

## The Other: Muslim Diaspora in Shamsie's *Home Fire*

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### ABSTRACT

*The postcolonial regime has abundantly uncovered the subtle dynamics of colonialism, which are still rooted in the apex. Postcolonialism entails the liberation and political emancipation of the ones who are declared as 'others'. The study examines the 'othering' of Muslim diaspora in polarized transnational space of the West with respect to Shamsie's Home Fire. The novel shows the emergence of colonial binaries in the contemporary world in which Muslims have been dragged to the periphery. This marginalization and discrimination deprive Muslim diaspora to live their life with liberation and equality. Moreover, the research employs postcolonial lens on Home Fire to highlight the Western ideologies which tend to play games in order to adjoin Islam with terrorism. However, by treating Muslims diaspora as 'other' whose foreign nationalities can be revoked at any time, the West proves itself to be a radical culture. The study is poignant as it proposes the issues of homelessness, identity crisis, racism and deprecation faced by Muslim Diasporas in Shamsie's anew work. The research accentuates that any form of othering, be it cultural or religious, should not be taken for granted. In addition, the recurrence of colonial binaries of Self and Other in various visages should be addressed and decimated.*

**Keywords:** Home Fire, Othering, Muslim Diaspora, Postcolonialism, Shamsie

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### Introduction

When the debate of post-colonial, post-racial and post-modern world occurs, many times a political misrepresentation of utopian worldview is propagated. More like a utopian space which is devoid of any kind of binaries and inequalities. A transcultural celestial space, as proposed by Gosh (2010) in *Shadow Lines*. However, Gosh like

Garcia employs magical realism to project this fanciful endeavor. But unfortunately, this specific impression does not always conform to reality because the power structures still dominate. As Lyotard in his *the Postmodern Condition*:

A Report on Knowledge argues that by abolishing the meta-narratives (political, social and ideological), a space

can be provided to the inhibited marginalized voices. Or in other words, it is important to consider the plurality of experiences in regard to a post-colonial world. Mishra and Hodge (1991) discuss the ambiguity of the notion of post-colonialism, which very much like its precursor "Common Wealth Literature has been jeopardized from the beginning by the ideological nuances of its name" (399). It must be noted that still the racial and religious biases persist, so it is too reductionist to consider that people have traversed or past the colonial mentality. In fact, this colonial mentality has reshaped itself. This paper is going to show the reappearance of colonial binaries in this postmodern world where Muslims are denounced as unwanted others, and their standings are dragged to periphery in a transcultural Western space. This new form of othering is definitely creating a kind of neo-radicalization, and this time the arrow of radicalization points to the white supremacist lobby. Nevertheless, the massacre of Christchurch mosque reinforces this anti-Muslim mentality.

Let's delve into some postulates of Post-colonialism first. It is undoubtedly an intellectual discourse which directly unleashes the cultural legacies of colonialism and the way it shapes into various cultural and religious binaries. The terminology of Postcolonialism foregrounds the liberation and political emancipation of the ones who are declared as 'others'. It

truly scrutinizes the manipulative cultural and social strategies employed by the imperial powers to wholly capture the body and mind of the colonized people. Foucault names essentialist approach as epistemic violence, and in *Power and Knowledge* he extensively shows how powerful faction deploys their ideologies in the visage of knowledge. And this disciplinary power not only controls the docile bodies but also label them as other. Similarly, Hall (2001) also seconds Foucault's stance by revealing how discursive practices have been used by powerful segment in order to legitimize themselves in wider terms. Hamid (2014) unravels the power hungry stance of colonial powers by describing Said's views:

Said argues that what has been written about the East is no more than false assumptions upon which the Western attitudes toward the East were built, justifying and encouraging the European and American colonial and imperial behavior towards the Arab-Islamic peoples and their cultures (p.40)

So, primarily colonial disposition has manipulatively othered the colonized natives by smothering their voice as second-rate over the years. The well noted scholars and critics like Spivak, Fanon, Ngugi, Bhabha, Said, Brathwaite and LaCapra have repeatedly resisted the wide range of colonial paradigms and its horrid offshoots. Ashrot (1989) in his *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice*

in *Postcolonial Literature* delineates how postcolonial challenges have diversified the trend of writing in English Literature. Especially the dialectics of Eurocentric notions and decentralization have definitely revolutionized writing and theory. Zadeh(2010) describes the essentialist approach of West as in “in oriental discourse the Europeans were portrayed as masculine, democrat, rational, moral, dynamic and progressive. Whereas, non-Europeans were described as voiceless, sensual, autocratic by them..” (1024). Nkrumah(116) explains the “Neo-colonialism, like colonialism, is an attempt to export the social conflicts of the capitalist countries...this policy can be seen in the ever widening gap between the richer and the poorer nations of the world” (123). To second this stance, Spiyak and Roy are also very apprehensive towards these neo-colonial threads in which “ Big bombs, big dams, big ideologies..big countries..big heroes ends up in big mistakes...perhaps right now century of small should start...”(Roy,1990,p.20).

