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Social Capital, political empowerment and social difference: a mixed-methods study of an ecotourism project in the rural Volta region of Ghana

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ABSTRACT

Claims abound regarding the empowering possibilities of community-based natural resources management (CBNRM). Social capital is seen as a key element towards that end, yet there is a paucity of critical research testing these connections. This study examines two aspects of social capital (cognitive and structural) in a community-based ecotourism (CBE) project in Ghana as they relate to social difference (notably gender and ethnicity) and political empowerment (i.e., access to political involvement, and political efficacy). Quantitative results highlight specific gendered and ethnic differences in political empowerment and social capital that, when combined with qualitative analysis, reveal how those inequities in ecotourism may be rooted in socio/cultural norms. In addition, a novel contribution from this study is that political empowerment seems to be partly mediated by peoples' access to social capital. This suggests that, regardless of one's gender and ethnicity, social capital helps to empower individuals. We conclude by describing what an intervention could look like in the context of this CBE project when informed by qualitative feminist as well as quantitative social capital analysis. Doing so we illustrate how a mixed-methods approach to the study of social capital and empowerment may offer important insights towards more equitable CBE.

Abbreviations: CBE: Community Based Ecotourism; CBNRM: Community Based Natural Resources Management; NCRC: Nature Conservation Research Centre; FPE: Feminist Political Ecology; PCA: Principal Component Analysis; ANOVA: Analysis of Variance

Introduction

CBNRM marries the goals of rural development and conservation with an explicit focus on decentralization and local empowerment (Constantino et al., 2012; Murphree, 2009). Within this context, social capital – understood as the resources inherent in social relations – can lower the costs of working together, facilitate knowledge transmission and enable cooperation empowering individuals (Nath, Inoue, & Pretty, 2010). In light of this, specific studies have suggested that social capital is an important resource for ecotourism, watershed conservation, as well as for fisheries, agriculture or forest management (Bodin & Crona, 2008; Isaac, Erickson, Quashie-Sam, & Timmer, 2007; Jones, 2005).

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Researchers, however, have cautioned against decontextualizing social capital, arguing that it is ill-advised to universalize its functions (Harriss, 2001; Radcliffe, 2004) while similarly raising concerns that the concept is overly-versatile and lacking analytical rigour (Bebbington, 2002; Lin & Erickson, 2010). Relatedly, 'the community' is too often viewed as uniform, leading to insufficient analysis of the socio-political or cultural context (Hickey & Mohan, 2004; Mansuri & Rao, 2004). This in turn risks obscuring pre-existing social inequalities (e.g., gender, racial, and ethnic) and may reproduce participatory exclusions that erode the social fabric (Agrawal & Gibson, 2001; Cleaver, 2005). In the tourism literature there is no shortage of accounts of how tourism development has led to the erosion of social relationships, the promotion of elite capture and the exacerbation of ethnic conflict (Ashley, 2000; Duffy, 2002; Jones, 2005; Southgate, 2006). Meanwhile, the importance of understanding and addressing participatory exclusions to increase community capacities for collective action and for effective natural resources management has increasingly been recognized (Agarwal, 2001; Lachapelle, Smith, & McCool, 2004; Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter, & Wangari, 1996). Altogether, these contributions highlight the need to critically examine social capital in varied contexts to uncover power relations and differentiated outcomes for distinct social groups.

In line with this interest, a subset of work has sought to analyze social capital across key demographics and in a variety of contexts (cf. Lin & Erickson, 2010). Most relevant to CBNRM, researchers in development (Cleaver, 2005; Harriss, 2001), natural resources management (Ballet et al., 2007; Ishihara & Pascual, 2012) and CBE (Jones, 2005; Stronza & Gordillo, 2008) have called for conceptual and methodological refinement in this direction. Indeed, there is a growing social capital literature that highlights power relations and differentiated endowments and outcomes for distinct social groups (Radcliffe, 2004; Silvey & Elmhirst, 2003). Results have shown that women and ethnic minorities tend to have less access to social capital or face added challenges in mobilizing social capital resources in CBNRM projects. Given the empowering opportunities that CBNRM offers, the question remains whether or not, and how, social capital access might still play a role at empowering marginalized community members, despite pre-existing inequalities. Our approach responds to this question by employing a mixed-methods approach.

While commendable attempts have been made to explore inequalities of social capital (Lin, 2001; O'Neill & Gidengil, 2006; Silvey & Elmhirst, 2003), mixed-methods approaches that include feminist analyses remain all too infrequent, including for the context of ecotourism (Jones, 2005; Stronza & Gordillo, 2008). For our purposes here, we draw heavily on Lin's (2001) well-grounded perspective of social capital as a product of social networks and combine that with insights from feminist political ecology (FPE) to examine the relationship between social capital, political empowerment and social difference in a community-based ecotourism (CBE) project in the Volta Region of Ghana. We proceed by briefly reviewing the relevant literature on the main concepts employed in this study, pointing to well-elaborated discussions on their conceptual and practical value. We then describe methods and results, before turning to a discussion of gender and ethnic differences in social capital access and political empowerment at the study site. We find that the mixed-methods approach brings new insights with the potential to inform context-driven and evidence-based policy interventions.

Literature review

Political empowerment

Empowerment is a complex and dynamic phenomenon that can be broadly defined as a process through which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over their lives (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995; Zimmerman, 2000). Empowerment can be both a process and a goal and is seen to take multiple forms and be contextually embedded (Zimmerman, 2000). While diverse forms of empowerment are necessarily situated in a sociopolitical context (cf. Hur, 2006; Kesby, 2005), and are thus political in nature, political empowerment has been commonly associated with access, participation or involvement in decision-making (Agrawal & Gibson, 2001; Pinkleton,

2008), participatory citizenship (Hickey & Mohan, 2004) and political efficacy (Angelique, Reischl, & Davidson II, 2002). Together, all these terms refer to one's ability to effectively participate in and influence decisions that affects one's life —which we take here to be the crux of political empowerment. Within the ecotourism literature, political empowerment has similarly been employed to refer to individual or community access to decision-making in the design, development and management of the tourism ventures, as well as the ability to exert control over the distribution of ecotourism benefits (Scheyvens, 2000).

