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CRITICAL REVIEW OF LITERARINESS IN CULTURAL CREATIVE DANCES PERFORMED IN THE KENYA SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES DRAMA FESTIVALS

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ABSTRACT

The Kenya Schools and Colleges Drama Festival is a series of student-theatre competitions in, held from January to April annually. Students across all learning institutions take part in these festivals. The competitive nature of these festivals provides an opportunity for participants to be creative in their submissions. The festivals feature many genres, including cultural creative dances. Traditional dances, as a sub-genre of orature, play are integral to the appreciation and maintenance of traditional cultures. They tell creative or literary stories orally and in a modern context. Therefore, this article seeks to articulate how cultural creative dances performed during drama festivals tell creative or literary stories orally. The study sought to describe the literary stories told and themes addressed through the dances, analyse the dramatic and oral literary features of these stories and the literary features included during performance and adjudication of cultural creative dances. The study used descriptive and analytical methods to underline important practical, philosophical, aesthetic, and psychological considerations in determining the artistic quality of cultural dances in Kenya's Drama Festivals. It thus relied on qualitative data obtained through textual analysis, interviews, focus group discussions and participant observation. The study employed the performance theory and theatre semiotics to examine the unique literary quality of these dances. The study found that cultural creative dances tell stories unique to the cultures from which they are composed. They also address themes of human or universal relevance out of those cultures. Moreover, cultural creative dances exhibit all features of literariness in terms of their composition. Some of these features make it to the stage performance and adjudication process. However, adjudication examines other technical aspects of production based on the themes prescribed for the festival by the government. This research underlines the place of cultural creative dance as dramatic genre and oral literary performance.

KEYWORDS: cultural creative dances, literary stories, Kenya schools, colleges drama festivals

1. INTRODUCTION

The year 1981 marks the onset of Traditional Dances to the Kenya Schools Colleges Drama Festivals (KSCDFF). Wasambo Were, the then first African inspector of schools in charge of teaching English,

accorded increased status and acknowledgement to traditional performance in the drama festival by incorporating indigenous song and dance as a separate category, to be known later as the "cultural creative dance". The traditional performance form supplemented the scripted play in a festival that was initially play-oriented. This was particularly important. It enabled those schools that did not have a teacher or student who could write and direct a play to have an alternative form, which they used to gain participation into the festival. Equally, the same year Wasambo Were introduced a Primary Schools Drama Festival, so that students were involved from ages eight to twenty-five years. Since then, the genre of cultural creative dances constitutes many of the items performed during the annual event held in the first term of the school calendar (January-April).

As a genre in the drama festivals, the cultural creative dance has undergone tremendous transformation regarding the time for performance, the entry number of performances, the adjudication ethics and integrity required to be upheld by the both the performer, the adjudicator, the audience and the festival organizers. The name for the dance has also changed from traditional dance to cultural dance, and then to current cultural creative dance. The notion of cultural creative dance purposely implies the dance in drama festivals tells an artistic story that is rooted in a discernible culture. Therefore, this genre differs from traditional group dances (folk dance) for Kenya Drama Festivals in the sense that it is meant to preserve the culture. The performance is within the idiom of a particular community hence revealing the originality of the source of the dance. The cultural creative dance is meant to tell a literary story in a creative manner. All the movements in this genre must be danced creatively. The genre calls for all creative and artistic skills that are literary in nature to make the dance unfold. Therefore, the cultural creative dance is not only meant for entertainment, but also to encompass the literary elements that do make it a theatrical and oral literary genre. All the uniqueness that characterize the orature equally do characterize this genre hence making it an authentic and lens to societal issues.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Cultural creative dances constitute one of the oldest forms of oral literary and dramatic performances in the Kenya schools and colleges films and drama festivals. Much of past research into this genre has examined its elements in relation to performance. Such studies usually treat the text of cultural creative dances as existing in the performance. The aspect of composition and the literariness that goes into the production of these dances are hardly considered during research. It is also not obvious that the standards used to critique the performances of this dance by adjudicators amounts to a critique of the dances' literariness. Therefore, to clarify these points, this paper examined the literariness of cultural creative dances. It specifically sought to describe the literary stories told and themes addressed through the dances, analyse the dramatic and oral literary features of these stories and their literary features included in their performance and adjudication of cultural creative dances.

