

Creative Ingenuity and Gender Studies in a Digital Era: A Ruminant on Some Selected Playtexts

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Abstract

Academic discourse and scholars for decades, have shifted attention to gender issues. The area of gender discourse that most received this attention, is maltreatment and subjugation of women or the girl-child. But little or no attention has been given to the area of women battering men or wife battering husband. It is so disheartening to note that men are also subjects of maltreatment in the hands of women and cannot talk about it. Thus, many of them are dying in silence. The study aims at examining the spate at which this menace has eaten deep into the 'flesh' of men. The paper achieves this through the study of some playtexts that silently house the issues of women battering men and how this can be read or seen through digitalized means, especially now that the world has become a global village. In order to attain this fit, the researchers adopt the qualitative research methodology through content analysis and merging it through digital means for wider coverage of their contents. The research therefore, concludes that if playtexts are studied beyond ordinary reading, more messages and information would be found through them. The study thus, recommends that once such messages are discovered, they should be presented to the world (audience) via digital means for wider and broader viewing.

Key words: Maltreatment; Subjugation; Discourse; Women and Attention

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, empirical studies focusing on spousal homicides have proliferated the society, especially the western societies. But in the recent time, this menace has found its way into African societies which include Nigeria. Clearly, this body of research has made significant contributions to the comprehension of spousal homicide. Nevertheless, some limitations of the extant literature subsist. For example, most studies have focused on uxoricides, or husband-to-wife homicides. Attention has never been given to mariticide- wife-to-husband homicides. Wife-to-husband homicides has been one of the major menaces in spousal homicides, but much attention has not been given to it.

In the time past, the trend and norm in Africa tradition had most times subjugated, subjected and projected the woman as second fiddle to the man. To the African man, the woman, no matter what she passes through should remain loyal to her husband, even if battering and violence of any form is involved. This has made researchers to beam their searchlights on the man-to-woman homicides, as if nothing happens to the man, in terms of the woman subjugating and subjecting the man to violence and battering of all kinds. Because much attention has not been given to the aforementioned attitude.

It is a good thing the United Nations declared every 25th of November as the day for the campaign geared towards the elimination of violence against women. This is part of the injustice done against men, as if nothing happens to men from their wives like violence. Though it is noted that men have the ability to conceal the violence meted to them by their wives than the women. They do this sometimes to hide their heads in shame and cover

certain secrets best known to them. This implies that men too face homicides of different forms from their wives and that makes this study very relevant.

For an explicit and implicit comprehension of the issues under discourse, there is need for us to look at these issues of gender and women in Nigeria. It is conspicuous that when we talk of gender issues what rightly comes to mind is the issue of gender inequality that has dominated the political realm of the Nigerian society. Our women under the disguise of feminism, seem to have lost focus in the fight against gender inequality. That is the main reason why most scholars and critics have openly and clearly criticized Zulu Sofolá of not taking a stand in the fight for the emancipation of women in Nigeria. This is because she has blatantly refused to be an exponent of the movement called feminism. She took her stand with womanism. To enable us have an in-depth understanding of this sub-heading we have to jointly look at this scholarly definition of Angya opines that, feminism is: ... a struggle to articulate women's vision of what desirable society would mean for them ranging in practical terms from issue relating to unequal access of women to resources, harmful traditional practices, and gender inequality etc" (55).

This implies that feminism has grown wings that it is no longer the issue of gender inequality alone but relatively to all issues affecting women both traditionally and socially. The issue of gender is a justice issue, "Gender became the justice issue," women the "minority" whose interests should be considered (White 20). White informs the society that what the gender issue is after is justice and those women who are classified as minority; their interests should be considered for equality, justice and social development. On this Akoh Ameh criticizes and gives a dialectical stance to the western feminism and what feminism should be doing on the African sore: ...the recurrent motif is the feminist vision built in the tradition of western culture, and their very execution the chemical and hypothetical nature of feminism within a culture that places high premium on the family system and its values (59).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is leaned on Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Melvin Defleur's Media Theory. Media Dependency Theory (MSD) emphasizes that the more a person depends on media to meet needs, the more important media will have on the person's life and therefore, the more effects media will have on the person. According to this theory, three media needs determine how important media is to a person at any given moment.

