

# **BORDERS, REGIMES, DISPOSABILITY**

**A SYMPOSIUM  
ON MIGRATION  
AND STATE VIOLENCE**

**25-26  
JUNE  
2018**

**FACULTY OF ECONOMICS AND  
CENTRE FOR SOCIAL STUDIES,  
UNIVERSITY OF COIMBRA**

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**“Borders, Regimes, Disposability” is an international symposium that brings together several scholars from across disciplinary affiliations and different parts of the world. Our one and half-day academic journey will provocatively engage in, inquire, and rethink the migration challenge and the idea of a borderless world. In a world of reviving nationalisms how can we bring the idea of global free movement into the political mainstream. The second of a series of symposium will take place in Coimbra, after last years’ Durham Symposium on migration and state violence. The intellectual exchange—deliberative, complementary, and perhaps even conflicting—is intended as a means for contributors to work through and build on their scholarly questions, commitments, and contributions. Challenging the idea of the securitization of the border and the sense of migrant as an intruder the goal is to understand why migration governance is dehumanizing the migrant.**

# Day 1

**25.06.2018**

**14:00pm Keynes Room – Faculty of Economics**

**Av. Dias da Silva, 165**

## Opening Address:

Claudino Ferreira, Vice-Dean, FE-UC, PT

Miguel Cardina, Head of the Scientific Board, CES-UC, PT (to be confirmed)

John Morán González, The University of Texas at Austin, USA

Claudia Milian, Duke University, USA

Carlos Fortuna, U. Coimbra, PT

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## **Session 1 (15:00 pm )**

**Moderator:**

**Claudino Ferreira** - Center for Social Studies and Faculty of Economics – University of Coimbra, PT

### **An Environmental History of the Desert Section of the Rio Grande/Río Bravo**

C. J. Alvarez - The University of Texas at Austin

The Rio Grande (called the Río Bravo in Mexico) is a relatively small waterway in terms of its discharge. It is not navigable for long distance travel, nor does it supply significant irrigation waters for agriculture compared to rivers like the Colorado River in the United States and the Río Nazas in Mexico. What sets it apart is that it is an arcifinious frontier—it forms part of the international border between the United States and Mexico. For over 1,200 miles (19,000 kilometers), the river acts as the border between the two countries, despite the fact that in some places it contains no water at all. In this paper, Alvarez examines the section of the river that divides the two bordertowns of El Paso, Texas and Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, coincidentally the part of the river that passes through the Chihuahuan Desert, the largest and least understood desert on the continent. Once a single settlement, these twin cities form the oldest non-indigenous urban zone in the border region, and they are situated at the exact point where the land border and the river border meet. Between 1933 and 1968, the U.S. and Mexican governments straightened, relocated, and canalized the river running between them, eventually fixing the waterway in a concrete lined channel. In the span of thirty-five years, these river modification projects transformed the waterway into a fundamentally different thing, manipulated in nearly every way beyond recognition from its former self. To fully comprehend the larger meaning of this radical transformation, Alvarez argues that it is crucial to understand this section of the Rio Grande not just as a river border, but also a desert river. The



massive state interventions in this area were more than just border delineation, they amounted to the conquest of a fragile and marginal ecosystem, made all the more extreme because of the international character of the river. From this point of view, Alvarez explains how the “vagrant,” “meandering,” and “unpredictable” qualities of a constantly shifting desert waterway prompted massive state interventions in the built environment, and how they ultimately achieved ecological domination of the desert section of the Rio Grande.

### **Disputed Emotional Spaces: Micro-territories and heritage sites**

Carlos Fortuna – Center for Social Studies and School of Economics –  
University of Coimbra, PT

The sensorial dimension of the current urban culture questions the social impact of the meanings of some particular places. Some of these are *emotional places* insofar as they condition the way individuals perceive and charge them with emotive significance derived from disastrous or even tragic events hold therein. The meanings of such places are very much subject to disputed political readings of past histories. Other places however (i.e. the street or the neighborhood we grew in) are *micro-territories* displaying apparent stable, undisputed and shared meanings. Whereas the former places tend to become tourist attractions, the latter are likely to be thought of as (local) *heritage sites*.

