

Militarization of Football Reporting in Kenyan Newspapers

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Abstract: Football is considered a chief global entertainment sport. Millions of soccer fans throng football stadiums to watch the live matches while others are always glued to the television and radio sets whenever their teams are playing. Owing to the modern technology, many others are able to follow their teams via internet. The print media has always played a significant role in dissemination of football news around the world. The language of football reporting is one of the most entertaining and creative literary pieces and in order to highlight the reality of football; in and out of the pitch, many journalists heavily borrow from other domains such as war and military conflict. Using the Conceptual Metaphor theory the study examined the use of military vocabulary in the reporting of football news in Kenyan newspapers with an aim of describing the militaristic aspects of the reportage. Judgmental sampling was used to select thematically related articles from two major newspapers in Kenya, 'The Daily Nation' and 'The Standard'. Results revealed that there is extensive use of creative language in football news reporting in Kenya through the use of military or war metaphors.

Keywords: Football Reporting, Militarization.

INTRODUCTION

The game of football was introduced to Kenyans by the British colonialist settlers and missionaries in the first half of the 20th Century,[1]. Just like in other parts of the world, the game has since then become the leading sport entertainment in Kenya. The sport has been associated with improved physical fitness, good health, nation building, cooperation, capacity for excellence and positive image, [2]. In addition, football has continued to play an invaluable role of enhancing political tranquility in Kenya as a neutral tool of minimizing political tension and differences thereby paving way for collective effort toward the development of various sectors of the country[3].

Football games are mostly played by young people as a recreational activity. Ongong'a, Okwara and Okello, [4] note that such recreational activities are important for the psychological and physical development of the youth since they contribute to their personal development by promoting good health, personal discipline, leadership and team skills. In addition, they also provide enjoyment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although football and real war are totally different phenomena, they exhibit an interesting relationship in terms of the shared vocabulary, notions and expressions. Football structure and reporting has heavily borrowed from the military language, where, as

Seddon[5] reports, its conceptualization and linguistic expression often take a militaristic turn. Lewandowski,[6] says that there is a conviction that the language of sport is permeated with war metaphors, probably because sport, such as football, is perceived as a substitute for war, especially in the time of peace.

The correlation between the military and the football game has been strong and this seemingly unbreakable link has nowhere been more emphasized than through the media. The link between military references and sports is strengthened because metaphors are not limited to use by sports media, but are used by government and military officials and war journalists as well [7]. Ultimately, society dominantly consumes and experiences sports through the media [8].

The dialogue that relates sports and war was initiated by G. Orwell, who in 1945 wrote in the *Tribune* that sport 'has nothing to do with fair play. It is bound up with hatred, jealousy, boastfulness, disregard of all rules and sadistic pleasure in witnessing violence: in other words it is war minus the shooting' Charteris-Black supports this view, saying that both domains typically entail control of territory (with potential gains and losses), and require physical and mental strength as well as training..... and that at least in theory, both are governed by rules and, generate worldwide interest [9].

Gunnar [10] notes that the permeation of military jargon into football is so particularly because

commentators, pundits, journalists and others tend to depict the activities in and around the football pitch in terms of an informal war zone, sparked, arguably, by the resemblance between the two conceptual domains, and realized, typically, through the use of various forms of symbolic and dramatic language, including everything from clear-cut metaphorical expression to mere allusions to line-ups, strategies and general aggressive behaviour.

Lakoff[11] avers that football, like war, is a competitive sport where there is normally a clear winner and loser, strategic thinking, team work, preparedness, spectator behaviour, glory of winning and shame of defeat. In addition, Chepanga[12] asserts that there is an undeniable theme of war in soccer and that reporting on the physical contest of football makes it almost inevitable for reporters to use allusions to war, metaphors of battle and strategy.

Vierkant[13] also agrees with this view and says that terms such as 'shot', "midfield", "enemy" or "battle" etc., denote war and seem to be an unavoidable when talking about football. It is this militaristic language that defines our understanding of the game. According to Gunnar [14], the game of football tends to be portrayed in terms of warfare and that the 'unavoidable' and 'undeniable' connection between war and football is so much that our understanding of the game nowadays even depends on it.