While active citizenship through local empowerment is considered crucial to the success of CBNRM projects – as well as an expected outcome of such projects (Murphree, 2009; Scheyvens, 1999) – it must not be assumed that political empowerment will result automatically from such projects. Indeed, several recurrent pathways towards empowerment have been described in the community psychology literature that distinguishes empowerment processes and outcomes from simple project benefits. These include opportunities for greater sense of autonomy and control, involvement in activities to exert control over one's life, and a critical awareness of one's socio political environment (for elaboration see Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). As clearly noted in Kabeer (2005), community projects may not lead to empowerment if benefits do not increase people's awareness of choices and their ability to make them. Agreeing with those important distinctions, we take into consideration such pathways as part of our selection of empowerment measures.

Added to this, many have highlighted the dangers of simplistic and decontextualized understandings of empowerment. For instance, theorists have argued that empowerment is a contextually embedded phenomenon and thus may take different forms over time and space (Constantino et al., 2012; Hur, 2006; Kabeer, 2005; Kesby, 2005). For example, in Constantino et al. (2012), local empowerment measurements for community-based resource monitoring included increased local participation, local education, information flow, paying for monitoring services or inserting local people into broader politics. Authors noted that not all strategies were suitable in all cases under their comparative analyses between Africa and Latin America. To this end, the inclusion of research participants to help develop measures and to test and refine them has been advised (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995; Zimmerman, 2000). We followed such advice in this study (see methods) to identify locally-grounded empowering processes while remaining rooted in the three empowerment pathways noted above. Overall, while we agree that caution is needed in the measurement of empowerment, we maintain that the concept of political empowerment is useful to open up key questions as to whether, and how, a CBE project might enable different community members to effectively participate in, and influence, decisions that affect their lives.

A FPE approach to the study of ecotourism outcomes

Studies on gender and development from a vast array of geographical and socio-ecological contexts have shown that power imbalances often preclude marginalized community members from participating meaningfully in community projects (e.g., Agarwal, 2001; Molyneux, 2002). For example, studies in ecotourism have shown that women might extend their household chores, often with little or no remuneration, to incorporate tourism sector activities in their daily routines; for instance, fetching water for the reception office, or cleaning or cooking for tourists. At the same time, their contributions to ecotourism decision-making processes often remain tokenistic or infrequent (Scheyvens, 2007; Walter, 2011). These power dynamics in development interventions pose many challenges, with the potential to exacerbate gender inequities and contribute to elite capture and community disengagement (Morales & Harris, 2014; Scheyvens, 2000). Ethnic (like gender) discrimination in decision making, has also been shown to undermine the success of CBNRM (Ballet et al., 2007; Mansuri & Rao, 2004). While researchers have

increasingly investigated such inequities in the context of ecotourism (Dilly, 2003; Swain & Swain, 2004; Walter, 2011) studies have been rarely informed by feminist and intersectional theories—despite the obvious shared interests. Illuminating possibilities of enhanced intersectional perspectives in tourism studies have recently been put forward (Cole, 2017; Mooney, 2018). Through this lens, inclusion is understood as a relational process dependent on broader community dynamics rooted in socio-cultural norms –precisely the type of dynamics that many FPE researchers have attempted to uncover (Hovorka, 2006).

FPE aims at analyzing and highlighting the differentiated experiences and knowledges of, responsibilities for, and interests in, environment or natural resources —differences that are not rooted in biology but rather are socially constructed and reproduced in daily work and routines (Nightingale, 2011; Rocheleau et al., 1996). Theorists working in this tradition acknowledge that one's relationship with the environment varies according to intersecting categories of difference – e.g., gender, ethnicity, age, or culture. This framework is useful for our purposes in that it invites attention to specific labour practices, environmental dynamics, and cultural narratives that shape unequal involvement in, or benefits from, CBNRM and ecotourism projects (*ibid*).

Towards a repoliticized and a structured approach to the study of social capital

Mayoux (2001), drawing from work in Cameroon, shows that where the complexities of social inequality are ignored reliance of social capital for poverty alleviation is ill-advised and may undermine empowerment aims. Until recently, when gendered relations have been recognized, they have "often been encoded in normative assumptions about women which misrepresent their lived relations, leading to questions on the efficacy of policies" (Molyneux, 2002, p. 177). To offer a corrective to much of the social capital literature that has either focused on men's networks (O'Neill & Gidengil, 2006) or ignored gender relations altogether, recent research has increasingly sought to explicitly analyze power dynamics—highlighting the fact that women tend to join different kinds of organizations than men, play different roles within them, derive distinct benefits, and use social capital for different purposes according to context (Lin & Erickson, 2010; Westermann, Ashby, & Pretty, 2005). O'Neill & Gidengil (2006) provide extensive evidence based on cross national analyses of how the study of social capital that considers gender relations offers a deeper understanding of the role of social networks, trust, reciprocity in power relations. Together, there is a clear need to examine differentiated social capital embedded in socio-culturally situated relations.

In CBNRM research, a growing body of scholars are taking a social network analysis approach to the study of social capital (cf. Bodin & Crona, 2008; Isaac et al., 2007; Lyon, 2000; Prell & Bodin, 2011). Such an approach has proven effective at revealing differing flows of information between individuals that in turn affect individual and community outcomes. This approach offers a basis to re-politicise social capital and avoid its commonly associated gender blindness (O'Neill & Gidengil, 2006; Silvey & Elmhirst, 2003) and also offers a solid base from which to revisit social capital theory—the aim of Lin's theory of social capital that we draw from here.