- The need to understand one's social world (surveillance).
- The need to act meaningfully and effectively in that world (social utility).

- The need to escape from that world when tensions are high (fantasy escape)

Ball Rokeach and Defleur suggest that the cognitive, behavioral and affective consequences of media use are premised upon characteristics of both individuals and their social environment.

COGNITIVE EFFECTS

There are five types of cognitive effects that will be exerted on the audience.

Creation and resolution of ambiguity

Ambiguity occurs when audiences receive inadequate or incomplete information about their social world. When there is high ambiguity, stress is created and audiences are more likely to turn to mass media to resolve ambiguity.

Agenda setting

This is another reason why we might call dependency a "comprehensive" theory of media effects. It incorporates the entire theory of agenda setting within its theoretical framework. Like any other effect, media agenda setting effects should be heightened during times when the audiences' needs and therefore dependency on media are high. So for instance, if our information needs and dependency on media was high during the invasion of Iraq in 2003, we would have been more susceptible to agenda setting effects, and would have therefore perceived the Iraq war as the most important problem (M.P) facing the U.S.

Attitude formation

Media exposes the audiences to satisfy mechanism that can be used to form attitudes e.g. anti-cultism shows, anti-prostitution information, anti-abortion programs etcetera. Dependency does not suggest media as monolithic but the theory suggests that media play a role in selecting objects and people for which people form attitude about it.

Potential effect of expanding people's belief system

Media have the potential effect of expanding people's belief system. Media can create a kind of "enlargement" of citizens' belief by disseminating information about people, places and things thus expanding their horizon and make them acquainted with the world around them.

Value clarification and conflict

Media help citizens clarify values (equality, freedom, honesty, forgiveness) often by precipitating information about value conflict. When such conflict plays out in the mass media, the value conflicts are identified.

AFFECTIVE EFFECTS

Rokeach and Defleur mentioned several positive affective media effects that are more likely to occur during times of heightened dependency first in desensitization,

which states that prolonged exposure to violent content can have a “numbing” effect on audiences promoting insensitivity or lack of desire toward helping others when violent encounters happen in real life. Second, exposure to news messages or TV drama portray crime ridden cities can increase people’s fear or anxiety about living in or even travelling to a city. A typical existence of this can be likened to the case of Ebola. When Ebola was at its peak in Liberia, C.A.F. banned the country from hosting Nation’s cup for fear of their countries becoming casualties of the disease.

Media can also have effects on the morale and feeling of alienation. The degree of positive and negative mass media depictions of social groups can cause fluctuations in people’s sense of morale in belonging to that group or in their sense of alienation from that group.

BEHAVIOURAL EFFECTS

There are two broad categories of behavioral effects that Ball-Rokeach and Defleur (1996) identified. The first broad category is called “activation” effects which refer to instances in which media audiences do something they would not otherwise have done as a consequence of receiving media messages. The second broad of behavioral effects is called “deactivation” and refers to instances to which audience would have done something, but don’t as a result of media messages.

From the above theory, one could deduce that media dependency has a great positive impact on the development of the youths both in the cognitive, affective and behavioral aspect. The educational system in a society relies greatly on media for value inculcation and reinforcement, waging successful conflicts or struggles for scarce resources, and knowledge transmission such as in educational media programming. The media being an agent of socialization helps to carve the youths through many of its programming. Radio being one of the outlets of the media and also the scope of this research study, suffers the fate of abandonment. There is no gainsaying the fact that this nonchalant attitude portrayed by the youths will spell doom to our world if not corrected, premised on the above positions of the theorists Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Melvin Defleur.

CONCEPTUALISING MARITICIDE

Mariticide literally means killing of one’s husband or boyfriend. It can refer to the act itself or the person who carries it out. Used in current common law terminology as gender-neutral for either spouse or significant other of either sex. According to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “mariticide made up 30% of the total spouse murders in the United States. Data not including proxy-murders conducted on behalf of the wife” (65). Mariticide

is a phrase that has existed right from the mid 1970’s to mid-1980’s. In the recent times, cases of mariticides have been seen and witnessed in and around Africa, especially Nigeria with avalanche of the perpetrators and the victims with evidences of the cases filed against them. Prior studies have found that women are typically the sole perpetrators in mariticide cases. For example, according to Goetting, 98.2% of the marital homicides perpetrated by women in her study involved one victim and one offender (102).