1.2 Literature Review

Most of the writings on Kenya National Drama and Film Festivals (KNDFE) have examined the overall achievements of the items staged for the festivals. Some of these writings are in form of articles published in Kenyan newspapers such as Daily Nation, The Standard, The Nairobiian, People's Daily among others. For example, Daily Nation describes the artistic impression made by performances on stage [1]. Similarly, The Standard newspaper does also capture the general impression and creativity of the entire genres of drama while on stage [2]. The two newspapers majorly act as a communique to the public on the nature of the festivals all the way from zonal level to the national concerts. As such, they only present event-based analyses of issues within drama festivals without the accompanying empirical analysis of such issues. In general, as newspaper articles, these publications are journalistic in nature and, as such, only report on the inauguration ceremonies of the festivals. They may occasionally paraphrase the storyline of these items staged without paying attention to the theatrical elements that make cultural creative dance literary. This paper undertook an in-depth literary analysis of the issues surrounding the performance of the cultural creative dance currently. This will help to provide a descriptive analysis of the theatrical elements within the cultural creative dance.

Thematically, the use of theatrical performances at the KNDFE is for edutainment purposes. Most of the publications done on and about performances at the KNDFE have tended to focus mostly on issues of feminism [3],[4], child-centeredness [5] and narrative strategies [6]. Otieno [3] analysed the feminist or lack of gender equilibrium in selected plays presented at the Festival while Tsikhungu [5] interrogates child centeredness in selected plays presented by primary schools in the festival. The two address themselves to themes that are the plays and other genres of KNDFE hence not paying attention to the cultural creative dances. Equally, Minishi only presents findings on the drug and substance abuse as a theme that most genres do feature in their performances [7]. Minishi's approach is on the theme of drug and substance abuse in plays and not in cultural creative dances. Opondo [6] and Chetambe [4] interrogate the oral narratives presented at the Kenya Schools and Colleges Drama Festival cultural creative dances. While Chetambe looks at issues of disempowerment on gender terms, Opondo also examines the aesthetics of the oral narrative at the festivals [6].

All these studies offered insights on how festival items can be analysed, hence they were useful to this study. However, the above reviews majorly look at the themes within two genres of the festivals, i.e. the plays and the oral narratives. Furthermore, they do present other theatrical features that make these drama festival's genres literary. Therefore, the present study seeks to bring out the theatrical elements that cultural creative dance literary and whether its thematic concerns are literary in nature and do reflect life within the current society.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

1.3.1 Performance Theory

The study was anchored on the performance theory, which involves the total framework of the interaction between the oral piece, the artists, the occasion and the audience that work out a total achievement of the aesthetic realization. The proponents of this theory are Schechner [8] and Austin [9]. Schechner's key argument is that drama is not barely a segment of the stage, but of daily living, and it cuts across societies. As he puts it:

It is important to develop and articulate theories concerning how performances are regenerated, transmitted, received and evaluated. In pursuit of these goals, performance studies are insistently intercultural, inter-generic and inter-disciplinary [8].

Performance theory in this study implied the total framework as well as the environment in the delivery of the cultural creative dance as a theatrical performance. The performer's dramatization of the various moods and actions give life to the dance as a festival's genre. The cultural creative dance was therefore fully contextualized in regard to the story or plot, the participants, and the features of language use. The integration of performance in the cultural creative dance resonates well with the theatrical elements. Indeed, it is quite hard to differentiate cultural creative dance's songs and dances from other aspects of theatrical performances.