In response to social capital critiques concerning poor theorization and common conflation of related terms such as trust (Das, 2006; Harriss, 2001; Radcliffe, 2004), sociologist Lin proposes an elucidating social capital theory rooted in social network analyses and focussed on individual outcomes (for a review see Storberg, 2002). After critical engagement with Coleman, Putnam and Bourdieu's social capital theoretical developments, Lin postulated that social capital consists of investments in social relations that enhance the access and mobilization of valued resources (e.g., information, influence, social credentials) and in turn generates returns both to individuals and communities (Lin, 2001). While Lin's theory of social capital recognizes the importance of collective goods such as norms of trust, reciprocity and collaboration – which are so prominent in the theoretical works of Coleman, Putnam and Bourdieu (cf. Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1990;

Putnam, 2000) – he clearly distinguishes them from social network aspects. For Lin, social capital is rooted in the understanding that different kinds of social ties bring different returns. For instance, it has been postulated that strong ties (i.e., relationships that have high emotional intensity) reinforce patterns of trust and reciprocity and lead to expressive outcomes such as the maintenance and consolidation of resources (e.g., social support, security, physical and mental health, and life satisfaction. Conversely, weak ties (i.e., those of low emotional intensity) expose individuals to diversified sources of information which facilitates instrumental outcomes such as getting a good job or becoming more active and influential in civic life (see Granovetter, 1973; Lin & Erickson, 2010). To distinguish these *social network aspects* from *collective goods* (i.e., norms of trust, reciprocity and collaboration), researchers commonly employ the term 'structural social capital' to refer to the former and 'cognitive social capital' to refer to the latter (Grootaert, Narayan, Jones, & Woolcock, 2004; Jones, 2005). We employ these distinctions in our analyses.

While we make no assumptions on the functions of strong and weak ties in this case (having no prior studies on this in the context of CBE in rural Ghana), we use Lin's robust social capital framework (Storberg, 2002) as an entry point to explore how 'structural social capital aspects', along with broader 'cognitive social capital aspects', may serve to clarify some of the pathways towards individual political empowerment in the context of CBE.

Methodological approach

Study context

CBE initiatives in Ghana, led by the Nature Conservation Research Centre (NCRC), have emerged since the 1990s with a strong emphasis on community decision making and project benefit distribution (for a historical description of CBE in Ghana see Eshun, 2011). This well-established CBE, recognized as a pioneer in Africa (UNDP, 2008), has directly supported the development of over 14 community-owned and operated ecotourism attractions offering an array of natural, cultural, and historical attractions with the aim of diversifying local economies and provide nature experiences to visitors, while promoting community empowerment and resource conservation (Eshun, 2011; Zeppel, 2006). The study takes place in a small community in the Volta Region of Ghana that has run one of these CBE projects independently since 2005, when external funding ended.

The community consists of approximately 2000 residents[1] and their most common livelihood is subsistence farming along with charcoal burning, and selling surplus farm products. According to local elders, migration to the current settlement dates back to the 18th century and that includes the 'natives'[2] from the local clans (hereon 'locals') and migrant farmers from northern Togo (hereon 'non-locals') who are mostly farm labourers for locals. Under NCRC's CBE model, the community has full control of decision-making and revenue distribution and operates under a locally-enacted constitution. Decisions are undertaken by a locally-elected tourism board made up of both men and women that represent the different local clans, landowners and chiefs. The community in turn ratifies the board and is informed and consulted about tourism matters through periodic community meetings. Based on agreed-upon percentages, visitors' fees are distributed among landowners, and are also used for project reinvestment and community development projects through communal labour activities.

The CBE project offers hikes in the community's forests, which attract both domestic and international visitors. The project employs a manager, receptionist and several tour guides, and provides indirect employment to food vendors, village stores and transportation providers. Direct and indirect benefits for individuals include improved local infrastructure (i.e., school buildings, clinic, streetlights, and sanitation), community pride, natural protection of forests, access to employment, economic diversification, and participation in tourism decision-making. While some people are more involved than others in the project, all community members are seen

as benefiting to a certain degree through infrastructural development or opportunities to participate in the CBE and engage with tourists (e.g., selling food, attending community meetings, etc.).

It is important to note the undeniable embeddedness of this Ghanaian CBE project in colonial legacies of territoriality that have historically shaped customary traditions and participatory roles in natural resources management. Research elsewhere has skillfully spelled out these legacies in the context of land tenure and management in Africa (Bernstein, 2007; Grischow, 2007) and some commendable initial attempts have been made in the context of ecotourism in Ghana (Eshun, 2011). In this regard our study, while not deeply engaged with these literatures, bears these considerations in mind when analyzing and discussing social differences in social capital and linked empowerment.

Data collection and sampling

Data was collected from village residents by the first author and six Ghanaian trained field assistants through face-to-face conversations in English or Ewe[3] between February and July of 2013 following a pre-field work visit in 2012. Partnership with a local NGO was established and community protocols as well as institutional Behavioural Research Ethics Board protocols were followed.

Data was collected at different times of the day through a quantitative survey of 130 randomly selected respondents (i.e., the available adult household member at the time of survey was selected, regardless of level of involvement in the CBE). In addition, twenty semi-structured interviews, including an interview with a group of non-locals, were undertaken and selected through a convenience sample of people with whom trust had been built[4]. Interviews lasted on average 90 minutes and unlike the quantitative sample which aimed at statistical representation of the population, the qualitative sample aimed at identifying a variety of experiences and understandings regarding norms of engagement with the ecotourism project. Hence, respondents from different ethnic groups, social classes, clans, and genders were selected to capture a diversity of perspectives in the interviews that invited narratives regarding: 1) the ways men, women, locals and non-locals participate in ecotourism 2) the respondent's willingness and perceived constraints to participation in the project as well as 3) daily routines.

In the surveys, seven pairs of statements were employed to describe potential political (dis)-empowering processes associated with CBE adapted from previous studies on empowerment (see Table 1). For each pair of statements, respondents were to indicate their level of agreement. In order for statements to qualify as measures of political empowerment in this study, they had to relate to decision-making and closely relate to one of the pathways defined in Zimmerman's (2000) individual empowerment theory: either being related to opportunities for greater sense of autonomy and control, engagement in activities to exert control over one's life, and a critical awareness of one's socio-political environment. In addition, each statement was pre-tested in the community and through participant observations and conversations with several key informants measures were adapted to increase reliability, validity and local relevancy (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995; Zimmerman, 2000). Principal components analyses (PCA) – a data reduction technique to detect components which explain the underlying variation in the multiple indicators – was used to uncover latent empowerment constructs and to develop empowerment subscales from the seven pairs of statements queried (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001) (Table 2). Based on the two distinct components resulting from PCA, two empowerment scales were constructed by averaging responses from the empowerment questions that loaded most highly on each of the PCA components (see Table 2). Qualitative data aided the interpretation and contextualization of the two empowerment scales.

Also in the surveys, aggregated Likert-scale questions were used to assess three cognitive social capital aspects: trust, reciprocity and collaboration. Three questions related to trust

Table 1. Key variables employed in the analysis.