According to Mensah Adinkrah, “...there is a dearth of empirical research examining mariticides, or wife-to-husband murder or battering. Another limitation of the literature on female-perpetrated spousal homicides is the nearly exclusive focus on industrialized societies” (526). Adinkrah goes further and submit that, Relatively few studies have examined the phenomenon in non-Western nations although both scholarly and journalistic accounts suggest that lethal assaults by wives against husbands does occur in such societies (526). To buttress his point, Adinkrah however, posits that:

To illustrate, to the best of this author’s knowledge, no known empirical study currently exists on mariticides in Africa. The paucity of empirical research and published material on female-perpetrated spousal homicides is lamentable because it hinders efforts to achieve a fuller understanding of spousal murders. (527)

It implies to this researcher that, it is apparently correct to take side with Adinkrah that in Africa much have not been done on the woman killing her husband, but a lot have been done on the Husband killing his wife. Attention wholesomely, has been given to the latter, as if the former does not exist at all. This may be seen as one of the motivational impetus for the current research, to investigate into the homicide of wife-to-husband.

However, the above does not imply that the number of men who are murdered by their spouses is small in comparison with the number of women who are fatally assaulted by their husbands. But that is not to say that women in the other way round are not also killing their husbands, committing obnoxious mariticides in the home.

Previous researches have also shown that in some cases, wives enlist the aid of male accomplices in the perpetration of the crime. For example, females who committed homicides against husbands tended to conspire with other persons, usually their male paramours (527). This implies that they tend to connive with other person outside their homes to perpetrate the act. But the researcher deviates from this opinion that most of the women who have tried this in Africa especially Nigeria, attempted it alone without any form of support from anybody outside their homes.

Extant research on mariticide has attempted to elucidate the circumstances under which the crime occurs. The research shows that women who slay their husbands

sometimes do so in self-defense or to end intense domestic battering. From the forgoing, it is then, obvious that other husband-slayers may be doing for other selfish reasons; for instrumental gain, and occasionally to facilitate an ongoing amorous relationship with a current lover. Still, some wives killed their husbands to avenge philandering or other transgressive behaviors of their husbands.

CREATIVITY AND GENDER ISSUE IN A DIGITAL ERA

Drama and theatre have been seen as critical tools in reshaping the society. Theatre mirrors the society with the soul aim of ameliorating the society. Accordingly, Alex Asigbo argues that the job of the playwrights in Nigeria has thus been, “mainly to give direction and warn of perceived dangers threatening our corporate existence” (14). In the same vein, Federico Garcia Lorce cited in Asigbo opines that:

...a nation which does not help and does not encourage its theatre is if not dead, dying, just as the theatre which does not feel the social pulse, the historical pulse, the drama of its people, and catch the genuine colour of its landscape and its spirit, which laughter or with tears, has no right to call itself theatre but an amusement hall, or a place for doing that dreadful thing known as “killing time.” (8)

Asigbo adds that: “the importance of the Arts and Humanities to the proper understanding of the complexity and enigma we call humanity is not contestable. By extension, the place of Theatre as mirror and chronicler of life cannot be overemphasized” (8). But it is very important at this contemporary time for drama and theatre to begin to look beyond the life performance to a more widely acceptable means of reaching a wider audience. These ways of reaching a wider audience are, Youtube, Zoom, Live Streaming on Facebook, WhatsApp and many other social media platforms.

As observed by these researchers, it is glaring that Nigerian playwrights through their creative ingenuities have mirrored or covered array of issues through their dramatic pieces. Because Gowon Doki opines that: “Central to theatre and drama is the desire to communicate an intended message to a designated audience” (1). They have covered issues ranging from culture and tradition, leadership problems, politics democracy, other issues relating to human dimensions. These are issues bothering human existence. Issues like nepotism, selective welfarism, favouritism, hedonism and many others. But of concern to this study is the area of gender related issues. These gender related issues have been covered by many playwrights in their creative has concentrated on feminism. Unknowingly, many of these creative writers do not understand that beyond feminism, their plays cover issue of mariticide. This aspect of gender related menace may have not received the required attention.

