchange of information among female enterprises in terms of solidarity production, commercialization, and consumption in the Brazilian Forum for the Solidarity Economy (BFSE) which took place in 2010. The idea of the network is to develop a collective identity and strategies to make collective female learning and feminist actions possible with a combination of social inclusion and production in the fight to increase the valorization of women, their communities, and society as a whole (Resf, 2013).

Considering CDA in Wodak (2004), there is a network of discursive strategies, and in this study, we identified perspectivation (point of view), self-representation, (self-description) and referential nomination (differentiating between “us” and “them”). We have opted to use larger excerpts of the speech of these women in order to preserve it and value it. There were constant interrelationships between large, medium-sized, and small theories that revolve around conflict management and the dynamics of female self-management.

During this study, we perceived that women do not think deliberately in the management of conflicts, but self-management contributes to the constructive treatment of them. In dealing with conflict, they seek to find solutions that improve relationships, because the engagement of the group and the feeling of belonging to the community also depends on them (Wenger, 2001). Not feeling “shame” about conflict helps them treat it in a natural, organic manner, placing it before the group in order to identify the best solution, as can be verified from this entry in the field diary:

At that moment, the women were discussing the use of the reserve fund to produce cloth dolls ordered and sold at the fair. Once the issue of using this money for this purpose was resolved, the group’s coordinator Dandara said that the next issue to be discussed would be the reserve fund itself. She informed us that several women had not paid the monthly fees in four months and for this reason the reserve fund’s balance was now low, and they would have to pay “the back and current” fees, in the words of the coordinator, so that they could determine the purchases for the production of the dolls. One of the women raised her hand, and said it was not fair that the products of those who were not paying the fee were going to the fair to be sold together with the products of those who were “up to date” with their payments. There was murmuring, and one of the women said she was one of the women owing the fees and explained that she was having trouble paying the money because her grandmother had moved in with her and the family was “spending a lot of money on medicine” and she had no money left over to pay the fees, but next month she would be able to pay because her grandmother would pay back this money with part of her retirement income. The women continued talking about the issue of the reserve fund. I perceived that there was a certain amount of conflict and a division of opinion. Some were uncomfortable with the situation, and others were not as much. After the woman’s revelation about her lack of money due to a family issue, the other women seemed to understand better. Apparently, there were just two women who were not paying: one was the one who had spoken up, and the other was not present at the meeting. The discussion about the fee continued for 20 more minutes. At one point, one of the women raised her hand and said she could pay the fee of her fellow member and that member could pay her back next month. This solution seemed to satisfy the group’s expectations. At 4:30 pm the women organized a table with sandwiches, couscous, and coffee and ate and drank while they conversed about the types of dolls they produced, showing cell phone photos of the doll models (Observation nº 10, February 10, 2020)

Thus, a small conversation led to a general discussion about the fund and the dilemmas of their organization. This issue appeared to be essential not only because of the material necessity of using it, but also because it was proof of the group’s commitment. The women did not avoid the conflict: they discussed it with the group in order to resolve it. The words of the woman explaining her reasons for not paying the reserve fund fee were very natural and indeed seemed to be a proof of the group’s trust, because it dealt with a very personal subject. The solution arose from the group itself, with the woman who was the coordinator acting just as a mediator in the process. The way they resolved this issue was surprising. At first there was a heated discussion about this issue; then they were eating couscous and talking about their products, with no sign of dissention. The unity of discourse and action is a characteristic that was perceived as familiar in the interdiscursivity of the communication dynamics among these women. The transparent way in which they communicate, together with the trust they have in each other, accelerated the conflict resolution process. There were no manuals for conflict management, which was understood based on the circumstances that shaped it, always supported by ties of reciprocity and trust.



We act according to the situation because there are issues and more issues. We cannot worry too much about a rule and end up having to reconcile things afterwards. We have to see what we can do and what way will help the group, because the group will only get stronger with the help of all of us (Carolina, handicrafts producer, 57, Fortaleza, October 2019).