The frequent overlapping of two domains has led to a situation where the concepts of war and football have become partly indistinguishable in the minds of today's reporters and fans. This has yielded support for the idea that war-inspired vocabulary has in fact become an unavoidable feature in current football reporting as well as an indispensable tool for those journalists who are set to provide it [15]. Lewandowski observes that the war metaphor exhibits the greatest degree of elaboration and that it would be fair to say that the whole football match could be conceptualized in terms of war. He also says that "it is relatively easy to recreate the mappings that hold between the domains of war and football since the soccer match itself corresponds to a *battle*, a *clash*, *encounter* or *war*.

According to Lewandowski [16], it would hypothetically, be possible to construct a match report in predominantly military rhetoric. Reporters, he notes, do this consciously in order to build up fan excitement, especially in the previews of games pitting teams whose countries used to fight real wars (e.g., Germany vs. England).

Gunnar [17] claims it would be hard to imagine football reporting without the use of war-inspired terminology because the use of such expressions have

become an indispensable verbal tool in the commentator's or football news writer's profession. Such words he further asserts, not only helps to master a fighting-spirit concept, making them pose as metaphorical mappings from the war domain, but they also seem to reflect, at least to some extent, a literal description of the actions in the game or the psychological state of some of its players, for example as seen in the (brutal, cruel, ferocious) character of a tackle and the (desperate, frantic) state of an injured victim.

'Just as war has to do with political conflict that takes place in a battlefield, football is concerned with sports competition that occurs in an arena. The participants in war consist of armies of soldiers mastering both aggression and ability to handle their weapons and ammunition, just as footballers are organized in teams of players who challenge their opponents on the basis of skilful treatment of the ball using various parts of their body. For soldiers the aim is to hit, kill and defeat the enemy in order to win the war and achieve political supremacy, just as the objective of football players is to trick the opponents, score goals and beat them, thereby winning the game and the title of the competition.' (p. 91)

The above a description, as Seddon[18] says, "Confirms the notion that football is a ritualized war, a stylized territorial battle, complete with casualties, which can only be resolved with the victory and defeat that produces winners and losers." Football reporters thus use the militaristic expressions in order to add pace and a violent touch to the drama of the game. Such expressions relate primarily to the action and activities on the field in terms of what the teams, players, coaches and referees do.

Achieving this understanding would call for invoking the simplicity and straightforwardness of war metaphor, as a means of facilitating understanding by conceiving of one thing in terms of another. Reporters therefore employ this tactic to make the football game easy to comprehend, while trying at the same time to increase its attractiveness by supplementing instances of metaphor with various forms of intensifying terminology that add action and suspense as well as pace and power to the commentary.

This study employed the Conceptual Metaphor Theory, also commonly referred to as Cognitive Metaphor Theory propagated by Lakoff and Johnson, [19]. The basic tenet of the theory is that metaphor operates at the level of thinking where an individual uses one idea and links it to another to better understand something. The scholars argue that most of our ordinary

conceptual system is metaphorical in nature thus; metaphors are integral and not peripheral to language and understanding.

Lule[20] argues that metaphors are essential to human thought and communication and that they are extremely influential on conceptual understandings of human beings. For this reason, they are often unavoidable in language. The metaphorical concepts, according to Lakoff and Johnson [21], “structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people”. The nature of human communication can therefore be fundamentally said to be metaphorical.

Metaphors often serve as the only way for humans to comprehend complex concepts such as life, death, sickness, health, war and peace [22]. Because people’s conceptual systems are central to the way we interact with the world, and these systems are largely metaphorical, our thoughts, experiences and interactions with others are hugely reliant on metaphors [23]. Additionally, Ricoeur argues that words become metaphorical in specific contexts when opposed to other words taken literally. Metaphors, through language, help to construct realities and can serve as guides for future understandings [24].

Proponents of Conceptual Metaphor Theory argue that thought has primacy over language, noting that few or even no abstract notions can be talked about without metaphor; that there is no direct way of perceiving them and can only be understood through the filter of directly experienced, concrete notions [25]. For instance, according to Lakoff, life can be metaphorically conceptualized as a purposeful journey and realized linguistically through expressions such as “He got a head start in life. He’s without direction in life. I’m where I want to be in life...” [26]. Metaphor plays a very significant role in human thought, understanding or even creating our social, cultural, and psychological reality, because it is used effortlessly by ordinary people in day to day life. An effort to understand metaphor means understanding what kind of world we live in. As a basic cognitive structure, metaphor helps us to understand a relatively abstract concept by means of more concrete concept.