Social capital measures	Adapted from
Trust	
Generally, I trust the people working at the tourist reception office	Glaeser, Laibson, Scheinkam, & Soutter (2000); Grootaert et al. (2004); Nath et al. (2010)
Generally, I trust the tourism board	
Generally, I trust the chiefs and elders	
Reciprocity	
If someone helps me, I help them when they need help	Dohmen et al. (2008)
I am willing to undergo personal costs to help someone who helped me	
Collaboration	
If someone dies or marries in my community I usually help with the preparations	Westerman et al. (2005)
Generally, I attend communal labour	
Social network measures	
Strong ecotourism discussion ties	Marsden & Campbell (2012); Granovetter (1973); Prell & Bodin (2011)
Weak ecotourism discussion ties	
Empowerment measures	
I (don't) care to attend community meetings about the tourism project.[b]	Narayan (2005);
Because of tourism I have (more/less) opportunities to participate in community decisions[a]	Kabeer (2005); Scheyvens (2000)
I am (not) aware of community meetings where tourism matters are discussed.[c]	Kabeer (2005); Hickey & Mohan (2004)
It is (easy/difficult) for me to get information about tourism matters.[c]	Narayan (2005); Hickey & Mohan (2004)
I feel I have (no) say in tourism decisions.[a]	Kabeer (2005); Narayan (2005); Scheyvens (2000)
I am (not) afraid to provide my views and suggestions about tourism to the board.[a]	The World Bank Institute (2007); Narayan (2005)
I (often/never) bring suggestions about tourism matters to community meetings[b]	Narayan (2005); Scheyvens (2000)

Note: We indicated with superscript letters how each empowerment statement relates to the three empowerment pathways described in Perkins and Zimmerman (1995) and Zimmerman (2000): [a]relates to opportunities for greater sense of autonomy and control; [b]relates to engagement in activities to exert control over one's life; [c]relates to gaining a critical awareness of one's environment;

Table 2. Principal component analyses run on political empowerment statements.

	Access to political involvement Component 1	Political efficacy Component 2
I (don't) care to attend community meetings about the tourism project.	0.830	
Because of tourism I have (more/less) opportunities to participate in community decisions	0.770	
I am (not) aware of community meetings where tourism matters are discussed.	0.701	
It is (easy/difficult) for me to get information about tourism matters.	0.650	
I feel I have (no) say in tourism decisions.		0.827
I am (not) afraid to provide my views and suggestions about tourism to the board.		0.774
I (often/never) bring suggestions about tourism matters to community meetings		0.724

Note: Varimax rotation. 60.2% of variance explained. Only factor loadings above 0.4 are reported. KMO is 0.692. Bartlett's Test is significant at $p < 0.000$. Determinant of the R-matrix: 0.174. Cronbach's alpha of scales constructed based on the two PCA components: access to political involvement = 0.685, political efficacy = 0.759.

in those managing the tourism project, two questions related to respondent's willingness to reciprocate and two related to collaboration in the community. While grounded in previous research (see Table 1), participant observation, initial interviews, and local informants helped to adapt questions to the local context.

Two variables pertaining to structural social capital were created (strong and weak ties) through a name generator technique (Lin & Erickson, 2010) based on the question: Who have

you discussed at length ecotourism matters with over the past year? After each name cited, respondents were asked whether the person was a close friend, lived in the same community as the respondent and belonged to their same church, clan, political party and family. Being a close friend along with each shared characteristic contributed 1 point towards tie strength. A weak tie resulted when the score was lower than three; a strong tie resulted when the score was equal to, or greater than, three. Gender and ethnicity information was also collected.

Analyses

Qualitative data analyses

Qualitative analysis focused on daily routines and norms related to tourism decision-making that might be shaping access social capital and active participation in CBE decision-making. As we detail in the results and discussion sections, we offer these narratives to substantiate and elaborate the quantitative analyses, providing a more contextually driven interpretation of the statistics results. Convergent triangulation[5] was used to validate quantitative results with qualitative interview results, while complementary[6] triangulation produced a more complete picture by combining information from different data sources and analyses (Nightingale, 2009).

Employing NVivo10 software, interview responses were transcribed and open-coded using descriptive coding and subsequently pattern coding (Saldana, 2013). Initial descriptive coding of responses consisted of labelling passages with a word or short phrase that summarized the topic discussed. At this stage, codes covered a wide breadth of topics from participation in ecotourism decision-making or other ecotourism activities, family duties and responsibilities, division of labour, access to the forest where tourism activities occur and norms associated with participation in the ecotourism project. A second cycle of coding was then assigned to shorter passages within each topic code and responses where classified by gender and ethnicity to allow for comparison.

Quantitative data analyses

Using the two political empowerment scales that resulted from PCA analyses, we conducted analysis of variance (ANOVA) to determine if women and non-locals had lower levels of political empowerment than men and members from the local clans in the village. Ethnic and gender differences were tested to uncover potential differences in cognitive and structural social capital (Table 3).

We then conducted two hierarchical regression analyses (one per empowerment scale) to examine whether higher levels of social capital access (including both cognitive and structural elements) were associated with higher political empowerment levels (Table 3). Gender and ethnicity were entered first, followed by cognitive social capital variables and structural social capital variables, to test the relative contribution of each of these three main explanatory sets of independent variables (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). This approach allowed us to determine the influence of one's gender and ethnicity on empowerment, and whether this was mediated by cognitive and structural social capital.

Results

Descriptive results

Among 130 respondents surveyed, 69.2% were locals and 57.7% were women. Sixty-five per cent reported having a relationship with ecotourism (of which 76.5% were locals and 58.9% women). Both qualitative interviews and surveys indicated that women engage in ecotourism mainly through indirect employment such as selling food to tourists, while men engage mostly

Table 3. Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) of political empowerment and social capital[a] differences based on gender and ethnicity.

