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# Thematic Analysis in Najat Khayyat's *Satashriqu al-shamsu yawma* "One day the Sun will rise"

by

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## Abstract

Writers such as Najāt Khayyat present the status of women not as passive but as women who experience psychological retrieval and decide to reform themselves. Here, I try to analyse her story *satashriqu al-shamsu yawma* (One day The Sun will Rise) which was published in the year 2001 in *mawsūʿat al-adab al-arabī al-sūʿūdi al-hadīth*. Her writing, in this story, skillfully operates on simple classical Arabic language, *al-fuṣḥā*. It is an enjoyable literary text, written in smooth, fluent and captivating manner. It poses questions about women's freedom, hope and optimism.

## Introduction

The author of the story analysed in this paper, Najāt Khayyat was born in the year 1944 in the city of Jeddah. She obtained her elementary certificate in Bayrūt Lebanon, and made herself cultivated through reading. She began writing stories and contributed social essays for publication in the press and on the radio. Her works include *makhad al-samt* "The Birth Pangs of Silence" (a collection of short stories).

The prevalent discourse in Saudi Arabia has presented women as generalised objects of analysis and as a category-"the woman"-

about which one may theorise. The notion of “the woman” sprang from the society’s system of concealing women as real human beings and revealing them only as symbols (Shido and Al-Qash’amiyi 2001: 189). According to this notion, women exist as symbols at various levels: they exist for individual men in private relationships, and as symbols of honor or shame in public relations; they serve the family’s domestic purposes in its attempt to achieve a good home; and they observe the religious duties in their response to the God’s dictates. Najāt Khayyat, in writing about her heroine’s experience, not only writing on women’s lives but redefine women and transform their status from that of a symbol to that of a real human being. The idea is not only a revelation but also revolutionary.

Writing on women issues means violating privacy, and in Saudi precisely where private life, family life, inner feelings and thoughts are sacrosanct, particularly for women writers. In Saudi Arabia, the public space is man’s domain, i.e. male, whereas the inner, private space is assigned to women and therefore defined as female. (Fatima, Mernissi 1987: 154) Ideally men’s and women’s worlds are totally separated, but nevertheless constitute a unit, as a man’s honour depends on the absolute non-existence of his female relations in public. A woman’s face must neither be visible, nor is her voice audible in public. Her name must not even be mentioned outside the house. Nowadays, in literary writing many Arab countries the most significant expressions of this spatial gender division, harem and veil, have been abolished but in others they are emerging again. However, in Islamic societies one can still find invisible harem walls and sensitivity to the borders of privacy, which, if transgressed, will be avenged immediately. In the literary world, social control and pressure upon an author through society is often much more effective than the censorship of some of the regimes of the region.

Women's mobility outside the house is traditionally regulated by rituals which clearly define how and to what degree she is permitted to enter the street, the market or the mosque. One of these rituals, for example, is to lower her veil as soon as she crosses the borders of the inner, female space. (Fatima, Mernissi 1987: 154)

The appearance of a woman's text in the literary world, which is part of the public sphere and therefore defined as male, is ritualised as well. The classical Arabic literary tradition allowed women only to exist under very carefully circumscribed conditions. Women are only allowed to move within one genre, the genre of *rithā* poetry (elegy). They are allowed to mourn in public the death of a male tribal relative, their father, brother or son. In contrast to prose, such a highly conventionalised form of traditional Arabic poetry provides women only with very limited possibilities for self-representation:

Prose by its nature permits a clearer representation, a more elaborate reformulation and restructuring of the world. Mimesis is tied to its essence. This is especially clear when prose is compared to traditional Arabic poetry, a highly conventionalised form. While certain defined sub-genres were assigned to women, the world of prose was effectively closed to them (Malti-Douglas. 1992: 4)

### **Between Private and Public: Self Representation**

Clear self-representation of women in public was not desired. Therefore the genre of fiction, the most extreme form of literary self-representation, was not acknowledged at all for women, and a woman who took pride in her inaccessibility, whose ideal state was being cloistered, would hardly have been interested in an undertaking such as revealing a private life in her society (Farzaneh, Milan. 1990: 5). So it is not surprising that no fiction written by women exist in Classical Arabic literature (Leila, Ahmed.1988: 155). The self-representation of a veiled woman

would be a contradiction (Simone de Beauvoir, 1988: 719). In the last two decades, however, many Saudi women's fictions have been published. This, of course, is related to gender imbalance and cultural changes in Saudi Arabia and to the development of women's status and self-consciousness in the society. The traditional system, especially the men's world, is always challenged by these women writers and the literary sphere became highly engendered, thus also enabling women to become active.