Conceptual metaphors are seen in language in our everyday lives. They shape not just our communication, but also shape the way we think and act. According to Lakoff, metaphors are used to talk about different aspects of life and that it is very difficult to find expressions used to talk about the subject of life which are not metaphorical in some way. Abstract subjects are therefore generally talked about using metaphor. A close examination of the metaphors used

can be an important key to the way people have mentally constructed abstract domains.

Metaphors are extremely powerful because they are so embedded and common in communication that they often go unnoticed. Analyzing news coverage of football reporting, as in this research, provides a way of understanding metaphors and, consequently, the society in which they are prevalent.

Metaphors are therefore not merely linguistic expressions but are important tools that relate our experiences of different concepts, making all metaphors a result of how we view the world. Conceptual metaphors help people to understand abstract subjects of such central importance as life and communication. It is therefore necessary to study the conventional, frequent metaphorical expressions that are used by communities, and in this case the newspaper language of football reporting. This kind of study provides clues to the conceptual structures that both reflect and shape the thought patterns of the football community. In many cases, metaphors represent subconscious choices on the part of the speaker or writer, whose choice of language is partly constrained by the conceptual structures shared by members of his or her community. Metaphors can also help people to talk about difficult, emotionally intense or uncommon experiences, and thus, according to Conceptual Metaphor theory, to think about them.

There are numerous ways in which conceptual metaphors shape human perception and communication, especially in mass media and in public policy. The theory was therefore found important to this study since it provided the basis for discussion on the war metaphors and related expressions in the newspaper reporting of football news in Kenyan newspapers.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive research design, and particularly employed the documentary analysis method that entailed analytical reading and review of newspaper articles reporting on football news. The target population was all the daily Kenyan newspapers reporting on football news. These include *The Standard*, *The Star*, *The Daily Nation* and *The People*. All these are published in English which is an official language in Kenya. This provided a wide sample of language use in football reporting considering that these papers are extensively read in the country. The sample of this study comprised two newspapers, *The Daily Nation* and *The Standard*. Judgmental sampling was then employed to enable the researcher arrive at thematically relevant and suitable articles for analysis, covering a period of nine months. The process of data collection involved identification of the newspaper articles reporting on KPL football matches. After assessment of the content of the article,

excerpts that bore content relevant to research quest were purposefully selected. These were then coded and categorized according to their inherent thematic qualities in relation to the objectives of the study. The study employed qualitative data analysis because the study was on content analysis

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Football field

A standard football field is between 90 to 120 metres long and 45 to 90 metres wide. This area where the football action takes place is often construed in militaristic notions of war and violence. In the first place, the field is divided into sections that correspond to military mappings of a war zone by the soldiers.

- 1) *Again saw his curving shot hit the upright post following a cross from Kevin mwangi on the left flank. ST 29/4/2013*
- 2) *Homeboyz Dennis Mukaisi, however, sharpened the claws in the tenth minute and his powered rifle outside the box from the right flank silenced the Green Army's restless followers. ST29/4/13*
- 3) *Tusker dominated play in the midfield in the first ten minutes but Gor quickly settled and started pushing them back ST 8/5/13*
- 4) *Wamalwa missed another opportunity ...when he collected a square ball inside the danger zone DN25/4/2013*
- 5) *He penetrated the Ingwe defence and unleashed a fierce grass cutter of a shotDN 29/5/13*

The above reportage demonstrates that the football field perceived as a war arena where soldiers (footballers) are stationed and can engage in combat from the *right* or *left flank* or tackle from the *midfield*. Indeed some of the players are referred to as *defenders* since their task in the field is to neutralize any threat or danger that was not eliminated at either of the other combat positions, to prevent an ambush against their ultimate fortress, the goalposts. In this effort, either of the combatants can overpower the other in the course of the *war*, and *dominate* the field. This is the immediate aim, to be in control and in a way eliminate the chances of the other team's chances of scoring.