This paper seeks to discuss how tourism and heritage are taking place in an unusual mixture of meanings and social uses. This is due to a mercantile economy that absorbs and converts everything into a commodity form, including the events of the dramatic history of places or the suffering of communities. Such is the result of a post-emotional culture (a sort of “anything-goes-culture”) in which some places, from concentration camps to other *lieux de souffrance*, remain at the mercy of rampant global voyeurism.

Turning political nonsense into heritage of the collective future mobilizes the denunciation of the mercantile, consumerist and spectacularizing logic that trivializes and makes suffering worthless.

Only the cultural relativism of today allows us to admire the macabre, disguised as heritage, as patrimonial ingredient. This being so, who can assure us that we are not about to see the tourists descent down to the depths of 700 meters, in the very same rescue capsule, in which the 33 miners were rescued following the 69 days after the life documented Atacama disaster in 2010? Or who will come to ensure that due to the cultural cynicism of today, there will be no proposals for the “touristification” of the Mediterranean and the Aegean coastal areas where thousands in search of a decent life have lost it? Or is there any certainty that the horrible memory of the Parisian massacre of Bataclan will not be signaled by any glamor of bad taste?

Preserving heritage with a futuristic sense extends the manufacture of palimpsests that bring indelible marks of a shared presence with other groups and communities. The political landscape of the future becomes more complex as these palimpsests show the virtue of a sort of Benjaminian porosity. It teaches us how to appreciate otherness and live in the co-presence of different forms of sociability, interaction regimes, and artistic, religious, or political expressions. Otherness help understand how unreal was the long-constructed narrative of the stable and homogeneous socio-cultural meanings of the spaces we used to live in.

## **Opening Discussion**

### **16H00 – Coffee Break**

## Session 2 (16:15 pm)

### **Moderator:**

**Clara Keating** - Center for Social Studies and Faculty of Arts and Humanities – University of Coimbra, PT

### **“Adios to the Brushland”: Colonial Terraforming in South Texas, 1904–1930**

John Morán González - The University of Texas at Austin

As Trump’s racially-charged rhetoric around issues of border security lurches to fulfillment in the form of a border wall on the U.S.-Mexico border, discussions of how the wall will materially enact its purpose have concentrated on speculation about its effectiveness in curbing cross-border “criminality,” a catch-all category that problematically lumps together undocumented migration, terrorist infiltration, and drug interdiction. Less attention has been paid to the what the wall’s effects upon the border region’s habitat will be. In particular, the first section is being built in the Santa Ana Wildlife Refuge, a federal preserve right along the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo that is an important migratory path for many bird and animal species. The irony is that building the wall to stop people will destroy the very reason the Refuge exists. And while its impact upon human migration will be risibly minimal at gargantuan cost, the wall would devastate bird and other animal habitats that depend upon the free flow of individuals to maintain health populations.

Trump’s border wall is another in a long series of attempt to control the border, or rather the people of the border, migrants and longtime residents alike, for economic and geopolitical advantage. Morán González’s presentation focuses upon the ecological transformations wrought by Anglo newcomers to the lower Rio Grande Valley of south Texas between 1904 and 1930, a period in which wholesale state violence against the Texas Mexican population served as a catalyst for the implementation of a white

supremacist colonial order. Morán González's presentation at Durham University's 2017 Border, Regimes, Disposability symposium focused upon the deleterious social, political, and economic consequences of this dynamic for ethnic Mexicans of the area. While powerful analytic frameworks from which to launch historical counter-narratives that contest the racialized dominant ones, critical class and race methodologies tend to gloss over the material changes to the environment as an inevitable and foregone conclusion to political, economic, and social change. To conclude, Morán González will suggest how revisiting this narrative through an environmentalist framework enhances an understanding of these events not only as a world-changing disturbance for Texas Mexicans, but also as a wholesale ecological apocalypse that fundamentally changed the landscape and therefore the extant communal relationships to the environment necessary for the land's exploitation via corporate agribusiness. This included the necessity of changing not only the Mexican descent people's legal relationship to the land but also their ideological relationship, whether in the form of racialized wage labor or their role in performing the work of colonial terraforming.