Characteristic of the first of those women who decided to write down the story of their heroines is that they all were somehow already victim whether as wives, daughters or mothers, their lives had already been exposed and talked about women (Farzaneh, Milan, 1990: 12). But even this does not make it easier to write fiction, which remains a balancing act between the private and the public, where every single life event that is related has to be weighed carefully as to whether it may touch another taboo of the inner world. Some of the women's fictions in Saudi Arabia are considered not proper or seemly by some members of their societies. Fiction writing is a social construct, and a woman who writes one has internalised gender norms. Such a woman is a most unconventional pioneer, who in that very act of writing her story transgressing a fundamental taboo, but it seems that the authorial superego, preoccupied with proper conduct for women, constantly represses subversive desires for self-expression (Annis Pratt, 1981:11) Considering this, it is fascinating how even those somehow very conformist women writers in Saudi Arabia incorporate elements of erotic and spiritual rebellion into their narrative with the help of a code: the description of nature.

Male authorship in short story writing is not sufficient evidence for the general function of the description of nature as a coding of emotions in modern Arabic literature. It would be interesting, however, to analyse the women's texts with more recent of Arab

women of a younger generation. Society may have changed its concept of privacy, so that women are allowed to express their feelings in more direct, less allusive ways.

### Self-definition and Female Identity

Najāt Khayyat, in this story, *Satashriqu al-shamsu yawma* (One day the sun will rise) narrates the odyssey of a woman who questions the status of women within her society. The heroine of the story is a subject who questions the rationale behind the stereotypes attached to women. The story is rendered the first person narrative point of view giving the impression that the story is a direct account of the heroine's life. The heroine is unidentified, that is, she is not given a name in the story. Like other heroines, she simply exists in the shadow of her husband's personality. In her situation, however, is not her ability to question her situation but also to seek redress. From the story, it can be deduced that the heroine is one given to deep thinking and contemplation. She is not ready to just sit and watch her. The heroine ponders:

الناس تتناقص أعمارهم يوماً فيوماً وساعة فساعة.. أما  
عمرى فكأوراق الخريف اليابسة في أي لحظة تهب  
عاصفة. تأخذ الكثير من هذا العمر في دوامتها الوهية.  
وتمر الأيام طوالاً، وأنا أردد في استسلام أبله. ستشرق  
الشمس يوماً. لكنى لم أتساءل قط أو أحدث نفسي كيف  
ستشرق، ومن أين يبدأ فجر الإشراق، وهل في ظمتي  
كوة يستطيع النور أن يتسلل إلى؟.. وهل ليدي إذا ما  
حفرت فعاليتها في تسلل النور إلي.

Al-Zahrani, M.S. 2001:333.

People's life continued to be reduced day by day, hour by hour, but my life is like dry autumn leaves. At any instant the wind might gust, carry off a whole part of my life in its fearful swirl. The long days pass, and still I remain in absurd and abject poverty: this "One day the sun will rise". Yet I have never asked myself, never wondered, how the sun will rise, where the dawn will spring from. Was there, somewhere, a

rift in my darkness, through which the light might creep in and find me? Would my hand find some way to dig and let the light creep in? (Akewula. A.O 2014: 146)

At this point in her life, the heroine is experiencing a psychological retrieval. That is, the ability to reflect, recognise the fact that there is a problem and seek ways of solving it. She no longer feels comfortable with the role of a passive unidentified personality who is ridden with poverty. Moving further in her contemplation, the heroine ponders:

تركت سؤالي نائما في طوايا نفسي فالإنسان عندما  
يصدمه شئ يهز أعماقه يسد منابع حياته لا  
يتساءل إنما يتقبل الشئ ويغرق في ذهول وعندما  
يفيق من ذهوله يبدأ في التساؤل وكنت لا أزال في  
الذهول لا أتساءل إنما أنتظر الإنعتاق من هذا  
الظلام. وإذا قلت الظلام أعنى أشياء كثيرة تقيدني  
ونظاما واحدا أعيش عليه. منذ أن جنت إلى هذا  
العالم وتقاليد نتوارثها ألف عام نجرها خلفنا رغم  
أنها تعوقنا عن الإنطلاق. Al-Zahrani, M.S. 2001:333.