The field is thus partitioned in a way that each of the teams have their own territory to fight for to defend, but if one team turns out stronger or more skillful, they can overpower and defeat the other. The mandate of the players is to try to keep the rivals far but when they cross the line into the other's territory, the effort is consequently geared towards *pushing them back* to their positions or territory thus neutralizing the threat they pose. Each team thus perceives the other as enemies that must be fought and forcefully ejected from their territory, or beaten to eliminate threat on the other.

Football demonstrates an inherent built-in military structural trait that is analogous to a miniature warfare whose aim is not to annihilate the enemy, but to conquer territory. He further describes the game makers as mimicking the movements on a military map and red-zone defenses as players who defend their end zone with the determination of men who stand between the ravaging foe and their homeland.

The approach of the rival team is also reported as a '*raid*' which is consistent with the theme of military action.

- 6) *Gor's goal was largely untested as Tusker preferred to play in the midfield, save for occasional raids which were dealt with by Gordefenders p. 66 DN1/8/13*

A raid often implies ambushing and overpowering the opponents in their territory to make plunder. A military raid would require systematic planning and meticulous execution of the strategy. Similarly, a football raid implies there is thorough planning and courage required to break into the territory of the other team. As the military aim in a raid is to defeat enemies and take control of a region, and maybe take the plunder, the aim of the football raid is equally to take the 'football spoil'; score and take the glory from the other team.

There is also a chain of command in the field, led by the captain who the other players look to for directions and coordination. The captain is also the ultimate voice in conflict resolutions and they are thus expected to be highly skilled to provide directions and motivation to the rest of the team.

- 7) *Upfront, captain Dennis Oliech provided the killer pass that forced a Nigerian defender to bring down Gateri and in the process provide that perfect free kick for Francis Kahata. DN 2/3/2013*

The use of such title as the captain is analogous to the military chain of command which directs to advance the war against the enemies. Football encounter is thus seen as a military event where 'soldiers' meet at a 'war zone' (football field) and is a battle fought by highly skilled personnel with an aim of obtaining the ultimate victory over the enemy.

The players are also regarded as a squad, which is a military grouping;

- 8) *(Ulinzi)Coach Salim Ali is unlikely to make major changes to Wednesday's triumphant squad. DN 30/3/2013*

These views are in tandem with those of Gunnar [27] who observes that by using such militaristic terms, the game of football can be seen as an event (a battle) which has active participants (captains and squads)

trying to defeat each other (through beating) using weapons (heavy artillery) to bring about certain consequences (casualties – and perhaps even revolutions).Charteris-Black[28] also supports this view, saying that both domains- military and football-typically entail control of territory (with potential gains and losses), and require physical and mental strength as well as training..... and that at least in theory, both are governed by rules and generate worldwide interest.

Naming of Football Clubs

The study revealed that several clubs have adopted militaristic names. GorMahia for instance is referred to as *The Green Army*.

- 9) *There were pomp and colour as the 'Green Army' turned up in record numbers at the 60,000-seater stadium to witness the crowning moment DN14/11/2013*

The above reportage shows that footballers are not only considered as players but also as a group of soldiers or an army out to fight for a cause. The fact that the colour of GorMahia's official jersey is green partly explains the reason for referring to them as *The Green Army*. It is not surprising then that the team's fans also don themselves with green coloured attires whenever they attend the matches. Thus the term '*Green Army*' is used to refer to the team as well as the fans or supporters of the club, both of which are in a 'military uniform'

Other teams going with military names include Admiral FC and Posta Rangers.

- 10)...in another match played in Mombasa, **Admiral** stopped West Ham 2-0 in what was billed as a Coast derby ST 26/3/2013
- 11) *Two years ago, the team's season opener against now relegated **Posta Rangers** was called off after irate GorMahia fans threw stones on the pitch as their team was trailing 3-0 at Nyayo National Stadium. ST 9/3/2013*

An admiral is a professional rank in the military navy unit. The fact that the team hails from the coastal city of Mombasa where the Kenya Navy is located may provide an insight into the association of the team with the military outfit of the navy. This association still conforms to the view that teams look at themselves as military organs established to wage war against their enemies. A ranger, on the other hand, is a member of an armed troop employed in patrolling a specific region, making raids, either on foot or ground vehicles or by airlift. It is evident that by using such a name as Posta Rangers, the team wants to appear militaristic.