In the FSEN, it is the women themselves who manage conflict (França & Eynaud, 2020; Soares et al., 2020). We can add this to the learning they acquire from fighting for their demands with governmental bodies. It is at times like these that they need to be united, and being united means the difference between success and failure.

Other discourses show the conflict between two ways of managing based on different forms of logic, one being bureaucratic instrumental rationality and the other substantive rationality. There are declarations like “we fight a lot”, “we’re going to go there and fight until we succeed”, and “there’s a lot of bureaucracy, but we find a way to get things done”. When the enterprises engage in partnerships or interact with public institutions, there is a conflict between their forms of organization, which are guided by different forms of logic. Thus, conflict leads to learning by forcing adjustments to the state’s access requirements, but it also leads to questioning of the bureaucracy. Thus, the productive action of women becomes political action:

Nanci brought up another point: the allocation of fairs in bus terminals. There was more murmuring, and several women wanted to speak. Nanci noted the names of the women who had asked to speak. She then said: “Everyone, as you know we divided up the terminals by lottery. We decided this, but City Hall has decided now that they are going to divide them up, because several women complained that we were not doing this correctly.” There was more murmuring. Nanci asked one of the women who had raised their hands to stand up and speak, and she said that this was wrong, that City Hall couldn’t make decisions without talking with the group [...]. One of the women said there should be another way of dividing the spaces in the terminals. She argued that they should be set aside just for the solidarity economy and that there were other types of commerce of conventional electronic products which were not handicrafts and were harming the sales of Ecosol products. Nanci said that City Hall had not even discussed this with the Ecosol Network that participated in the terminal fairs and that this was a discussion that should be taken to the Ceará Network (Observation nº 7, October 2, 2019).

The conflict over dividing the commercialization of these spaces involved the external partners who made the spaces available. However, the lack of dialogue between the women and their partners resulted in dissonance and conflicts, given the shock in terms of the language used and the fluidity between the parties. We observed situations in which the strategic language used in the discourse came from the referential nomination of “us” and “them”, leading to a distancing between the internal and external. Since the groups function in a system that is more open than closed, external interference often causes conflicts independent of the women’s decisions. This is true above all in terms of their partnerships in which there is conflict with the heterogeneous management of hierarchical processes. While these groups are based on substantivity, their public organization partners act based on instrumentality. The need to translate this language has to be emphasized, because it needs to occur in order for there to be a real approximation between society and the state, as well as the need for an effort by the state to perceive that not everyone is apt to understand formal-instrumental logic.

Even though the women in their internal dynamics administer conflict in an organic manner, when they relate with the external environment, they encounter formal structures that do not include the subjectivities and values that they cultivate. A communication closer to these women’s reality, observing their real demands, would result in a more constructive process, but one that would depend on a policy agenda that demands important social transformations, such as a sense of urgency in the perception of women’s issues (Martin, 2006; Onuma et al., 2012; Ramos, 1989).

The debate continued for a while. Nanci asked to continue the discussion, because City Hall had already made its decision regarding the division. That is to say, in the next meeting with City Hall the women were expected to bring their questions; in the last meeting only four women from the Estrela de Iracema Network had attended, and it was important that everyone attend to make their requests. Several women said that they could not attend the meeting at City Hall because they had no one to take care of their children or for other personal reasons, including a lack of money to pay for transport. One of them said that, in this case, women could contribute to paying the trip for those who did not have the money. Another said it would be difficult for her to go to the meeting because she had to take care of her aged mother-in-law and a small child and could not leave them alone. Other women presented similar excuses related to housework and having to take care of others (Observation nº 7, February 3, 2020).