This question I left within myself, unanswered. When the shock comes, everything is paralysed, the springs of life are dogged. You don't ask what has happened. You just plunge into distress, then, once the numbness is past, you start to question yourself. But the numbness was still with me. I wasn't asking questions, just waiting to be free of the darkness of so many things dragging me down: a way of life I had followed from the moment I came into this world, outdated traditions we had inherited from thousands of years, which we dragged behind us for all their cruel weight. (Akewula. A.O 2014: 146)

The author depicts the way women are being silenced in the society throughout history, especially the Arab representation of women. Najat challenges the social tradition of the Arab in general and Saudi in particular, the ideals of freedom and equal opportunity preached by Islamic tenets but not found in the custom of the society.

### Revolts and Rebellion

In an attempt to resist men's excessive authority on women's, the writer demonstrates a special sensitivity to what the real experience is all about. Stories are main sources of inspiration in writing about the real lives of women with whom they are together in the same environment. Thus, in her story, one may assume that Najāt tends to select specific personal experience and particular events in women's lives rather than those events that are merely representatives of women's problems. The account of her heroine has resulted in generating a sense of sharing among women. This account is also an important source for illuminating the current situation of Saudi women whose lives have long been concealed. In writing about her story, she emphasises and even celebrates the qualities of self-assertion, self-worth, mental strength, and resistance against injustice as part of being a woman. She emphasises that the heroine possess necessary and indispensable qualities.

The following excerpts portray her as a woman who is dissatisfied with her husband and women poor circumstances. It is quite obvious that some women are maltreated by their husbands. The narrator depicts the rebellious action of the heroine thus:

وزوج لا أدري أسميه زوجا، أم أسميه دودا يزحف  
 في ظلام قبرى ليأكل من جسدى في نهم. وبيت  
 باهت مترب الجوانب كل ما فيه يوحى بحياة القرون  
 السابقة التى كان طابعها البؤس والتأخر والشقاء

Al-Zahrani, M.S. 2001:334.



A husband above all-or should I rather speak of him as worms crawling into the darkness of my grave, to eat from my body. And a dusty, run-down home where everything reminiscence the life of centuries past, filled with misery, backwardness and hardship. (Akwula. A.O 2014: 147)

Through the use of vivid imagery, the narrator portrays a woman who regards her husband as a predator or parasite. Coupled with this is the fact that she believes that the age-old tradition guiding the status of women within her society is one which should be discarded. There is a pervading sense of disillusionment, anger and frustration.

### **Motherhood and Optimism in *safashriqu al-shamsu yawma* (One day the Sun will rise)**

Motherhood is centrally important in Najāt's story. Motherhood brings social status of different kinds. The physical link of mother to a child is heavily stressed in her text. Not surprisingly, perhaps, feminist thinkers have produced most of the influential contemporary work on motherhood and especially on mother-daughter relationships. Indeed, motherhood has been a complex issue for feminism, and feminist debates throughout the twentieth century grappled with its contradictions, from women's relations with their mothers through to women's experiences as mothers. Motherhood is such a topic because, as Latīfat Al-Zayyat argues in her literary work on the issue of *al-umawiyah* (motherhood), it is so deeply embedded in our concepts of identity, in the construction of individual subjectivities and in the social organisation of gender<sup>15</sup>. An attempt by Najāt's heroine to make sense out of her existence, the heroine reveals:

وفي يوم ما جاءت أمي إلى بوجه صبح ر غم كآبة  
عيشها ورغم شرور عالمها. فسألتها بلهفة أماه:

متى تشرق الشمس التي وعدتني بها. فتطلعت إلى  
 بحنان الأمومة الخافق بين جنبيها قائلة: فديتك  
 عمرى يا حبيبة، لو كان كيانى يحرق وتبزغ منه  
 شمس لأحرقته لك لا تتشاءمى يا بنيتى ان الشمس  
 لا تظهر للمتسائمين واصبرى فإن للصبر نهاية  
 طيبة.. Al-Zahrani, M.S. 2001:334.