1.3.2 Theatre Semiotics

The study was also grounded on the theory of theatre semiotics, which lays a foundation to argue that the drama festival is an activity involving performance embedded in systems of signs and significations that help to pass various messages. This study used semiotics theory as propounded by Keir Elam in his text *Semiotics, Theatre and Drama* [10] and as modified by Marvin Carlson in his text *Theatre Semiotics, Signs of Life* [11]. Elam [10] and Minishi [7] define semiotics as a science that is dedicated to the study of the production of meaning in the society using the different sign systems and codes that are at work in society and the actual messages and texts produced thereby. Their views resonate well with that of Ferdinand de Saussure as the father of semiotics in the linguistically. Ferdinand argues that theatre and performing arts in general have simply appropriated what the linguists developed to explain the processes of generation of meaning in linguistic communication. This theoretical perspective mirrors Minishi's [7] idea of semiotic signs in the plays that were selected and interrogated how were they realigned to bear the weight of telling the story of the campaign against drug and substance abuse. Theatre semioticians like Elam [10] argue that the transaction between the audience and the performer warrants and amounts to what can be termed as 'theatrical communication', which is just but a variation of communication. This theatrical communication is embedded in theatrical systems, which are equivalent to the Saussurean linguistic systems. This theory was relevant to the study in that it useful in relation to selection of the songs used in these dances and their linguistic meanings they have in telling the literary story.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The choice of the cultural creative dance as a theatrical performance was based on the fact that cultural creative dance as a genre of drama festivals is not only among the most treasured the genre but also the second longest item on stage after play production of all ages. The research was qualitative in nature. Field research was undertaken from Jan 2019 to April 2020 in selected schools that took part in KNDFFF in Bungoma, Kakamega, West Pokot Counties. In these counties, the participants were mainly drama students, drama patrons and adjudicators for the KNDFFF who were interviewed. Moreover, at Namakhele Primary school in Bungoma County and Mabunge AC primary in Busia County, the researcher identified and interviewed one of the drama patrons, along with some drama fans. These were also interviewed before, during and after the performance of cultural creative dance in drama festivals. The selected drama participants, drama patrons and the adjudicators provided information on the social and historical background and significance of the theatrical elements in cultural creative dances in drama festivals. The whole process was audio- and video-taped, which helped in analysis of results later. Besides fieldwork, library research was also carried out to enhance the study outcomes. A review of past cultural creative dances and even those of Kenya Drama Festivals were also undertaken.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 The Structure of Kenya Schools Drama Festivals

The Kenya National Drama and Film Festivals (KNDFFF) are organized by a national organizing committee housed within the Ministry of Education. The festivals involve drama performance by talented school and college students from different zones within the county. These regions are created by the Ministry of Education for easy management of the festival competitions. The regional drama festivals involve competition of performances from counties, referred to as zonal festivals, which progress to regional and then to the national festivals. Currently, there are 8 regions. The Lake Region covers former Nyanza Province and covers Kisumu, Siaya, Kisii, Homabay, Migori and Nyamira counties. Western Region includes Busia, Kakamega, Bungoma and Vihiga Counties. Rift Valley Region includes Nakuru, Uasin Gishu, Narok, Kajiado, Kericho, Nandi, Elgeyo Marakwet, Trans Nzoia, Baringo, Laikipia, Turkana, Samburu and Bomet counties. Nairobi Region comprises Nairobi County. Eastern Region constitutes Meru, Embu, Isiolo, Tharaka-Nithi, Kitui, Machakos, Makueni and Marsarbit Counties. Coast Region constitutes Mombasa, Kwale, Kilifi, Tana River, Lamu and Taita Taveta counties. North-eastern Region constitutes Garissa, Wajir and Mandera counties. Central Region covers Kiambu, Nyeri, Nyandarua, Muranga and Kirinyaga.

The National Drama Festival features winning performances from all the different regions in the country. This structure allows for as many learners as possible to participate in this theatrical competition. The festival is indeed the single biggest educational theatre event in Africa. The entire process of the festivals is intended to realize the following objectives set by the Kenya Ministry of Education:

- Mainstreaming of the arts within the education system
- Nurturing of young talents
- Celebration of cultural diversity in Kenya
- Enhancement of skills related to creative talents
- Awareness creation on the value of arts in society
- Creation of awareness on issues affecting society through arts
- Enjoyment of culture

3.2 Literary Stories and Themes in the Selected Cultural Creative Dances

3.2.1 The Lokapera (meaning catastrophe/disaster) by St. Theresa's Tartar scripted and choreographed by Allan Chahasi, David Olengo and John Konoo

The Lokapera means disaster or catastrophe and was performed by St Theresa's Tartar. The Lokapera dance was awarded the second-best dance in cultural creative dance category in the 2019 edition of the Kenya Schools and Colleges Drama and Film Festivals in the category of Secondary Schools. Thematically, the dance features the plight of children, social media effects. The dance was sourced from Pokot community. It featured colourful Pokot costumes, including African beads. The fast-paced cultural dance depicts a young girl (Mercy Cherone), who despite the stringent school rules, sneaks a phone into school. With the help of accomplices, she has access to internet and, as a result, Facebook and other social media sites become her breakfast, lunch and dinner. She somewhat finds a way out of this maze after paying the price for her misdeeds.