The discourse strategies of these women demonstrate that social relationships are partially discursive, and therefore the excerpts reveal more about social interactions and the nature of the established relationships: symmetrical or asymmetrical, of power or subordination, cooperative or competitive, and close or distant (Wodak, 2004). In the critical discourse analysis, it may be perceived that the distance among the women is diminished once they communicate and exchange information about their personal experiences. This distance does not travel the path of subordination or hierarchy, but rather the formation of ties of reciprocity. This strengthening of ties does not occur for free; it occurs through the exchange of life experiences and ways of producing and commercializing. Therefore, there needs to be an exchange in order to diminish the distance among these women and establish trusting relationships, or in other words, this exchange is part of the conflict management process as Putnam (2010a, 2010b) and Gherardi and Strati (2014) observe. The discourses indicate resolutions of conflicts based on experienced situations, however the exchanges in these trusting relationships are the backdrop for their dynamics.

It depends on the situation, because sometimes there are things that we resolve on our own; other times no, we bring things to decide in a group, producing more at home. We seek to resolve things in the best way possible. It's very different, because we do not work under pressure; we work in a spontaneous manner, in our way. We decide, and each of us gives our opinions. It's much better that way. We feel much more at ease (Laudelina, producer in the nutrition area, 58, Fortaleza, February 2019).

I don't think I've ever seen a group in which the women had an irresponsible attitude of not wanting something or another. Sometimes one says: "I'm not going to the fair because my husband won't let me." But she's there in the production area, she brings material to... They assume the responsibility that they can handle. Now, fleeing responsibility, that I've never seen. Generally, they do something that they know (Nanci, producer and FSEN representative in the State of Ceará, 52, Fortaleza, February 2020).

The search for substantive rationality in relations between the state and FSEN groups would facilitate the creation of more flexible structural models more adapted to the demands of women, as well as the promulgation of demands, requirements, and needs that have to be answered by internal and external organization systems, making conflict management with external partners more organic (Guérin, 2005). Thus, horizontal systems of communication are necessary instruments for managing conflicts that can arise. This process becomes viable in solidarity economy enterprises through self-management practices that allow associates to learn through experiences with cooperation and solidarity.

On this day two women were absent from different groups. Those present from the FSEN groups decided to cover for their missing colleagues so that there would not be any lost business. This solution, apparently, was a success and work continued normally. One of the women spoke with one of those absent on the telephone and they agreed that the absent woman would cover the other's shift next week to compensate for her absence that day. While they worked, the women agreed how the coverage would be during their lunch break. One said she'd go at 11:30 and come back earlier so that the other could take her place. Another said she had brought her own lunch and that she could divide her lunch with another woman who hadn't brought her lunch, because there was enough for two people. The organization seemed very fluid with few problems in terms of communication (Observation nº 09, November 30, 2019).

We are very concerned when sometimes a person is late: "could something have happened to her?" We call right away to know if something is wrong. We're very concerned about each other (Laudelina, producer in the nutrition area, 58, Fortaleza, February 2020).

Based on the dynamics of these women, we perceived that their business problems are resolved in accordance with the situation in a way that does not harm the group. They seem to take care of each other and understand that personal issues can be resolved together. The unexpected absence of two producers was an example of this: they cover for each other when necessary without any communication problems. When two or more people get together it is quite likely that, sooner or later, they will have a divergence of opinion over interests, needs, the interdependence of activities, or the sharing of resources (Moretto & Cesconetto, 2009; Onuma et al., 2012).

In the FSEN, observations, conversations, and interviews reflect on the identification of organic conflict management based on a system of tacit mutual support (Pinheiro & Paula, 2014). In their speech, we can perceive their strategies of perspectivation and self-representation, demonstrating an initially individualist view which is transformed into a collective view to the extent that they perceive the guiding objectives and dynamics of the groups. Mutual support and cooperation, however, do not mean that there is no dissent, but at the end of the day what matters is the collective and the collaborative resolution of conflicts.

If I told you that there are never disturbances, never fights...We always respect the other's point of view, the subject. We try to take a break, sometimes you leave that subject alone and wait for the person to come to you, but we've never had ugly fights where we feel bitter afterwards (Laudelina, producer in the nutrition area, 58, Fortaleza, September 2019).