One day, my mother came to me smiling despite her wretched life. I asked her anxiously: "When will it rise. That sun you promised me?" She gazed at me with a mother's affection and then said: "If I could, my darling, I'll redeem you with my soul. If my whole being could burn, so that the sun rose from it, I'd burn myself for you. Don't lose hope daughter. The sun doesn't shine on those who lose hope. Be patient: patience always brings its rewards. (Akwula. A.O 2014: 147)

The heroine's mother urges her to be patient, to wait for the day the sun will rise. The rising of the sun in this story symbolizes freedom, the arrival of a day or an era when women will be able to hold their own with men; a time when they will not have to be tied to apron strings of their husbands and male relatives, a time when they will be able to be identified as an entity on their own and also an important element in the growth and development of their families and the society at large.

### **Freedom and Female Revolts in *satashriqu al-shamsu yawma* (One day the Sun will rise)**

Here again, I will examine how Najāt as a female writer perceives women's freedom. Freedom is very important in human's life. It is through it that one can identify himself or herself. Any environment that will develop and progress will allow her people to have freedom of speech and thought. The heroine in Najāt's story, despite her mother's advice, has her own reservations. She ponders:

ودمدت في ثورة مكبوتة تزلزل أضلعي. وهل يكفي  
 العمر حتى نهاية الصبر، أم أرى نهايته الطيبة، عندما

تَغِينِي الأَرْض فِي صَدْرهَا وَتَسْحَق كِيَانِي فِيغْدُوا  
 عظاما نخرة قد أكلها الدود. Al-Zahrani, M.S. 2001:334.

I murmured something, and I feel inside me a suppressed revolt that shook my bones. Did I have enough years for patience? Or would the happy ending come when I am buried and my bones become feast for termites. (Akwula, A.O 2014: 148)

The heroine's social condition featuring poverty and subjugation makes her to revolt. This social condition, coupled with her natural indignation for freedom inspires her action and reactions. She constantly dialogues with the sun, which symbolises her freedom, calling on it to bring with it the dawn of a new day which will ensure her freedom and the opportunity to exist if only for a day as a separate human being and not an extension of a husband she despises. In putting forth her inner agony, the narrator says:

ويصرخ ضميري ملتاعا: وهل أنت اليوم أحسن منك  
 جسدا ميتا يضمه القبر المظلم. إن الموت يسلبك  
 الإحساس الذي يؤلمك ولعله يكون أرحم. إن الدود  
 الذي يعيش الآن معك ويملاً بحيرتك بالأقذار ويمنحك  
 اللقمة ليأتي ويأخذها أضعافا من ضميرك من أيام  
 عمرك. أيها الصبر أعني. ويا أيها الشمس أما إن  
 وقت شروقك علي أفقي المظلم. رفقاً بي ورحمة  
 بالأمي أن رائحة الأقذار في بحيرتي تكاد تختقني. ألا  
 اغسلي أكداري وطهرها.. اشرفي يا شمس وذوبي  
 قيدي. لأشعر ولو لحظة بأنى إنسانة تحيا حياة كريمة  
 لها مطلق الحرية التي وهبها الخالق لولد آدم. Al-  
 Zahrani, M.S. 2001:335.

A voice screamed out inside me: "Are you any better now than you will be then, a body in a dark grave? Death would rid you of the pain, be more merciful

perhaps. The husband, the worms living with you now, silting up your lake-this husband provides your bread and butter, but he takes a double price in return, from your mind and your life." Oh patience, help me. The stench of my stilled lake repels me. Why, sun, won't you wash away my anger and make my waters clean? Rise, sun, and melt my chains, let me feel, for just one moment, that I am a human being, living a worthwhile life in all the freedom God granted to Adam's children (Akewula. A.O 2014: 148)

Through the use of internal monologue, the narrator makes the reader privy to the thought going on within the heroine. Indeed, the story is mostly rendered through the use of this narrative technique. The language of the story is highly tensed, simply showing the agitated state of mind of the heroine. There is also a high tendency of using imageries. For instance, the sun symbolizes freedom while her husband is depicted as a worm and slave master. She views her life as a dry lake devoid of any growth or development. The narrator employs vast use of imageries.