Mariticide is the case of wife battering husband. Roland Greene contends that a text must necessarily be thought of as incomplete, indeed as missing something crucial that provides the mechanics of understanding. He posits that: “The text is always partially hidden, one word for the hidden part in literary theory is the subtext” (Greene 51). Textual therefore covers all other aspect of the play that the playwright left hidden for its readers and critics to identify them for the message he the playwright wants to pass across to be seemingly clear.

The case of mariticide and divorce abound in contemporary Nigerian drama, whether consciously or unconsciously.

In *Our Wive have Gone Mad Again*, Utoh-Ezeajugh transfers grossly exaggerated forms of patriarchal attitudes to her female characters. This graciously espoused on the tenets of mariticide which is the spine of this study. Ene is married to Inyang Mpang, a much younger man and treats him worse than most people would treat their hired help. Inyang is solely in charge of cooking and house work, yet Ene abuses him at will. For example, Ene and her friends enter their house to find Inyang sweeping and dusting:

Ene: (waves her hand expansively.) Inyang! What is the meaning of this?

Inyang: (straightens up.) What? Madam Ene, you have come. Welcome. Madam Funmi and Madam Mairo, welcome.

Ene: (standoffish.) Welcome yourself, foolish man. (pointing) look at the clock, is this the time your mates clean the house?

Lazy Idiot! (22)

To Ene, her husband is a “lazy idiot.” Funmi in support of Ene’s opinion and treatment of her husband generalizes: Ene my sister, we all have different grades and degrees of imbeciles in our homes but what shall we do? Men are necessary evils or so they say (23). To explicitly talk about why some women maltreat their husbands, Ene gives us reasons why her husband is worthless.

Ene: ...What have I not done for this useless Inyang? I took him to the village and gave him money to pay my dowry. I sponsored the traditional marriage and the church wedding. I feed this man, I clothe him and I put comfortable shelter over his head. Now what do I get in return? Ingratitude! He is lazy, insubordinate and good for nothing. He cannot even impregnate me. Three years since our wedding and nothing has happened. What am I supposed to do with a eunuch? (23)

Inyang is “useless” because he is economically dependent on his wife and is unable to perform the much valued function of giving her a child.

Ene’s attitude to Inyang’s economic dependence is extreme enough to be objectionable and goes beyond the realms of feminism. The reader realizes that the playwright presents a grotesque parody of patriarchal attitudes to her audience, and enabling them to view and evaluate the harm caused by the woman’s economic dependence on the man, a major reason why men have been able to subjugate women in patriarchal social structures.

The study's interest is to establish that men beaten by their wives exists in Nigeria and Africa at large, but it is being covered up. No one wants to talk about it, especially men that are victims. It thus seeks to discover an apposite model for addressing gender violence that we can use in order to bring about a cohesive and egalitarian society for all.

In *The Rebellion of the Bumpy-Chested*, Oyedepo places the premium for liberation on self-assertion, physical strength to rival the man and the abolition of fear and efforts to please the man irrespective of the consequences. Members of B. C.M. remind themselves. Haven't we resolved that the word 'weak' will henceforth be pulled out of our vocabulary? We've said this for the umpteenth time. Haven't we? (11). The women are determined to suffer physical discomfort, go through rigorous physical exercises so as to have as much physical strength as men do, thereby debunking the claim that men have more physical stamina. They resolve to entertain no impediments or excuses in the course of the struggle. Sharp declares:

... have vowed to myself, if it is my breasts that will be an impediment in the course of this struggle, I shall not think twice about slashing them off. No sacrifice is too much. No sacrifice is too little. Learn to suppress those things for which the rival sex has stamped you 'the weaker' (13).

Sharp educates the women that the idea of feminine weakness is only psychological, so the women go to extreme lengths to deny physical weakness, such that a pregnant woman forces herself to jump up three times just to prove that she is not weak.

Ashake refuses to cook for her husband and brothers-in-law. She is preoccupied with applying makeup from a collection in a quantity that suggests she sells make up. She also dresses in hot pants, halt-neck blouses, large sunglasses as is befitting of a woman of sophistication (27), irrespective of her husband's wishes and at the risk of creating wrong impressions of herself. Oyedepo provides a contrast between the feminist Ashake and her conduct before she joined B.C.M. Her brother-in-law inform us:

Clem: Here was a woman who earned herself very high commendations as a good housewife in the village. She fetched firewood for my mother. She helped the elderly housewives to fetch water from the brook.