3.2.2 The Cuban Doctors by Kakamega High School, scripted and choreographed by Sidney Muhando

The Cuban Doctors was the best cultural creative dance in the 2019 edition of the Kenya Schools and Colleges Drama and Film Festivals in the category of secondary schools advocating against foreign employment hence leaving Kenyan graduands jobless. The dance also depicted a medical profession in dire straits, as nurses and doctors find it hard to continue without a pay rise. In the dance, the medics' representatives have entered into a Collective Bargaining Agreement with their employer, and they patiently wait for authorities to implement it as agreed. However, to their utter shock, the Government seems to have kept the agreement in a shelf gathering dust. They give an ultimatum to arrogant officials who whilst saying there is no money, can be seen riding in SUV vehicles, dining and wining in five-star hotels and philandering around. The strike day begins peacefully until the police turn up in anti-riot gear, firing teargas and beating up the medics. Soon there is light at the end of the tunnel as the Government and medics reach a middle-ground and everyone is happy.

3.2.3 *Siwuyisio* (the delocalization) by Bungoma High School by Toil Khisa and Violet Moga

The dance addressed the concerns of teachers on the government reforms of school head teachers or principals working outside their home county. It shows how a delocalized teacher feels away from

her/his family and how some teachers were received badly in their new stations. Equally, the dance mirrors the student and parents unrest occasioned by the delocalization and its overall impact on both student performance and general attitude of other education stakeholders within the school that has received the new head. It ends on a happy note advocating for teachers to be ready to work any school within the republic. It calls for truce harmony for the school community and new head as a way of promoting national integration. The positive attributes of delocalisation outweigh the negative one. The dance was culturally sourced from Bukusu showcasing the authenticity of Bukusu Kamabega dance. Its general choreography was artistic in nature reflecting theatrical elements of drama.

3.2.4 Features of Literariness of Cultural Creative Dances

Cultural creative dance is an edutaining sort of performance in which its execution all movements must be danced. Just like the staged play, all scenes and theatrical movements must be acted out, the dance has to tell the story through the dance motives, synchronized dancing styles, well harmonised songs and in a clearly well-choreographed dance outline. Cultural creative dance exhibits the following theatrical features that do make it literary (oral) in nature:

The Aristotelian definition of the plot as the soul of the play looks at it as the imitation of dramatic action and meaning in a series of connected events. However, this definition leaves out the vehicles that carry that meaning. This is why Dace defines dramatic action as that that reveals a character or rather revealing thoughts that go through the mind of a character and determines his overt acts which in turn reveal what kind of person he/she is [12]. Thomas [13] and Minishi [7] view plot and structure in theatre production as both a scriptwriter's work and the director's headache since the actions are supposed to be done in such a way that they reveal the thoughts that go on in a character's mind on stage.

Styan observes that elements of drama are those that build the events on stage (the score) the way these events may be put together (orchestration) and the reaction of the playgoer (values) [14]. Score has dialogue and use of words. Orchestration has sequence, tempo characters and continuity. Values has audience participation and judgment. On the other hand, Sanger holds that plot has an exposition, rising action, climax and falling action [15]. According to Brockett and Ball:

plot is the overall structure of a play and dance and it has a beginning, a middle and an end. The beginning establishes some or all of these: place, occasion, character, mood, theme and the internal logical that will be followed. Exposition is the setting forth of information usually about earlier events, the identity and relationship of characters and the present situation (p. 39) [16].