Football action

The football action generates great interest thus it is always characterized by intense emotion. It is the culmination of expectations that each team supporters

have over any given match. Newspaper reporters use different terms in an attempt to capture in the best way possible the reality of events that happen in the field during a competitive football engagement. For instance, to play is to *clash*;

- 12) *GorMahia shared the spoils with champions Tusker in a mid week **clash** DN18/13*
- 13) *Tough Sofapaka**disarm** soldiers in lop-sided **clash**DN 26/10/2013*

The competition is here seen as a quarrel, a fight, collision, disagreement, dispute or a conflict that must be resolved in the field, by either a defeat or victory of one team over the other. Toughness is projected as a prerequisite for a team to defeat their rivals, by *disarming* them. To render a team armless is to incapacitate their competitive ability thereby ending the dispute. In essence, a clash or fight is necessary to settle the competitive football dispute.

Teams are also said to engage in a battle;

14. *Sofapaka is breathing hard on their necks as they prepare for the **battle** with Chemilil Sugar at the City Stadium DN 16/10/2013*

The reporter depicts the emotional tension players go through before and during the match, and this foregrounds the aggression and 'hostility'with which the teams mete on each other when they meet in the field.*Breathing hard* implies mental or emotional provocation to aggression. Since this is a pre-match comment, the implication here is that the team is only restraining itself from unleashing their anger and aggression until they meet their rivals for the *battle* at the football field.

Just like military engagements require strategic positioning and official launching, football is also presented to have own territory with drawn lines against which, crossing calls for war;

15. *...the **battle lines** are distinctly drawn for today's **epic duel** pittingleague giants, GorMahia against SofapakaFC . The two rivals go head-to-head at the 60,000 seaterMoi International Sports Centre, Kasarani in a late kick-off match in what is expected to be an **explosive encounter** DN 16/10/2015*

Drawing battle lines is a *distinct* way of declaring preparedness for an eminent fight. Drawing lines implies that the battle is not spontaneous but a preplanned activity, and in the case above, it is an epic or grand encounter between two big teams, metaphorically referred to as *giants*. As earlier mentioned, there is mental preparedness for brutality, violence and pain, captured in an *explosive encounter*. In essence, the battle is not for fainthearted, is bound to leave someone hurt in attempt to attain the ultimate victory. Again the football match is presented as a duel, a battle for heroism.

The fact that clubs are regarded as giants gives the teams larger-than-life image and further intensifies the emotional expectations that will be carried into the field by both the players and spectators; hence the explosive encounter.

16)... *underwent the same predicament last weekend and this therefore set the stage for a bruising battle, one that will shake the walls of Kakamega today* ST 1/3/2013

17) *It will be a do-or-die battle for Bandari when they host unpredictable Karuturi Sports in a nerve-wrecking match.* ST 1/3/2013

18) *Bandari did not relax and kept Thika on toes as they terrorized defence time and again* ST 8/4/13

19) *Beating Sofapaka today may be a good way to begin a resurgence* ST 22/6/13

The pre-match commentary, that a team is headed for a bruising battle or that it will be a do-or-die match reveals the metaphorical violent perspective towards football encounters. The football match in this case is metaphorically referred to as a clash, a battle that will have to be fought so intensely, that requires mental preparedness for brutal violence that will be nerve-wrecking. In other words, it will require a lot of determination and strong will to bear the consequences of meeting another group of fighters (team) and just like surviving in a war is an unpredictable affair, the outcome of the match is equally hard to tell which way it will go.

Thus the players have to engage in a do-or-die battle so that they can survive the other team's aggressive tactics in the field in order to avoid being ashamed. Winning is also portrayed as the ultimate cause; the only reason why teams meet. The players must outdo themselves; they would rather die than bear the embarrassing consequences of defeat at the hands of their rivals. This heightened desire for victory over the other team might explain the occasional real hostility that is experienced in the field among the players as well as among the football fans who at times engage in both verbal and physical fights.

While highlighting the brutal aspect of football encounters in the use of words such as bruising, the reporters also engage in brilliant exaggeration. For instance the football battle '*will shake the walls of Kakamega*'. The town Kakamega is metaphorically seen as a fortress that has walls that can be shaken by the intensity of the battle. This compares to intense military operation which entails destruction of enemy territory or infrastructure using heavy artillery.