James: ... she was the ideal housewife and my mother loved her for it. (26)

In patriarchal structures, the woman is ideal as a wife if she is subservient, useful and serviceable to her husband and his relatives. It is remarkable that Clem and James, who are still teenagers, have already acquired deeply rooted patriarchal attitudes. They feel that their brother's wife should be available to fetch them food and water at their command.

The boys demand food and water but feel that it is condescension to say please ma to my brother's wife for

a glass of icy cold water (20). Clem would rather die than say please to Ashake (21). Clem and James are used to confirm the woman's subjugation in Nigerian patriarchal society. Their attitudes illustrate the male attitudes that feminists seek to dismantle.

Also implied in Ashake's earlier compliance highlighted here, is the lack of awareness of alternatives visible in *The Corpse's Comedy* and in the early part of *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*. Awareness and options come through the Bumpy-chested Movement. Thus Ashake is resolute: This is my own domain and I am the despot here! I am no more the Ashake who used to placate you at the expense of my self-esteem (24). In a slight argument, Ashake does not hesitate to use her artificial finger nails to rake tribal marks into her husband's face. Her attitude is now such that Saka, her husband looks like he had an encounter with a tigress in the zoo and he corrects the impression, I didn't go to the zoo... My house is the zoo and Ashake my wife is the tigress (35).

The conversation between Falilat and her husband, Jolomi, confirms both the need for feminism and that the members of B.C.M. in their bid for emancipation have indeed turned into tigresses.

Jolomi: A helper, a subordinate, because you were created from the spare rib of Adam...

Falilat: (*suddenly looking thunders*) Now, I am not ready to listen to that trash....Who wrote the Holy Book? Weren't they men? It should be expected then that the stories and injunctions there would be pro-male and anti-female.

Jolomi: This is pure heresy! ...Women are better seen than heard. Just like a rope does

not befit a fowl's neck, a position of authority does not befit a woman. It mars her femininity. No way! You are mere helpers.

Falilat: Look, I am not ready to listen to any more filthy talks. You can go and sing your encomium of the man's unique place in the universe to your great, great grandmother. ...But I think your story has become stale and absolutely obsolete for this century and age...(springing to her feet) Now, don't delay me. I am set for a crucial meeting! ...A meeting in which strategies and logistics to puncture the over-blown male ego will be thought and decided upon.... (32-33)

Ezenwanebe summarizes the conduct of the women in *The Rebellion*: Fiercely arrogant and stubborn, the women use not only physical violence but also verbal abuse and name calling to champion their cause as they declare 'bed and kitchen strike' in order to force men to yield to their demand of equality in all things (187).

Oyedepo provide ample examples to show that the emancipation of the woman from patriarchal attitudes is essential, they also let us see that the methods the women in the plays apply to achieve equality is objectionable and do not provide solutions. For instance, Oye in *The Rebellion* dominates his wife and expects her to be at his beck and call:

Oye: (*In an imperious tone*) Isn't the food ready?

Sarah: It is my Lord.

Oye: What are you waiting for? Bring it. (*with a rather sarcastic look*) Or have you joined the association of belligerent wives? (50)

Oye accuses members of the B.C.M of coming to disrupt the blissful peace of our happy home (57) and the women give him a picture of the woman's life, and request him to step into it to see if he will like it. Their conversation between Oye and the women is illuminating. The women ask if Mr Oye would still have the same definition of a happy home if he did all the house chores, the cooking, the laundering and let his wife go out when and where she likes (57-58). They request him to try out his wife's role to see how it feels. The reader does not doubt that Ashake, Falilat, Sarah and the other women need to be liberated from certain male attitudes such as Jolomi, Oye, Clem and James exhibit, thus it does not come as a surprise that as soon as awareness comes, the women revolt against subservience and patriarchal attitudes. They, therefore, demand equality. Thus, the women in Utoh and Oyedepo's plays rebelliously insist that men too must participate in all domestic work for equality to prevail, as they venture into male domains such as taxi driving and politics, but their extreme methods of liberating themselves from patriarchal structures cause havoc to their homes and society. Underneath the parodies of attitudes, Utoh and Oyedepo imply that feminism is about gaining equality and advantages for women, not destruction as women embark on in *Our Wives* and *The Rebellion*. The plays show that while feminism is more commonly applicable to women, it is, in some circumstances, also applicable to men.