Conflict is latent and, within the organizational context, complex, particularly in organizations of the third sector like FSEN which is organized under the self-management paradigm and consists of distinct segments that require an interest in cooperation, and a willingness to cooperate, commit, and involve oneself in collective solutions to organizational conflicts (McIntyre, 2007; Moretto & Cesconetto, 2009). Their speech demonstrates the discursive strategies of perspectivation in showing involvement in their conflict management process and in the construction of solutions to management and production processes, indicating an openness to managing conflict collectively.

We identified the following speech situations: arguments, conversations, networks, freedom, exchanges, producing, collaborating, support, construction, working, support, knowledge, and female dialogue. Even though this discourse perspective describes an individual point of view, it may be perceived that they present elements of the collective dynamics of conflict management. At various times, there is a relationship between the words "I" and "group", and it may be perceived that the decision-making processes regarding conflicts are collectively resolved (Sá & Soares, 2005). In this way, the act of managing conflict as a social practice acts as a political dimension for women in an organic manner in the human and social sense, turning it into a learning process in productive and reproductive life, in which knowing is not separated from doing, and the individual is not separate from the collective.

In the FSEN, female practices are much more social than discursive, and power comes from the exchange of information and the establishment of relationships. Within this practice a political dimension resides in these women's own experiences, who in their private and public contexts suffer from processes of social inequality. Since they confront conflict situations with the desire to resolve them over the long term, they combine their efforts to encounter a broader solution through consensus. Their discourses indicate self-representation and collective perspectivation.

The organicity with which women manage conflicts in their organizational practices is only implemented as a function of substantive rationality (Onuma et al., 2012). The practice of the organic management of conflicts requires a search for reconceptualizations and resignifications of notions of efficiency, rationality, and conflict, among other things. França and Eynaud (2020), Pinheiro and Paula (2014), as well as Tauile and Debaco (2004), allege that the concept of efficiency in solidarity organizations goes beyond the simple generation of short-term profits, and that there is a need to maintain a business's viability, which assumes intense interactions among individuals. Thus, the efficiency of these organizations is expected to foster the sustainability of cooperation.

Not only do the women of the FSEN generate income: they also provide quality of life and valorization, which could be considered social efficiency that varies depending on the context. In the SE, managerial efficiency is not limited to material benefits and is also defined as social efficiency, which is understood to be achieving results that go beyond utilitarianism, or in other words results that include quality of life, living well, participation, and good citizenship (Monte-Reyes, 2011; Silva, 2018). This conceptualization encompasses a distinct way of dealing with conflict by reconciling democratic decision making and economic efficiency, diminishing the concentration of power and increasing group cohesion.

A situation characterized by female inequality is in itself a conflicted issue. Nevertheless, within the FSEN, the search for emancipation and the conflicts that may occur are part of learning. Contact, attention, and concern for others are not dependent on the idea that women are naturally altruistic, that caring for others is just a quality of women, but rather they define female interdependent practices and relationships.

Organicity, therefore, is not a characteristic of women, but rather of their practices. Caldart (2010) observes that organicity and democratic management are directly related, especially in social and popular movements, because thinking with organicity is thinking of the relationships between spaces/instances in light of the healthy functioning of the collective. Therefore, the

expression organicity indicates a process through which a given idea or decision manages to pervade the group of instances that constitute the organization, in an agile and synchronized manner, which is able to guarantee the effective participation of all in waging the fight in various dimensions. Among the practices of the women of the FSEN, this process occurs very quickly, given that instances of decision making are more horizontal.

The discourse of these women demonstrates the strategies of perspectivation and self-representation related to collective action that transforms the lives of these women in their economic context with a lot of fight. From the point of view of the critical understanding of the text and its context, they seek to affirm their conditions self-representing themselves as strong fighters.