## **Lampedusa: post-colonial reading of the border**

Gaia Giuliani - Center for Social Studies, University of Coimbra

A site of biometrics and (re)definition of the European 'imagined community' (Anderson), Lampedusa is the "proscenium" (Cuttitta 2014) where a number of colour lines/borders that have older and more recent origins are performed: the North/South fault (Continental Europe vs. Mediterranean Europe), the South-South one (Mediterranean Europe vs. Mediterranean Africa), the South-East one (Mediterranean Europe vs. the Middle East) – constructed within a set of discourses that are racialised, gendered, and sexualised. My paper wants to explore the overlapping of local, national, and international colour lines (Giuliani 2018) and European borders as well as their interaction in constructing a system of definitions –



fixing the meaning of 'life' (Butler 2009) – and distinctions – between 'monstrosity', 'expendability' and 'must-be-defended-ness' (Asad 2007 and Mbembe 2003) – within what Talal Asad has called the 'small colonial wars.' By local, national, and international colour lines, I mean the cultural, social, and geographical axes assigned of a specific colour (racialised identities) by European agencies involved in the control and management of transnational migration. By monstrification (that is, a process of animalisation/criminalisation/hypersexualisation), I referred to the moral panic that has been associated with the figures of race since colonial Modernity and links them to a sense of unmasterability and danger against which the colonial/metropolitan order is constantly (re)constituted (Giuliani 2016). By 'European borders,' I mean those 'instable fictional boundaries' established by European government(s) in order to contain Europe within an idea of itself that identifies the EU as the Northern outpost of civilisation, whiteness, and rightfulness (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013; Amoore and De Goede 2008; Bhabra 2016). My reflection connects 'texts' and 'contexts,' whether the texts are those upholding 'national security' discourses and 'risk management' measures, or the cultural materials forging the imaginary of the War on Terror.

## **Opening Discussion**

**19h45 – Dinner at Polo II University Restaurant**

## Day 2

**26.06.2018**

**Room 1 – Center for Social Studies**

**Colégio S. Jerónimo**

**Largo Dom Diniz**

## Session 3 (09:30 am )

**Moderator:**

**Paula Lopes** - Center for Social Studies and Faculty of Economics –  
University of Coimbra, PT

### **2050: LatinX Odysseys**

Claudia Milian - Duke University

“2050: LatinX Odysseys” focuses on a major concern of our time: the unthought-of scale and impact of environmental degradation, paired with new forms of LatinX displacements and transitions. This presentation’s

conceptual pathways are organized into four sections—access routes, if you will—that foreground climate change, Central America’s Dry Corridor, migrations, and LatinX human existence. The conceptual exploration begins with “Projections, Extremes, Transitions”—a section that considers scenarios for 2050, urgent circumstances for the now, and an unrecognizable LatinXness. The intensity and uncertainty of climate change are surveyed here to comprehend ecological crises through extreme LatinX currents including border fortification, rising sea levels, Central America’s drought, disintegrating bodies and landscapes, and Mesoamerican movements. The talk probes, from there, a “Transfixing X-ness”: how the topsy-turvies of the present are throwing us headlong into the ubiquitous and unfolding patterns of LatinX as well as the conceptual language trying to chronicle contemporary transitions and the new nature of things. The penultimate section—“The X Corridor”—evokes literary scholar Steve Mentz’s concept of climatologically “being in the brown,” an uncontrollable brownness signaling what LatinX is becoming. Concluding with a rumination on X as “The Time of Our Lives,” the undertaking advances a reflective understanding of LatinX life in the twenty-first century. This presentation attempts to put the world together through LatinX uncertainty—a speculative mode that is thinking with the day-to-day and Milian’s willingness to follow the flow of the “X” through the risky unknown. So doing, “2050: LatinX Odysseys” strives to make an opening for the fuller potential and ranges of LatinX, to be more than a just casual observer, and to construct systems of knowledge through what climate change and the X are doing.

## **Fake News, Real Blue: How Emerging Technologies Threaten the Narrative of Migrants and People of Color**

Russell Contreras - The Associated Press

U.S. media companies are experimenting with new storytelling tools such as augmented reality, virtual reality, and artificial intelligence amid declining revenues from traditional print products like newspapers and magazines. But these tools, created by human minds, are reflective of systemic racism and inequality and are vulnerable to reinforcing stereotypes. They also can be manipulated to create “fake news”—false stories and images—to foster prejudices and resistance to social change. As the alt-right in the United States continues to be influenced by far-right thinkers in places like France, immigrant advocates and civil rights activists in the United States are largely clueless of the struggles of people of color and migrants in Europe. This lack of media literacy makes it difficult to recognize the manipulation of emerging technologies and develop global strategies to reclaim the narrative about marginalized people in an age of concentrated media control and Russian social media troll farms.