Haseman opines that, such as reflective practice, action research, grounded theory and participant-observation have informed practice-led research, this he argues further that "He has termed this paradigm 'performative research'. A performative paradigm potentially offers the creative arts a radical new vision. From the action of the performative above, the researcher couldn't have formed the action and it is apparent from the action of the play, Stella Oyedepo that that woman in the picture with the interpretative acumen of the researcher has in a way presented the women specie as being seen bullying or battering her husband in the play which is the concern of mariticide.

The effect of mariticide was explicit in the plays selected for the study. The excerpts from such plays may be lifted or acted and posted on the digital forum and the messages from such plays would go a long way in taming this menace. This is because they all touch on the challenges of broken homes. They look at the psychological imbalance on the side of both the man and the women, whether married or unmarried. In as much as there has been relationship and it went soar, then psychologically, both parents will feel the pains of separation. If the relationships are the ones that have fruits

(children) the psychological trauma will be extended to the children.

CONCLUSION

It is evident that men too are victims of domestic violence (mariticide). This should be presented through digital means to create more awareness about the experience of men in the hands of women. Though, their plight is not made clearer compare to that of women victims. But through the digital platforms like Twitter, facebook, Zoom, WhatsApp, Youtube and others awareness would be created about the challenge. The research reveals that women who are perpetrators are usually susceptible to play the victim when a case of domestic abuse is reported against them. Most women who are knotted in the trap of domestic violence as perpetrators tend to apply for protection orders to camouflage their action and to look defenseless within the justice system. In this instance, there has to be a thorough investigation through digital means by the police and some concerned parties, to make sure that the perpetrator is brought to book.

It is therefore glaring from this study that many men who experience domestic abuse from a current or former partner find it difficult to get support; not least because it can be hard for men to acknowledge and discuss their experiences. This can be due to any number of reasons, including love for a partner, embarrassment or shame and concern for any children, or simply not knowing where to go.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The data from this study suggests that legal provisions through digital platforms must be introduced to protect men from violence or threats of violence directed against them by their abusive partners. Guidelines must be adopted and digital means by the police in the process of pursuing domestic violence wherever it occurs.

The criminal justice system should be fully implemented through digital platforms, irrespective of gender, when a case of domestic violence is reported or handled. Appropriate sentencing policies must be developed, including compulsory attendance at programs designed for abusive partners in this digital era and through digital means like Facebook, WhatsApp, Zoom and many others. But it is also urged to look at this scourge from the male perspective where some victims of domestic violence are men.

Law enforcement personnel should be trained in digital means and platforms, and in procedures and enforcement of the Prevention of Family Violence Act and about the social and psychological context in which domestic violence against men occurs. Police are indebted to ensure

protection and equal enforcement of the law in domestic abuse cases. Police must be trained in digital knowledge to eliminate gender, class and race bias in their responses to such abuse and to realize that domestic violence is not to be excused, tolerated or condoned in this digital era. However, consistent arrest policies should be considered for domestic violence cases.

Police who are involved in investigating rape cases should receive proper training in pathological skills and in the importance of medical information. Police must provide prompt protection to women and men by diligently enforcing court orders that prohibit abuse and reduce the abuser's access to the victim. Police stations must make it a priority to respond speedily to both men and women's urgent calls in cases of domestic violence. The government should create a self-governing apparatus to monitor and mastermind police treatment of both men and women victims of violence without any bias in this digital era.

In the academia, aggressive attention should be given to mariticide (homicide) of wives-to-husbands or woman-to-man killing which is increasingly impacting the male gender silently because of the shame or socio-cultural stigma associated with it in this digital era.

In the cause of the study, the researcher discovered that their dearth of playtexts on domestic violence against men which makes it a bit difficult for the research to do performance since the work is based on practice-led research. Most of the playtexts the researcher came across are all women-based violence.

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