This is a view supported by Wilson and Goldfarb who note that dramatic structure is the framework of the dramatic action that includes conflict, pace and tension; all within time and space [17]. They add that the essential elements of dramatic structure are story, plot, action, conflict, and lastly, a

balance being struck between the opposing forces. Further, Minishi argues that the plot is what actually happens on stage and not what is talked about [7]. Wilson and Goldfarb argue further that opposing forces are people determined to achieve their goal [17]. They note that a dramatic structure has obstacles and complications which are occasioned by the movement of characters through a series of steps alternating in between achievement and defeat, hope and despair so that the moment they accomplish one goal, a new hurdle or challenge is thrown up and they must overcome. These hurdles that block a character's path or outside forces introduced at the inopportune moment are what they call obstacles and complications. They further discuss crisis and climax as elements of dramatic structure when they observe that crisis result from conflicts, obstacles and complications in which characters are involved. The resolution of one crisis leads to another until a final and most significant one, which Wilson and Goldfarb refer to as climax.

All these features of the plot do cut across the cultural creative dance. The cultural creative dance is characterized by four elements, dance, drama, colour and instrumentation. This plot and structure in cultural creative dance tell the literary story, which is set thematically. What brings out the difference in performance of the dance is the artistic nature and display of the four elements that defines cultural creative dances in the context of KNDF.

Various literary elements are also witnessed in the Performance and examined in the adjudication of cultural creative dances at KNDF. These include the name of the dance, innovation and story, choice of dance, choreography, music, instrumental accompaniment, dance patterns, drama, costume and décor, and plot.

Name of Cultural Dance

This category is named deliberately as cultural creative because, as stated in the objective of the festival, so as to enhance appreciation of cultures, portray national image or identify and preserve what is good in our cultures while allowing for innovation. In this category, emphasis is laid not so much on cultural "identity injected" but on creativity.

Innovation and Story in Cultural Creative Dance

Literary innovation means using existing forms and infusing them with fresh ideas while maintaining the core tradition in that which is being created. Whatever is borrowed needs to be given a new dimension and freshness of interpretation. Where dance styles of different origins are blended, these must be presented using storylines within the core culture(s) portrayed by the dance. The mode of communication in cultural creative dance is achieved by means of synthesizing song, movement, instrumentation and characterization. All these should culminate in theatrically creating a clear storyline.

Choice of Dance

A dramatized cultural dance should have a theme and a clear storyline around which the dance pivots as it develops. The theme of the dance should grow from an established beginning to a conclusive end. In terms of theatrical relevance, the dance should seek to answer the following questions: Does the dance have a cultural source? Is the message educative? It must also have an entertainment value: has the choreographer moulded words and movements and patterns such that the dancers and the audience do appreciate, enjoy, identify themselves with, and get the message of the dance with ease when the audience does not speak the language in which the message of the dance is communicated? The dance must establish the right mood for the occasion.

Choreography

A dance ought to start in the mind of the choreographer, who should then interpret and express the ideas, moods and situation through the art movement, song and characterization.

Music

Is the dance enhanced by incorporating music and song or other effects that the choreographer may deem necessary when developing the dance? Such other effects may include singing and use of musical instruments. Songs help to convey the message of the dance. They are sometimes used to command change in dance sequence. Voice projection and audibility are therefore very essential. Are the words clear and audible? Are the voices of the soloist(s) and dancers in harmony with the mood and pace of the dance? Have the soloists internalized the meaning(s) of the song(s)

Instrumental Accompaniment

How well does the sound of the instruments add to the total presentation of the song and the dance? Do they hamper movements? How accomplished is the mastery of the instruments? Is there variety of instruments? How creative are they used?

Dance

Tempo: the choreographer must determine the speed of the dance and music accompaniment. They should attempt to answer these literary questions. Does the pace live up to the situation and mood conveyed by words? For example, how does ululation to welcome a warrior or new-born baby differ from the solemnity of a burial ceremony? Are the movements in the dance fast or slow enough to render with ease? Is the dancing natural? If the dance is hurried, most of the times it appears mechanical. A right tempo is a crucial factor for an impressive dance.

Rhythm: How well have the dancers mastered the rhythm? Again, as in tempo, maintaining the right rhythm in the movements determines how well the dance has been mastered.

Movement: appealing movements depend on how well both the tempo and rhythm have been synchronized. The choreographer should bring out the required message of impact. Movements are

not only of the legs or arms but rather of the whole body. They should be purposeful and relevant to the mood conveyed by words the movements should not be dynamic. They should help in telling the story of the dance.