## **Re-constructing the migration communication discourse. The call for scientific evidence in the de-construction of fear**

Maria Faraone - Oxford Brookes University, UK;

Pedro Góis - Center for Social Studies and Faculty of Economics –  
University of Coimbra, PT

The style of communication with the public about people and events related to migration is a key factor impacting on the possibilities for two-way social integration. Communication is a political tool in any subject area but now, during the largest migration movement in Europe of recent eras,

we see a direct correlation between mainstream media and the rise of far-right ideals, through the impact on public sentiment. There is often a lack of evidence available and even when it does exist and is well communicated, it may be ineffective because of cognitive dissonance. However, herein lies hope; scientists can improve their communication skills to make their analysis more accessible to the general public. The question is not why some forms of journalism approximate to, while others skew, the truth; they all emanate from facts filtered through self-interest and inherent bias. Rather, the question for society at large is how private newspapers and social media are losing the capacity to tell the truth in context; a protectionist stance for their own wealth and power is going unnoticed or unchallenged. We argue that more accessible “easy read” versions of academic reporting should be delivered in accessible language outside of subscription-based journals via contemporary platforms such as social media or printed news media.

This paper compares reporting across critical events in the migration movement from 2015 onwards to showcase differences between a first-hand account attached to a human face with reporting in a dehumanised way, which in turn facilitates an approach underpinned by fear of change. The refugee narrative voice and the use of evidence-based information provide examples of how the public could be informed through a shift from writing for fellow academics to public writing. This chapter is about encouraging academics to write for the public in order to balance access to information on critical issues where public sentiment has an important effect, such as in the refugee movement. Influencing public sentiment is about using academic research to inspire involvement in debates that seek to find reason and justice.

What we refer to here as scientific facts are really also social science. Being evidence-based is being committed not to developing a version of the ‘truth’ and doggedly sticking to it but rather to being committed to a process of what Karl Popper (2002) described as “conjectures and refutations” where there are no universal truths, only the application of

scientific measures in the pursuit of truth through dialogue, considering evidence and theories and perspectives of other academics in the field.

## **Opening Discussion**

**11H00 – Coffee Break**

## **Session 4 (11:30 am )**

### **Moderator:**

**José Manuel Mendes** - Center for Social Studies and School of Economics  
– University of Coimbra, PT

## **Take Two: Administering Latinx and the Synthesis of Objects**

R. Galvan – Artist

Taking medication, to receive into one's body a substance for treating disease, discomfort or disorder, for many people is routine. So common is the activity, that there's a joke with the punch line, "take two and call me in the morning." Reflecting both the ease of access to treatment and the disinterest for engaging with the particularities of a case, humor from the "take two" gag arises from the anticipated yet prosaic prescribing of pills, objects constructed to be a panacea for any given situation, as genuine care. For this body of work, which is an essay consisting of image documentation and artist statement, Galvan enmeshes the unimaginative meting of medical treatment with Latinx cultural expressions to generate new relations that visualize the body as clinical subject and correlatively as administered presence. Galvan is interested in the ways that geographic border crossings can be imagined as internalized migration, configuring the

passage of a synthetic pill as the ingestion of Latinx through the body. The risks of consuming this Latinx medicine are the chances that something unwanted or unexpected could happen to you when you use them. Side effects could be as fleeting as an upset stomach, or more deleterious as forced evacuation of one's contaminated bowels. If the projection of bounded space is imagined, then through this abstracted reality, an understanding of borders resides in contemplating the conditions and criteria that inform the synthesized object. What does the relational presence of Latinx medicine within the body tell one about the movement of Latinx subjectivity through governmental organizations and bordered spaces?