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Dependent variable: access to political participation					
Corrected Model	5.059	3	1.686	3.289	.023
Intercept	.255	1	.255	.498	.482
Gender[d]	1.129	1	1.129	2.202	.140
Ethnicity[e]	3.332	1	3.332	6.497	.012*[b]
Gender × Ethnicity	.264	1	.264	.515	.474
Error	64.611	126	.513		
Total	69.672	130			
Corrected Total	69.669	129			
Dependent variable: political efficacy					
Corrected Model	14.312	3	4.771	10.462	.000
Intercept	6.894	1	6.894	15.118	.000
Gender[d]	10.909	1	10.909	23.923	.000***[c]
Ethnicity[e]	1.892	1	1.892	4.149	.044
Gender × Ethnicity	.189	1	.189	.414	.521
Error	57.457	126	.456		
Total	79.921	130			
Corrected Total	71.769	129			
Dependent variable: trust					
Corrected Model	2.248	3	.749	2.063	.108
Intercept	9.439	1	9.439	25.983	.000
Gender[d]	.230	1	.230	.634	.427
Ethnicity[e]	1.782	1	1.782	4.906	.029*
Gender × Ethnicity	.026	1	.026	.071	.791
Error	45.773	126	.363		
Total	64.324	130			
Corrected Total	48.022	129			
Dependent variable: number of strong ties					
Corrected Model	50.315	3	16.772	6.133	.001
Intercept	180.751	1	180.751	66.095	.000
Gender[d]	35.700	1	35.700	13.054	.000***[b]
Ethnicity[e]	4.990	1	4.990	1.825	.179
Gender × Ethnicity	.137	1	.137	.050	.823
Error	344.577	126	2.735		
Total	612.000	130			
Corrected Total	394.892	129			

[a]No effects were found in the ANOVAS run with the dependent variables: reciprocity, collaboration and weak ties, so results are not reported. We tested two-way interactions of gender and ethnicity with measures of cognitive and structural social capital as well as with the two empowerment scales.
Only the one-way ANOVA results are presented because there was no significant interaction in any of the two-way ANOVA results.
*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.
[b]Due to moderate violation of the heterogeneity of variance we used a more stringent alpha level. In this case $p < 0.025$.
[c]Due to severe violation of the heterogeneity of variance we used a more stringent alpha level of $p < 0.01$ (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001).
[d]women = 0;
[e]non-locals = 0.

through decision-making and as direct staff (being or having been tour guides or part of the management team). Overall, individuals from local clans are involved in tourism more often than non-locals. Among the latter, non-local women are more involved than non-local men (albeit indirectly, once again, by selling food to tourists).

Concerning political empowerment types, the PCA revealed two political empowerment components. The first joins empowerment aspects related to engagement and information access (first four statements in Table 2) and as such is closely related to the idea of having access *political involvement* (Pinkleton, 2008). The second appears to refer to politically active participation and agency in decision-making, such as speaking at meetings or providing input (last three statements on Table 2)—referred to here as *political efficacy* (Angelique et al., 2002).

Such distinction coheres with villagers testimonies from interviews that made claims such as "(…) when we go for such meetings it is only the men that ask questions, but they will close for the meetings before the women would say [anything]." Although access to political involvement and political efficacy might be thought of as related, it has also been argued that efficacy in decision-making should be conceptualized as distinct from general political involvement (Hickey & Mohan, 2004) —justifying our approach to separately analyze these two kinds of political empowerment.

Inequities concerning political empowerment and social capital

While no significant differences were found between men and women in their reported levels of *access to political involvement* (Table 3), this was significantly lower for non-locals compared to locals (p < 0.025). This indicates that non-locals are likely less informed and are invited to fewer decision-making tables than locals. Concerning *political efficacy*, absolute levels were generally low and ANOVA results show a significant difference between women and men (p < 0.001; Table 3). This means that, men are significantly more likely to speak at meetings and share their thoughts on ecotourism matters with the board than women. As hinted in the previous quote, these results resonate with qualitative interviews that reveal that men and locals in general have more power in community tourism decisions than women and non-locals. While women are aware of tourism decisions, they wish to be more actively involved:

> "(…) sometimes what the men will be saying we realize that that is not how it is supposed to be. But because we are women we would just listen and shut up because we don't want to challenge the men."

Research has indicated that while women not speaking at formal meetings doesn't necessarily imply that they don't have other means to assert their ideas and influence decisions (Cleaver, 2001), the women interviewed in this case would often report their desire to have more women speak at community meetings and share their views. Non-locals also shared this sentiment.

Not surprisingly, political empowerment inequalities also cohere with the over-representation of locals and men on the CBE board, the staff management team, as well as in the traditional leadership. Non-locals are *de facto* excluded from decision-making as they were never considered as stakeholders in the CBE project. Thus, there are no board representatives from the non-local clans.

Interpretations as to why more men than women participate in community decisions varied. For instance, men and women often stated that taking decisions and speaking up at meetings is mostly the role of men as head of the household –– at times associated with the idea of God creating man first. "*That is how it has been since creation. The man is always the head. (…)*" a local woman conceded. On several occasions, lack of education or the incompatibility of meeting times with domestic duties were also cited by women for their lack of representation on decision-making boards. A local man described this situation as follows: "*The men are more educated than the women. If one is not educated one can't be a treasurer.*" With regards to meeting attendance,

> "(…) the women, they normally have different excuses: that they are doing this, they are doing that, they are busy. But, as for the men, any time that we are called upon us, we make sure we reach there."

In addition, characterizations of women as either 'naturally shy' or 'talking too much' were offered as justifications for women participating less effectively in decision-making. Some women indicated they were hesitant to speak up due to fear of being shamed for presenting their ideas in public – a phenomenon known to limit engagement (Goldin, 2010).

With regards to social capital, Table 3 also shows that non-locals trust the ecotourism management team significantly less than locals (p < 0.05) and that men discuss ecotourism matters with their close ties significantly more often than do women (p < 0.001). Here again, qualitative interviews substantiated these results. In particular, the group interview with non-locals revealed that while they are proud of being part of the community, some carry grievances arising from their perception of being marginalized from tourism benefits (such as not being hired as tour

Table 4. Hierarchical regression models for the two empowerment scales.