### **Female Rebellion in *satashriqu al-shamsu yawma* (One day the Sun will rise)**

Najāt Khayyāt takes huge risks that may put a woman writer in patriarchal society in a great challenge. With the understanding of the power of literary work, Khayyāt is able to share her own literary and feminist view of a society controlled by men. Her story became exemplary that other brave women writers could follow as they strive to walk in her redeeming way of life. Khayyāt, then served as a typical example that will encourage other women writers and readers within the society and beyond to take up the pen and begin to find ways to resist the patriarchal structure and male dominance.

Through her story, the author begins to resist the status quo and embark on creating a new way of writing in opposition to societal

demands and expectations. In her story, the resistance of the heroine to male oppression is depicted. However, Al-Zayyat articulates that women's resistance could not start until women realised that a conscious reassessment of roles is taken into consideration. If women are to resist the system of patriarchy, then they had to step out of the socially acceptable places, refuse to follow the norms that society had given them and change the way they view themselves (Latifat, Al-Zayyat. 2001: 45)

When the heroine of the story fights back her tyrannical and despicable husband and everything he signifies. Simply put her husband signifies everything that the heroine finds suffocating. He is the authority, the slave master and he inadvertently represents generations of male dominance and oppression. Unable to bear her tormenting state, the heroine sub-conscious invariably takes over. She decides once and for all to resist him and fight for her freedom. In recounting this incidence, the narrator says:

ها هو الزوج. أو الدود القذر يدور رأسه محوما يبحث  
عبر المائدة الشهية. ليترك أقداره عليها. كابوس أسود  
يجثم فوق صدري يشل عروقي يكتم أنفاسي. أصرخ  
وتضيق الصرحة. يتمرد جسدي فيكته بكف أثيمة  
تنهال على وجهي ويسيل شئ لزج حار على شفتي  
جرح يتفتق لونه الأحمر. يلهب حسي ويحرق  
أعصابي فأثور أنبش في لحمه ألف جرح أحمر  
كجرحي .. ويتراجع الدود عن أكل لحمي. ودار في  
ذهني بريق مشع .. إنه أول خيوط الشمس .. وانقشعت  
غيوم الذهول الأخرس عن فكري .. وبدأت أتساءل  
لماذا؟ لماذا عشت هذا الزمن الطويل أرزح تحت نير  
عبودية ظالمة. تمتلك كل شئ مني ولا أملك من نفسي  
شيئا؟ لماذا رمى بي القدر في أحضان هذا الدود  
الأسود الحقود؟ لماذا كنت أملك القدرة على العيش في  
هذا القبر المظلم؟ لماذا ظلت عيناى معدومتى  
الضياء؟ ولماذا لم أثر؟ وجاءنى الجواب: كلنا لا  
نملك المسير في طريق الحياة على ما نحب ونهوى

ما دام هناك إرادة عليا تسيرنا كيفما تشاء.-A|  
Zahrani, M.S. 2001:335.

Here is the husband; the grimy worm moving its head this way and that in search of a tasty meal to defile with its trace. He crawls on my breast like a dark nightmare. My blood goes cold, my breath's cut off. I scream but no one hears. My body rebels, but the nightmare comes down on my face like a fist, a warm liquid flows over my lips, to stir up my feelings and set my nerves on fire. I rebel, and gouge countless wounds into his flesh.

The worm stopped eating my flesh. A shining thought passed through my mind. The first thread of the sun, the numbing clouds vanished from my thoughts, and I started asking myself, why? Why have I lived so long under the tyrant slave master who owned every part of me, while I owned nothing of myself? Why has destiny flung me into the arms of this black, malicious worm? How could I have endured it, to live in this dark grave? Why have my eyes remained there in the darkness?