## **Alterity at work: narrative identities and dialogue in biographical workshops with migrants**

Elsa Leschner - Center For Social Studies, University of Coimbra, PT

From a qualitative critical inquiry (Denzin, 2018) standpoint, this presentation will focus on the question of alterity through the analysis of narrative identities at play in biographical workshops with migrants. Inspired by the hermeneutics of the self (Ricoeur, 1990), and the socialization of power in biographical research (Ferrarotti, 2014), the aim is to identify the effects of narrative production and dialogue on the relation to the Other, both understood as part of any identity and the different other.

This work is framed by the larger ethical challenge of hosting the stranger in the era of mass migrations, and the specific test that is implicit in the very exercise of biographical research with migrants and refugees. It analyses the specific tasks faced by this dialogical and narrative kind of research within the social sciences and the humanities in the sense of a civic epistemology that works from the inside alterity and identity in contexts of cultural diversity.



# **Migrants, Bare Lives, and the Practice of Sovereignty in Hispaniola**

Michaeline Crichlow - Duke University

Most reflections about modern twentieth-century plantation in the Dominican Republic disallow constellational thinking that is as Teju Cole avers in a different context, an inability to connect the dots or see the patterns of power so evident in the operations of state and capital at various moments in its career of violence and progress based on a politics of extraction. Analyses project bateyes as isolated from the social and political time-spaces of Hispaniola, and barely recognize them as underpinning the country's capital accumulation process. In contrast, this paper suggests that there is need to relink these lives and embed them within the practices of governmentality, sovereignty, and biopolitics that operate on the island of Hispaniola, and sustain the racial dis-ordering integral to the capitalist world economy. In short what the history of plantations not least those built by corporate America and later their nationalized iterations in the Dominican Republic reveal is more than a straightforward tale of the institutional and extractive logics of a "free labor regime of surplus accumulation" and liberal tactics of accommodation to cultural difference. Rather, what gets masked in this narrative is the way in which these practices composing a "free state" are fundamentally imbued with certain political imaginaries that are rehearsed, performed, and worked out through peculiar processes of primitive accumulation, nation-state identity formation, and the idea of modern power and sovereignty itself.

## **Opening Discussion**

**13h- Lunch at the Jesus College, UC**

## Session 5 (15:00 pm )

**Moderator: Claudia Carvalho** - Center For Social Studies, University of Coimbra, PT

### **Deathscapes of Land and Sea: Gianfranco Rosi's**

#### ***Fuocoammare* and Ai Weiwei's *Human Flow***

Francisco-J. Hernández Adrián - Durham University (UK)

The cosmos, in Alexander von Humboldt's visionary accounts, can be apprehended through an immoderate acceleration of the local perspective. This acceleration imagines an adequate and genteel insertion of technological timescales (the temporalities produced and aided by measuring and navigational instruments) that extend ideologies of exploration and mapping, conquest and extraction into manageable and prosperous futures. The acceleration of the local perspective expands visibility beyond its insular standpoint, making it panoramic and capacious, simultaneously mobile and potentially boundless in the name of universal knowledge and moral perfection, international harmony and global peace. As Kantian and Humboldtian models of cosmopolitan and global thinking give way to the "unthought" of "planetary cognitive systems" and "cognitive assemblages" (Katherine Hayles), there are new and urgent questions surrounding borders, regimes, disposability.

Hernández Adrián considers the current sensory and affective emphasis in migration visualities through discussions of two recent documentary films about immigrant and refugee crises. Gianfranco Rosi's celebrated *Fire at Sea* (*Fuocoammare*) (2016) is a staggering visual text that dwells uncomfortably on visual and aestheticopolitical boundaries. Filmed on the island of Lampedusa in 2015, it centres on Samuele, a schoolboy from a local fishing family, approaching the so-called European refugee crisis from a series of unexpected small island angles. Ai Weiwei's *Human Flow* (2017) expands the local perspective historically and territorially, deploying a dazzling panoramic projection that demonstrates the systemic and

unprecedented scale of forced displacement, migration and statelessness involving more than 65 million people across twenty-three countries. Weiwei's imaginary is expansive and continental, irreducibly global and multiply fragmented.