DV	Access to political involvement						Political efficacy					
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6	
IV												
Gendera	1.313	(.113)	2.259*	(.170)	1.233	(.096)	5.048***	(.403)	5.219***	(.416)	4.118***	(.338)
Ethnicityb	2.715**	(.234)	2.525*	(.195)	2.198*	(.165)	2.206*	(.176)	1.678	(.137)	1.320	(.104)
Trust			.250**	(3.080)	3.224**	(0.253)			1.837	(0.157)	1.973	(.162)
Reciprocity			.235**	(3.067)	3.059**	(0.227)			−1.355	(-.110)	−1.508	(−.117)
Collaboration			.252**	(3.228)	3.002**	(.230)			.543	(.045)	.290	(.023)
Strong ties					2.082*	(.165)					1.991*	(.165)
Weak ties					2.230*	(.164)					2.720**	(.209)
Constant	−2.579*		−4.393***		−4.942***		−5.942***		−6.014***		−6.684***	
R^2	.068		.312		.366		.197		.230		.302	
Adjusted R^2	.054*		.284***		.329***		.184***		.199***		.262***	
R2 change	.068*		.243***		.054**		.197***		.034		.072**	
n					129						129	

Note: IV: independent variables; DV: dependent variables; Standardized coefficients in parentheses; [a]women = 0; [b]non-locals = 0; *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$; Cronbach's alpha of scales: trust = .656, reciprocity = .521, collaboration = .575.

guides or the lack of development infrastructure in their settlements). In addition, non-locals perceive that locals do not include their traditional leader (a male leader) in community decisions and are only actively called to meetings concerning communal labour duties. This seems to foster a sense of mistrust and disengagement in CBE matters by non-locals. This is illustrated in the following field notes:

> "(…) the traditional leaders of the non-natives are not regarded by the traditional leaders of the natives in terms of decision-making. (…) the natives invite them for meetings that are based on communal labour but when beneficial things come to the community they are not invited."

Additionally, field observations and qualitative interview descriptions reveal physical and institutional isolation reinforcing the notion of difference along ethnicity lines. Most of the non-locals, who migrated to the area years after the natives settled, live on the outskirts of the village in small isolated compounds. Though some migrants have lived here for several generations, they may still be referred to as 'strangers' or non-locals. Not only are non-locals less likely to hear about meetings announced over the village PA system due to their physical isolation, but not being part of the board or staff team isolates them from any important decisions. It is not surprising then that, according to both interviews and surveys, non-locals discuss ecotourism matters with fewer individuals than locals.

Social capital access as a mediator of political empowerment

Turning now to results in Table 4, hierarchical multiple regressions reveal that the relationship between gender and ethnicity vis-a-vis the two political empowerment scales changes as social capital variables are incorporated in the equation. Simply stated, regardless of whether the respondent is a man, a woman, a local or a non-local, one's access to social capital is positively associated with higher levels of political empowerment. More details follow.

Access to political involvement
As indicated by the significant social capital coefficients in Models 2 and 3 (Table 4), higher levels of cognitive and structural social capital are positively associated with more opportunities to learn about and partake in tourism decisions. This is notwithstanding a respondent's gender and ethnicity. In other words, the more access to social capital one has, the more likely one is to *access political involvement* in CBE. While ethnicity is also a significant predictor, the hierarchical regressions show that access to social capital partly mediates the

relationship between ethnicity and *access to political involvement*. In brief, whether you are local or non-local, having more access to social capital (i.e., higher number of strong and weak ties, and higher levels of trust, reciprocity and collaboration in the community) increases one's *access to political involvement*.

Political efficacy

Concerning the second empowerment scale, the higher the number of strong and weak ties, the higher the *political efficacy* reported (see Models 4, 5 and 6 of Table 4). Note that while gender is also significantly correlated (i.e. women report significantly lower levels of *political efficacy*), scores decrease considerably when network variables are introduced. This suggests that the effect of gender is partly mediated by one's number of strong and weak ties. In this case, cognitive social capital and ethnicity show no significant correlation with *political efficacy*.

To summarize, while respondents' ability to *access political involvement* seems contingent upon their ethnicity (non-locals report lower levels) and while one's level of *political efficacy* seems contingent upon gender (i.e., women report lower levels), the degree to which those individuals access social capital, partly determines their level of empowerment. The implication here is that, despite pre-existing socio-cultural norms that underlie behaviours of men, women, locals and non-locals vis-a-vis CBE, reporting higher access to social capital contributes to increased individual political empowerment (in both scales measured and regardless of gender or ethnicity). As we discuss next, this information may be valuable when designing interventions to avoid tokenistic approaches to political empowerment processes.

Discussion

The empowerment and social capital inequities identified above reflect and amplify elite patterns that are well characterized in the literature related to gender and ethnic exclusions in CBNRM (Agrawal & Gibson, 2001) and are consistent with past feminist claims (e.g., Agarwal, 2001; Cleaver, 2005; Rocheleau et al., 1996). In addition, the mixed-methods approach, as well as the disaggregated analysis of the links between social capital and empowerment, add further resolution as to the kinds of political exclusions and social capital differences that are in place. Most significantly, the results reveal that, despite pre-existing social inequalities shaping participation in ecotourism, social capital nonetheless contributes to higher levels of political empowerment. In other words, results indicate that social capital is a mediator of political empowerment (both access to political involvement and political efficacy) despite gender and ethnic inequalities. As such, the work moves beyond recognition of key inequalities that condition differentiated empowerment and social capital to offer evidence that greater political efficacy and access to political involvement are indeed achievable through social capital despite existing ethnic or gender exclusions —a novel result that has so far not been described in the literature. In what follows we unpack these insights further.

What we learn from gender and ethnic differences vis-à-vis political empowerment

Previous ecotourism research has shown that higher levels of empowerment are more often observed among native people (i.e., local clans) with the potential to reinforce the subordinated position of certain ethnic groups (Key & Pillai, 2006; van den Bremer & Büscher, 2011). Here, this pattern is similarly observed, given that non-locals reported significantly lower levels of *access to political involvement* than locals. Furthermore, the previously described physical and social isolation of non-locals seems to be in line with the commonly observed traditional stratification of

Ghanaian communities — rooted, in part, in colonial and post-colonial territorialisation (Bernstein, 2007; Grischow, 2007).