In dealing with this information as data, which to Wodak (2004) already represents small theories, medium-sized theories arise which are linked to more specific issues and construct the narrative of social practices: the exchange of information as a way of establishing reciprocity among women, trusting one another by sharing situations of inequality and the desire for unity and forming a collective identity. This dimension of medium-sized theories is linked to other dimensions of work, such as discussions of conflict in feminist theories and the debate of organizational studies regarding substantive and instrumental rationality. Thus, large theories are related to the female gender's condition of inequality and have to do with the sexual division of work, which requires more productive and reproductive work from women.

It is possible to perceive three types of conflict: those that occur in the internal environment of these enterprises, those that occur in the cooperation network itself, and those that occur in the interactions between this network and external agents, especially partners in public administration. Internal conflicts in these enterprises have to do with the organization of productive work itself and tend to be resolved in an organic manner based on the women's mutual care for each other. These conflicts lead to learning which, even though it is not mapped formally in procedures, accumulates in the organizational memory of these enterprises associated with dealing with everyday situations. Internal conflicts in the cooperation network itself have to do with commercialization – the definition of sales points, schedules, and who is responsible – given that unity in the network comes mainly from the need to strengthen the market commercialization processes in these enterprises (RESF, 2013). These conflicts also imply learning which is retained in the network's organizational memory and are resolved with relationships of trust, exchanges, and reciprocity.

Conflicts with agents outside the network occur due to the different forms of rationality that permeate these contexts. While the network is permeated by substantive rationality, public and private entities are permeated by bureaucratic instrumental-legal rationality, which orients their language and ways of doing things, often complicating the interactions between these agents. These interactions also create learning, even though they also lead to conflict.

Organic conflict management is not an automatic, normalized, and structured process, like heterogenous managerial processes, but rather the fruit of situations and relations established among women. Most women support their family and find strength through participating in and organizing production groups. Box 2 presents a summary of an analysis of feminist self-management practices in organic conflict management.

**Box 2**  
**An Analysis of Organic Conflict Management**

SOCIAL PRACTICES	DISCOURSE ELEMENTS	DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES	THEORETICAL LENSES
Not hiding conflict in management processes and maintaining a questioning posture.	Dialogue and intense communication. Conflicts between substantive and instrumental rationality.	Predominance of perspectivation and self-representation.	Management based on substantive rationality (França & Eynaud, 2020; Ramos, 1989; Serva, 1997).
Conflict is managed in an organic manner, with an intense exchange of information and the strengthening of ties of reciprocity.	Exchange of information as a way of establishing reciprocity and trust. Collective formation of identity.	Predominance of self-representation and perspectivation.	Gender and female inequality, the sexual division of work and care (Guérin, 2003; Hirata, 2002; Martin, 1993, 2006; Saffioti, 2013).
Managing conflict as a learning process which prioritizes the experiences of women and their differences.	Learning is experience. The logic of differences	Predominance of referential nomination and perspectivation.	Conflict management as a communication and learning process (Caldart, 2010; Gherardi, 2009; Putnam, 2010a, 2010b).

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

As pointed out by Serva (2023), conflict has political dimensions in human life and is especially associated with collective action, which has a direct effect on the engagement of the actors. The practices of women in the SE have demonstrated a vision of conflict as collective learning with an intense exchange of information. Social movements tend to be horizontal, because in their organicity they diminish hierarchy, trusting in democracy and plurality in participative and democratic organization processes both inside and outside of the organizational space.

The emancipation of the women of the FSEN is achieved by their ways of organizing and managing the conflicts that are part of this process. Considering their context, Soares and Rebouças (2022) observe that women end up developing practices that avoid instrumental logic, including managing conflicts and perceiving gender inequality and the limits it imposes. Thus, feminist self-management practices related to the organic management of conflicts are a political strategy for women to minimize their inequality.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

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The feminist self-management practice identified and analyzed in this work is organic conflict management observed through the interactions and dynamics of the women of the FSEN. This observation demonstrates that flexibility in the conflict management dynamics is related to a value structure which shapes the way work is performed, guiding it using the logic of substantive rationality together with a degree of instrumentality. The dominance of substantivity permits the organicity of ways of thinking and managing conflicts based on feminist practices (Martin, 1993, 2006; Serva, 1997).