In both documentary films, longstanding concepts such as "the cosmos" and "international harmony," "asylum," and "refugee status" are rendered obsolete, while "human" and "landscape" can arguably be conceptualized accurately in terms of *deathscapes* of land and sea, given the sheer exorbitance of death rates across local contexts and global panoramas. Both films register these processes of conceptual erosion through contrasting perspectival manoeuvres: insular and amphibian, trans-continently panoramic. Hernández Adrián asks how these visual texts might speak to us about a cosmopolitics of the small island model of surveillance (Lampedusa and the Canary Islands), the detainment and detention centre (Guantánamo and Manus Island), and related *transitional* spaces (the now dismantled "Calais Jungle" and the emerging EU-Turkey Refugee Deal) in today's transnational contexts. What precisely do these documentary films demand of us imaginatively and conceptually, through their combined registers of insular and continental scales?

## **Border regimes, anxiety and discursive configurations: Europe being redefined through the "refugee crisis".**

Olga Sololova - Center For Social Studies, University of Coimbra, PT

Almost two decades on since the 2001 attacks, the diffused "anxiety about the presence of Muslim communities and Islamic traditions within the borders of Europe" (Asad 2000:11) has resurfaced in the social and mass-media. During the recent "refugee crisis", this anxiety took shape in the differential treatment and representations of refugees by the different European states. Discourses of fear and hate were activated to ensure the immobility of some (e.g. refugees and third country nationals) whereas

others (e.g. citizens of developed countries) were able to enjoy a borderless Europe (Urry 2007).

This paper examines the ways in which adult and child refugees were represented in the Russian and Portuguese Press as they moved towards and crossed the borders of the different European states. By looking closely at the particular visual-textual configurations in the Russian and Portuguese media (headlines, captions and photographs), the paper will point out the main discursive trends as well as the most evident absences in the constructed narratives. In our view, the media anxiety not only places symbolical barriers further away from the actual European borders – in the Mediterranean Sea, in the Sahara desert – but also triggers the tropes of control and security, whereby state representatives and even objects (documents, border poles, transportation means and tents) gain agency. Unable or unwilling to deal with the complexity of the social, historical, economic and political reasons behind the refugee crisis, the newspaper narratives continue to depict Europe as a symbolically homogeneous space inserted into the linear historic time (Asad 2000:16-17). As their authors reflect on the future of Europe, this paper draws a special attention to the differences between the Russian and Portuguese media representations of non-accompanied refugee minors. What is the role of the child refugees in redefining the Europe discursively? Which forces and actors are pictured as agents? Which alternative narratives and agents can be imagined?

## **German debates about the “refugee crisis”: making sexual violence (in)visible**

Julia Garraio - Center For Social Studies, University of Coimbra, PT

In early 2018, the German movement *Identitäten* aired the video “Frauen wehrt euch! 120 Dezibel” [Women defend yourselves! 120 decibels]. Well-established aesthetics and tropes of feminist anti-rape discourse are reproduced (or rather culturalized) in the video to construct a narrative of German victimhood that depicts sexual violence as a product of foreign patriarchal cultures which

supposedly are threatening German women through immigration. Relying on the much-entrenched phobia of the immigrant as a potential rapist, the video capitalizes the metoo moment to promote anti-immigration policies. “120 Dezibel” calls for an examination of German politics of representing rape and more broadly for a discussion of the functional character of rape discourses. Which rape stories are made visible and which are ignored by public debates? What is the agenda underlying the mediatization of certain rape stories?

In this presentation I examine the role of rape stories in the German debates about the “refugee crisis”, signaling processes by means of which sexual violence has been made (in)visible. Special attention will be paid to the public impact of the New Year’s Eve sexual assaults in Cologne and to voices who argued that these events resembled the sexual assaults in demonstrations in Cairo. I argue that the hypervisibility of certain rape stories and their instrumentalization by the far-right have been complicating discussions of sexual violence, both in the context of the “refugee cycle” and more broadly in German society. Furthermore, they have been interfering with efforts to develop transnational responses to rape.

## **Opening Discussion**

### **Session 6 (17:00 pm)**

#### **Closing Remarks**

Carlos Fortuna- Center for Social Studies and Faculty of Economics –  
University of Coimbra, PT  
John Morán González, The University of Texas at Austin, USA  
Claudia Milian, Duke University, USA

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**17:30pm – 18:30pm**

**Historical Buildings of University of Coimbra - Touristic tour**







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