On the other hand, having the opportunity to speak up at meetings or directly address one's concerns to the CBE board or the chiefs (i.e., *political efficacy*) is something that seems harder for women than men, within the context of this study. As one woman simply put it: *"Most of the work on tourism matters is for the men (…) I think they selected too many men."* Engaging in qualitative analysis reveals specific labour practices, environmental dynamics and narratives related to ecotourism that reinforce unequal involvement in, or benefits from the projects and that seem, more generally, to entrench key inequalities that may have historically affected women and non-local members of the community negatively, as noted in numerous rural communities in Ghana and across Africa (f. Cleaver, 2005; Hovorka, 2006; Whitehead & Tsikata, 2003). As such, the ecotourism project could be contributing to the erosion of social relationships in the community, a danger that has been extensively reported across different continents and tourism configurations (e.g., Duffy, 2002; Southgate, 2006; van den Bremer & Büscher, 2011). Overall, the empowerment inequities observed uncovered processes for gender and ethic exclusion in ecotourism decision-making that have been noted elsewhere in other NRM contexts (Bernstein, 2007; Morales & Harris, 2014; Whitehead & Tsikata 2003). Thus, this research supports previous claims from feminist political ecologists (cf. Hovorka, 2006; Morales & Harris, 2014; Nightingale, 2011) for the need to consider structural inequalities and context when examining empowerment.

Given what we know about empowerment as being a process as well as an outcome (Zimmerman, 2000) one could think about these two types of empowerment as sequential processes of political empowerment that are differently accessible based on social hierarchies (in this case rooted in gender and ethnicity). One first would need to be able to access decision-making spaces (particularly for non-locals, based on our results) to then be able to participate effectively (gender differential). As Cornwall clearly noted: "Having a voice clearly depends on more than getting a seat at the table" (2004, p. 84). In this sense, studies have shown how women use their leverage and voice in informal spaces or private spaces to achieve political and economic outcomes (Cleaver, 2001; Hovorka, 2006; Morales & Harris, 2014). Thus, it would be important to analyze a wider set of empowerment measures and informal leverage strategies when evaluating ecotourism outcomes for women and other marginalized communities if we are to avoid simplistic representations of people's empowerment, (Ramón-Hidalgo, Kozak, Harshaw, & Tindall, 2017).

When we concurrently consider that women reported significantly lower levels of *political efficacy* than men and that qualitative data revealed that non-locals experience both physical and institutional isolation vis-à-vis the CBE project, it seems reasonable to think that 'non-local women' in this study likely experience higher levels of political exclusions than any other cohorts analysed. While unable to show quantitative evidence of this (ANOVA analyses did not find gender-ethnicity interactions), the expansive literature on intersectionality (Hovorka, 2006; Mooney, 2018; Nightingale, 2011) reminds us of the importance of understanding social difference as a complex experience produced from everyday practices, and in relation to multiple notions of difference and inequality. Nightingale (2011) notes that social difference is a contested and dynamic process and thus opportunities for side-stepping hierarchies do exist. As discussed next, our results suggest that increasing social capital access has the potential to contribute to reducing political inequities in ecotourism-related matters for non-locals and women. While not a simple task, the recognition of the existence of such complex intersections in CBE seems key to devising effective policy interventions.

The nuanced role of social capital

Separately discussing cognitive and structural social capital permits the identification of particular aspects more relevant for the achievement of either *access to political involvement* or *political efficacy*.

Cognitive social capital role

Qualitative and quantitative results indicate that cognitive social capital (i.e., one's trust in the CBE management as well as one's reciprocal and collaborative behavior in the community) is also important. Individuals with higher levels of trust, reciprocity and collaboration were associated with greater *access to political involvement*, regardless of their gender and ethnicity. This means that, even when non-locals reported having significantly less *access to political involvement*, non-locals with higher cognitive social capital had more *access to political involvement*. Social capital theory states that habits of trust, cooperation and participation in public life act as a social glue and make it more likely that people will be active citizens and engage in exchanges (Ballet et al., 2007). When both qualitative and quantitative results are combined they suggest that ethnic exclusions from CBE participation and benefits have created an environment of mistrust and disengagement among many non-locals over tourism matters, weakening both community cohesion and opportunities for collective action, something that has been noted in other similar ecotourism projects in Ghana (van den Bremer & Büscher, 2011). Trust and reciprocity building across ethnic backgrounds, the establishment of meaningful collaboration opportunities for non-locals and dealing with spatial dimensions of participation will likely go a long way to fostering greater inclusion, and empowerment (Hickey & Mohan, 2004; Nath et al., 2010). For instance, the incorporation of non-local representatives (both men and women) on the board as well as active support towards the development of infrastructure and jobs that directly impact non-locals may contribute to the re-establishment of trust and collaboration by non-locals.

Nevertheless, it is paramount to avoid simplistic extensions of these results. Social capital is contextual and contingent on other dimensions of accumulation and social differentiation such as the relative distributions of cultural capital and human capital by individuals or groups (Ballet et al., 2007). Those contingencies are to be recognized within any given setting to most effectively devise approaches to increase trust and collaboration among socially and culturally-differentiated groups. While outside the scope of our study, historical approaches that account for critical engagements with 'customary systems' of land relations may also shed light on locally-relevant and effective approaches to the empowerment of non-locals and women through CBE (Bernstein, 2007; Eshun, 2011; Grischow, 2007).

Structural social capital role

A higher number of ecotourism-related discussion ties were associated with having more access to both *political involvement* and *political efficacy,* even after controlling for gender and ethnic variability. It is important to note here that, given the relatively small size of the community and its rural nature, almost everyone in the community knows each other (either by name or by face, even if they are not from the same ethnicity or clan). This however doesn't mean that residents regularly discuss tourism matters and ideas with each other. In this sense, our study shows that those who do, are better informed and supported in accessing and participating effectively in ecotourism decision-making. Not only did strong ties (close family and friends) provide access to higher political empowerment levels, but weak ties, who provided non-redundant novel information about tourism, were shown to be helpful as well.

While, as noted in the literature review, prior studies have identified distinct functions between strong and weak ties (Granovetter, 1973; Lin & Erickson, 2010; Tian & Lin, 2016), we weren't able to identify specific differences vis-a-vis the two political empowerment scales analyses in this study; the reason being that the political scales arising from the PCA combined, on each scale, empowering statements that point to both instrumental and expressive outcomes. In addition, it is likely that the function of tie strength in the context of rural Ghana might differ from more western-centric studies where these propositions have emerged from (Lin & Erickson, 2010). Further analyses on the structure of discussion networks, such as diversity of ties (not part of this study), may shed more light on the particular roles of specific kinds of networks in certain

political empowerment outcomes (Tindall & Cormier, 2010). Regardless, given the relatively small size and isolated location of the community, the total number of ties is likely to be more relevant in this context than tie strength. In this sense, since women reported significantly less *political efficacy* than men, this suggests that if women (including non-local women) were to expand the number of ties (strong and weak) with whom they discuss tourism matters at length, their ability to participate effectively in political matters would increase.