Why haven't I rebelled? And the answer came to me. Not all of us can travel life's path as we wish, so long as a higher will dictates our steps. (Akewula. A.O 2014: 149)

### Female Psyche Retrieval

The heroine has a sort of psychic retrieval at a point. Here, the realization that life cannot be lived in isolation sets in. Although it is true that life has to be lived based on a set of principles, it is also right that such principles should see to the welfare of the generality of the members of the society or humanity at large. This realisation gives the heroine the strength and courage to stand firm and confront the raging storm as epitomised by the husband. Attesting to this, Najāt al-Khayyāt says in her story:

وكان فكري ارتاح لهذا التفسير المطلق ولكن .. أرى ماردا  
 جبّارا كالعاصفة العاتية.. يتمطى ويتأهب ثم ينهض  
 ويلزل أعماق بحيرتي الراكدة، وتصخب أمواجها وتفور  
 كأن نبعاً صافياً تدفق في قرارها وطرد تلك المياه الضحلة  
 الأسنة ويتسلل الضياء إلى عيوني الجافة فأبخلق في الدور  
 باشمنزاز وقرف يكاد يفرغ ما في أحشائي من خبز مر. كل  
 هذه الأسئلة انهمرت في لحظات خاطفة في رأسي وحينما  
 ظهر الضياء في عيوني تطلع إلى بعنيت أشعلهما الغضب  
 المجنون وتقدم مني. يحاول القضاء علي يريد إطفاء شعل  
 النور المشتعلة في عيوني يريد هدم إنشاء نبتي تحت قدميه  
 .. وتوالدت في دمي غريزة ماتت منذ امتلكني توالدت  
 وبعنف غريزة حب البقاء . كنت أقف ووراء الشيش  
 الخشبي المهترئ، وبحركة سريعة مني انزلت من بين يديه  
 فجاء ثقله على الشيش فانهار الإثنان. Al-Zahrani.  
 M.S. 2001:336

I felt at rest, as this truth dawned on me. But I saw a great, vast and looming like a raging storm. Stretching, yawning, and then rising to stir the depths of my stagnant lake. The waves raged, as if some spring had uncoiled far below, sending the murky water racing off. Light came to my dry eyes. I stared at the worm with disgust, felt like the throwing up all the bitter bread inside me.

In a single moment all those questions rang in my head. As the light shone in my eyes at last, the grant scowled at me, moved towards me to make and end of me, put out the light in my eyes, crush my humanity under his feet. An instinct, long dead since my husband took possession of me, was reborn in my blood: the instinct to live. I stood there in front of the decrepit wooden shitters. Then, with a swift movement I slipped from his hands. His weight struck

the shutters and they felt together. (Akewula. A.O 2014: 150)

### Female victory

The fall of the protagonist is symbolic. It represents the fall of years of patriarchy. It signifies the almost endless years of tyranny, abuse, oppression and subjugation. Although, the heroine also suffers physical injury, it does little to dampen her exhilarated emotions. Free at last, she realises that the long awaited sun has indeed risen. When her mother pays her a visit in the hospital, she says.

أما إنه يوم الشمس .. لقد أشرقت الشمس التي  
وعدتني بها، إن فجرها رائع اللون، عطري  
الأنفاس .. أشرقت الشمس يا أمي، وأسندت  
رأسي إلى صدرها فضمته بيد غزلت إلى الحياة  
وكل من سألتني بعد ذلك اليوم متى كان يوم  
ميلادك؟ أجبت بإقتناع عميق: يوم أشرقت  
الشمس.. Al-Zahrani, M.S. 2001:336.

“Mother” I said softly, “It’s the day of the sun. The sun’s risen, just as you promised me it would. The dawn’s so splendid, it smells so wonderful. Mother, sun’s risen”.

I leaned my head on my mother’s breast, and she embraced me with her hand that had tailored a whole life for me. Always after that, whenever I was asked about my date of birth, I would give my answer without the smallest hesitation. I was born, I would say, the day the sun rose. (Akewula. A.O 2014: 150)

To the heroine of the story, her freedom from her otherwise restricted existence is synonymous with rebirth. There is the belief that her escape from matrimony and poverty is an opportunity for her to change her existence and redefine herself



and her essence. This, most poignantly reflects the rebirth and her utmost belief that she was born the day the sun rose.

## Conclusion

Najāt khayyat's *satashriqu al-shamsu yawma* represent women's revolt and psyche retrieval in a society highly dominated by patriarchal order. The family is portrayed as the institution within which women's oppression takes place. Women in the story is symbolised as victorious and have realised that they have their own identities which must be respected by their male counterparts. The story is centred on different themes concerning women as the heroine rebels against the existing order of the established institution and became victorious. The author has achieved what every writer aspires to achieve: honesty and courage in facing the society.

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