Where the defeat of a team is not possible owing to equal strength or skills of the combatants, the teams are reported to have *shared the spoils*, again

consistent with the theme of *military raids* which are carried to defeat and obtain plunder from enemy fighters. This way, aesthetic nature of a football match is relegated to the back and instead the pleasure is realized through witnessing horrid, brutal acts against other individuals.

This agrees with Orwell's views that football 'has nothing to do with fair play. It is bound up with hatred, jealousy, boastfulness, disregard of all rules and sadistic pleasure in witnessing violence: in other words it is war minus the shooting' [29].

The statements above show that the newspaper reporters of football news employ war metaphors and referenced military terminology of armed conflicts in their coverage and commentary on football. Violence and aggression are depicted as exciting and rewarding, and in a way a foreshadowing that emphasizes that violence is an expected and an accepted occurrence in football, and celebrates as heroes those who play through pain.

The act of scoring

The action of scoring a goal is the peak, the climax and the reward of hard work by the players. As such, it attracts the most colourful military vocabulary use. For instance, scoring is likened to military action of shooting; Scoring is the legal way of eliminating the threat posed by the rival team. In this case, the footballer's action is directly correlated with the military use of guns to kill or destroy an enemy in combat. While soldiers use guns to shoot, the players' body parts- basically legs and heads- are the weapons they employ to attack and destroy their contenders. Scoring is also directly correlated to the use of guns on an enemy;

20) *Ulinzigu down Gor as Mathare hold Sofapaka.* DN28/3/2013

Ulinzi football club is a team composed of actual professional soldiers trained to use guns and other weapons to counter the nation's security threat. In the football context, however, they are not using the said weapons but their bodies to play. Their scoring is however related to the action they would carry out in real combat war. Use of war term like this confirms that imagined hostility, mercilessness and hatred are viewed as necessary ingredients in football competition. The reporters also consider conceding of goals a disarmament process.

21) *Tough Sofapakadisarm soldiers in lop-sided clash* DN 26/10/2013

Scoring here is equated with the action of overpowering and taking the weapons from the rivals. Since the players use their body parts to wage their battle against their rivals, conceding goals is equated to

being disarmed. In essence if one is disarmed they are not in a position to engage in battle anymore thus they are defeated. The action of scoring is also viewed as a military action that will require one to expend ammunition on the rivals.

22) ...the soldiers will be aiming to **empty their magazine** on the Bankers to glean maximum points DN 30/3/2013

This demonstrates that the football is conceptualized as real war where actual arms are used against a perceived enemy. This agrees with [30] observations that “football is a ritualised war, a stylised territorial battle, complete with casualties, which can only be resolved with the victory and defeat that produces winners and losers.”

The intensity of force used to score is also colourfully described in war terms. For instance, after a *ferocious attack* comes a *scotching shot*. This reveals an underlying ideology that relates football action to use of excessive force, especially through the use of military weaponry. Football is also reported as a sword war and scoring is equated to using a sword to kill a rival;

23) Navy corporal, Evans Omuoka was the toast of the day for the soldiers **putting K’Ogalo to the sword** with two brilliantly taken goals in either half DN28/3/2013

The metaphorical use of sword culminates in a bloodletting encounter;

24) Ugandan import Dan Senkuruma chipped the ball over Muhoroni Youth custodian Gaddy Omondi from a goalmouth melee to draw the **first blood** for K’Ogalo in the 12th minute ST 5/5/13

These kinds of comments further elucidates that scoring is widely viewed as an active and aggressive use of weaponry against rivals, and that the teams are perceived as military entities engaged in bitter battles for supremacy and dominance, for which they would be ready to do anything.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that there is widespread use of military jargon and concepts in the reporting of football news in both newspapers under investigation; *The Standard* and *The Daily Nation*. The entire process of football, from organization, setting and actual competition compares heavily to that of military and war domains. This reliance on military concepts exemplifies creativity in writing on football news. However, heavy dependence on metaphors that seem to glorify violence and brutality might be detrimental to the welfare of the society by encouraging violence as a means of settling scores. It would be necessary for journalists to also use imagery from other domains in

order to project a more balanced outlook of football game.

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