The results indicate the following findings: there was no effort made to hide conflict in management processes; conflict was managed in an organic manner through the intense exchange of information and the strengthening of ties of reciprocity; and conflict is managed as a learning process which prioritizes the experiences of women and their differences. These findings, which construct the practice of organic conflict management, were not foreseen in Martin's research (1993, 2006) and constitute a theoretical contribution to the field of organizational studies related to substantive rationality.

The women of the FSEN do not deny or avoid conflict; they discuss the conflict in a participatory manner and consider it to be natural. Due to this self-management practice, the solution of conflicts is a collective task which requires the participation of all. The unity of these women is achieved through group activities and organic-functional needs and features intense exchanges of information about business as well as their lives and personal experiences. The organicity of conflict management brings women closer and keeps them united through its self-management dynamics, because they deal with conflicts in a spontaneous manner.

The expression "organicity of conflict management" indicates a process through which a given idea or decision permeates the group of instances which constitute the organization in an agile and synchronized manner, and it is capable of guaranteeing the effective participation of all in waging the fight in all of its various dimensions. To women in the SE who are organized in cooperative networks, managing conflicts is not covered in a manual; it is the accumulation of their experiences and intense communication processes that have established themselves using a logic that considers collective interests.

The conflict management process becomes a collective learning process which is characteristic of social movements, because in its organicity it mitigates hierarchy and guides a horizontal approach which trusts the concepts of democracy and otherness. Therefore, the emancipation of the women in the FSEN is also achieved through their ways of managing conflicts. The organic management of conflict is based on the notion that it should be resolved through the perception of differences in conditions and the need for unity as the guiding element which is related to the generation of income and the valorization of organizational practices.

From a theoretical point of view, this study contributes to new feminist management practices under a self-management paradigm, which is still an unexplored field but one that is relevant to organizational studies and the field of the SE. Thus, the identification of feminist self-management practices is related to the management of values. The understanding of feminist self-management practices broadens the vision of how work can be realized, foreseeing that a feminist and substantive organization needs to promote other ways of thinking of work and management, transporting the themes of control, power, conflict and learning to a context based on practices oriented by values such as otherness, recognition, and caring for one another.



Nonetheless, we can cite the impossibility of generalizing these results as a limitation of this study. This is because it is based on a specific management context and articulates theoretical lenses which are directed towards the understanding of a specific phenomenon, which does not permit the reapplication of the results. However, even though scientific studies seek to generalize, it is understood that the generalization of the perspective of female practices should not be thought of as a model that can be applied to any context.

This is a broad discussion of feminist management in a peripheral context which can be implemented by relating it to large themes in organizational studies, feminist studies, and post-colonial studies. This construction, even though it is recent, involves the search for methodologies which are appropriate for approximating this phenomenon. However, we believe that this study has the potential to interest and involve researchers, given that it affects a movement as important as the SE. A suggestion for future research would be to identify more feminist self-management practices, as well as a deeper study of the practices identified in this article. Another perspective that can be explored is that of race and its relationships with managerial practices in peripheral contexts, which from a post-colonial and decolonial perspective are intertwined with gender issues in Latin America. We suggest further research to identify new management practices, especially those related to governance within a social management context.

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**Sílvia Maria Dias Pedro Rebouças:** Conceptualization (Supporting); Data curation (Supporting); Methodology (Supporting).

**José Carlos Lázaro da Silva Filho:** Conceptualization (Supporting).

#### DATA AVAILABILITY

The entire set of data that supports the results of this study is available upon request to the Center for Studies in Gender, Age and Family at the Federal University of Ceará. The data set is not publicly available in compliance with ethical principles, which does not require the disclosure of any means of identifying research participants, fully preserving their privacy. The practice of open data seeks to guarantee the transparency of research results, without requiring the identity of research participants.

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