An example of a social capital approach to equitable political empowerment

In the context of this study, tapping into current networks in the community where women (both locals and non-locals) could discuss tourism matters and strategize their participation may offer new possibilities for political efficacy in tourism matters. As stated in Gaventa (2004, p. 39), "the power gained in one space may be used to enter new spaces". Microfinance institutions have been shown to help groups in Ghana as well as in other countries learn how to collaborate to save money and receive credit (Anderson, Locker, & Nugent, 2002; Hickey & Mohan, 2004). This is also the case here, where well-established microfinance groups have enabled local and non-local women to save and reinvest money earned through selling food to tourists, and thus increased their economic status. Women in these groups meet weekly to make their deposits and discuss matters of concern; some know each other well while others are just acquaintances. Opening up strategic discussions about ecotourism concerns or improvements at those weekly meetings may plausibly build political efficacy capabilities for women of different ethnicities through information exchange, rehearsing argumentation skills to negotiate improvements from ecotourism, or through the use of a designated spokesperson for the group (Kesby, 2005). Moreover, women in these groups share strong and weak ties offering the necessary trust to be in the same microfinance group while accessing non-redundant information and ideas. The groups then could be seen as political spaces for ecotourism discussions.

It is important to note, however, that such discussions would take place within a broader set of sociocultural norms and not all women would speak up directly at meetings or use the increased socio-economic status as to leverage other CBE outcomes (Cleaver, 2005). Yet, the discussion of tourism matters within these spaces may produce, over time, small empowerment changes for minorities by first sharing ideas in smaller and trusted groups (cf. Cornwall, 2004; Gaventa, 2004; Kesby, 2005). For non-local women in particular, the increase in ecotourism discussion ties may help them to learn about upcoming meetings or opportunities to engage in CBE and expand their tourism discussion networks (both strong and weak ties).

Conclusions

Applied researchers in tourism have encouraged mixed methods approaches combining ethnographic with quantitative methodologies to understanding current tourism-related challenges and facilitating collaborative, culturally sensitive research (Hewlett & Brown, 2018). Based on this study's results and building on previous social capital research in CBNRM, we conclude that a critical examination of social capital, employing mixed methods and disaggregated measures, enables a more nuanced understanding of ongoing exclusions in this case study, while also recognizing the ways in which various minorities may nonetheless benefit from CBE projects through social capital access. While some of our results amplify themes long present in the feminist literature around the inequities that CBNRM projects tend to reproduce despite increased participatory efforts (Agarwal, 2001; Agrawal & Gibson, 2001; Rocheleau et al., 1996), results also offer novel insights into the discussion regarding the value of social capital. Specifically, this study shows how social capital access may lead to higher political participation, despite gender and ethnic socio-cultural barriers. As

such, these results contribute to the debates in the literature on the value of social capital examinations, given its common depolitization in the academic and development literature (Grischow, 2007; Mayoux, 2001; Molyneux, 2002; Silvey & Elmhirst, 2003). For instance, despite past feminist claims that CBE may have unequal political empowering effects rooted in socio-cultural norms (Scheyvens, 2000), quantitative results in this study show that empowerment may be partly mediated by an individual's access to social capital, regardless of socially and culturally-embedded naturalized patterns of exclusions. This is a key insight for those interested in feminist approaches to the study of social capital in CBE and CBNRM more broadly.

Notably, we find that employing an FPE lens to concurrently analyze gender and ethnicity in this context enriches explanations for both the inequalities in empowerment and access to social capital, which can help develop more contextually driven, and effective, social capital interventions. For example, we suggest building on the power gained through well-established microfinance networks to enter new maneuvering spaces (i.e., higher political efficacy in ecotourism matters). While other CBE projects in Ghana and elsewhere will face their own particular challenges and results cannot be generalized, the mixed methods analytical approach suggested here may offer novel insights towards the improvement of CBE projects and community empowerment elsewhere.

Finally, the cross-sectional nature of this study limits our ability to provide empirical causal evidence for these links. Our results' interpretations are informed by robust theoretical causal pathways (Lin & Erickson, 2010; Storberg, 2002) yet, the positive feedback loops between social capital and empowerment identified in other studies (Tindall, Cormon Hidalgo isier, & Diani, 2012; Wagner & Fernandez-Gimenez, 2008) are likely at play in this context as well. In addition, replication with case studies elsewhere would offer a more solid ground for our claims concerning the comparative advantage of social capital in light of inequities. We urge future scholars to continue to unpack these relationships under different contexts to more effectively employ social capital towards the goal of promoting social equity and inclusion in CBE, and more broadly in CBNRM.

Acknowledgements

Disclosure statement

Funding

Notes on contributors

Ana-Elia Ramón-Hidalgo is a PhD graduated from the Faculty of Forestry at the University of British Columbia. Her work focuses on social capital and social difference in the context of CBNRM and ecotourism in Ghana.

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Notes

1. After careful consideration and consultation with the community the name of the village and its specific location are not cited to protect anonymity.
2. "Native" and "local" versus "non-native", "stranger" or "non-local" are locally accepted ways to differentiate between descendants from families/clans who settled in the area prior to colonial times versus those who arrived subsequently from other lands in search of farmland. Such denominations have been critically discussed as part of the legacy of colonial capitalist territorialisation (Bernstein, 2007).
3. When in Ewe, answers were recorded verbatim in English.
4. Partaking in local community activities such as communal labour, community meetings, cleaning campaigns, funerals, etc. allowed for the establishment of trust with a range of community members during pre-fieldwork and fieldwork stays.
5. Convergent triangulation is used to validate qualitative results with quantitative data or vice-versa (Nightingale, 2009).
6. Complementary triangulation is employed to when analyzing two or more different datasets to help create a fuller picture of the research problem by creating more complete in- formation about a topic (Nightingale, 2009).

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