Formation: the choreographer should work out a fitting and interesting floor plan to be used by the dancers as they go through the emotions of the dance to avoid monotony and unnecessary crowding. The choreographer and the dancers should consider the cease with which dancers adjust themselves to the various formations. Do they arrest the interest of the audience? With ample time for rehearsals, the dance should be spontaneous even when complicated formations are created.

Pace: how does the message of the dance help the message of the dance to develop? Are movements and formations well blended in terms of timing? Do the movements make the dance disjointed and dragging or do they make it flow? How well does the pace keep the mind of the audience alert?

Involvement: are the dances alert both mentally and physically throughout the dance? Do they respond well to the changing tempo, rhythm, movements, formations etc.? do they identify themselves with and enjoy the dance?

Drama

The dancers must bring out a clear storyline with a beginning, middle and conclusion. This should be well infused into the dance. These should evidence of appropriate and distinct characterization. Characters must be clearly marked out and used to initiate, heighten and resolve the conflict in the dramatic plot. The dance should be well rendered by use facial expressions, gestures and body movements. The dance should be choreographed in such a way that props and other features are improvised and/or functionally used in a theatrical structure. There should be clear evidence of creativity and imagination.

Costume and Décor

There should be good mixture of the set, costumes and make up schemes so that the intended theme and situation of the dance can be brought home in a balanced manner without excessive simplification or magnification. The costume should give an immediate impact suggesting the life, conditions and the personality of the dancers (characters). Make-up should enhance the facial expressions and body decorations should reveal the symbolism and representation of the myths. The décor should be designed in a manner that is functional and drawings should relate to the storyline of the dance. Theatrically, both costume and décor should be used appropriately to help in heightening the story of the dance.

Dramatic Plot in the Cultural Creative Dance

Introduction or exposition

Sanger notes that the exposition is an opening act and lines that mark the intentions of the play giving ideas to the audience [15]. With reference to the dramatized dances, the exposition introduces the dances songs hence enabling the audience to culturally locate the source of the dance. Some dances do start by a prologue; others a direct address to the audience. All these expositions should dramatize in a song and dance. The exposition in the dance serves to reveal the character, to locate the source of the dance hence setting out the dance parameters by indicating what is involved, who is involved, a sense of conflict perhaps an impending drama or a waiting for something to happen. In dramatized dances, exposition is done through the following ways: a direct address through song and dance among the dancers and soloists of dance groups within the dance, introduction of the dancer about a situation, dancers setting up audience anticipation by mentioning dance protagonist, among others. Exposition does also set the mood of the dance hence bringing the audience close to the dance

Plot development

Brockett and Ball [16] and Minishi [7] note that the middle of a dramatized dance consists of the rising action composed of a series of complications: a complication is any new element that changes the direction of action. It is the discovery of new information e.g. dancer coming with news. Through plot development, the rising action justifies the conflict of the dramatized dance. The course of conflict should always be told in a clear story line of the dance. Good creative dancers are characterized by twists and turns a feature that entails use of both flashback and foreshadowing. The series of complications of twists and turns do culminate in a climax.

The resolution

Brockett and Ball note that the ending of a performance is a resolution or dénouement (the unravelling or untying) which ties up the various strands of action, answers the questions raised in the course of the choreographer's script and solidifies the dance theme [16]. Minishi observes that resolution of the dramatized dance is geared towards returning the situation to a state of balance and to satisfy the audience's expectations [7]. This paper was interested in how the dramatized dances do tell and resolve the literary stories. All conflicts within the dance should either be dramatically resolved or in a suspense leaves the audience on ways solving the problems. The dance does also have the prologue win this, the prologue does mirror the resolution met in the dance. In theatre semiotics, resolution works as part of the structural system of a production.

4. CONCLUSION

This paper has appraised the plots of the theatrical feature in cultural creative dances. The plot has showed how the dance succeeds in exploring the various literary themes in cultural creative dances. It started by looking at the exposition of the performances, then interrogated the plot developments and finally the resolutions. In the dramatized dances, the paper has analysed the unearthed plots that tend to be prescriptive and preachy and, in this event, the audience do not relate to the pain, anguish, joys and sufferings of the dancer throughout the dance. The paper has also expounded on theatrical elements that when blended in the dance, they help in telling literary stories that thematically reflect the society.

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