Postcolonial premise has repeatedly denoted the perils and politics of ‘othering’ . And in the contemporary world, the victims of this exclusion are non-western countries especially the Muslim nations. According to Brons (2015) ‘Master-slave Dialect’ of Hegel captures the different ranges of self vs other notion (because it may depict reciprocity). However, postcolonial critics and novelist wholly resist the

hierarchal eurocentric ideologies and Western hegemony by negating the binaries of Self/other, centre/peripher, West/East, Us/them, Orient/Occident. Mambrol (2019) demystifies types of othering:

Othering involves two concepts — the “Exotic Other” and the “Demonic Other,” The Exotic Other represents a fascination with :the inherent dignity and beauty of the primitive/undeveloped other, as delineated in Yeats’ Byzantium poems; while the Demonic Other is represented as inferior, negative, savage and evil as is described in novels like Heart of Darkness and, A Passage to India (p.145)

In reference to above quote, Said (2001) in his “Reflections on Exile” draws ambiguous lines between exotic and demonic other. For instance, Said (1974) in his analysis of “Amy Foster”, he argues that the exiled is treated both ways in Conrad’s narrative. Yanko is taken as an exotic other but at the same time he is also disapproved as a demonic exotic other. Spencer (2009) believes that postcolonialism should not always define the differences because it sustains the space of alterity where the power-relation between subaltern and dominant groups persist to exist. For Spencer, the second condition of post-colonialism which is cosmopolitanism, is far more effective and subversive. However, Gikandi (2009) gives a more practical analysis of cosmopolitanism, where unlike the

privileged beneficiaries usually the migrants have to face “violence...statelessness...and cultural blockage”(p.28) when they try to fit in the orbit of cosmopolitanism.

With the dominant discourse of Islamic Radicalism the West and its allies have coldly turned their back towards Muslim immigrants. Now, in the current scenario the Western world is at open war with their proclaimed Muslim enemies. Etymologically, the word Diaspora is derived from the Greek term “diasperien” which refers literally to displaced communities of people who have been dislocated from their native homeland through the movements of migration, immigration, or exile. Moreover, this word has various epistemological connotations. Butler (2001) explicates that mostly scholars have marked immigrant, nomadic, exilic as diasporas. He quotes Gupta for whom Punjabis who migrated to Delhi after 1947 became a part of diaspora population. Oxford English Dictionary gives theological inception of this word back to Greek Old Testament, as it refers to God’s plans for the people of Israel to be “dispersed” across the world. Ironically, the so-called great Western nations like Britain and America are quite friendly towards Jew diasporas but they cannot bear the presence of Muslim expatriates. This shows their collective hostility towards Muslim faith. Hall (1990) describes diaspora as those identities which continuously

produce and reproduce themselves afresh, through a myriad of transformation, evolution and difference.

It’s unfortunate that in this ‘othering game’ Muslims have been targeted most vigorously. HM Naqvi (2010) in his *Home Boy* represents the ‘othering’ of Muslims after 9/11 in America. In the novel the three assimilated Muslims (who have been pro-Americans) characters realizes their worthless condition when the West heartlessly disowns them just because of their Muslim diasporic background. According to Karim and Nasir (2014) South Asian Diaspora novels many times project the issues faced by Muslim diaspora entities in a so-called multicultural west. These concerns include identity clash, assimilation troubles, social-stratification, cultural conflicts, double marginalization and societal oppression (p.126). They further elucidate Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane* and Nadeem Aslams *Maps of Lost lovers* as an embodiment of South Asian Diaspora issues.

Nayar (2010) in *Postcolonialism: A Guide for the Perplexed* perpetuates that with the eruption of “Transnational terrorism” of 9/11, a strife against terror has avidly probed the paradigms of ambivalence, diaspora, and hybridity . This is because the West has reclaimed the colonial binaries of us and them by insensitively “constructing itself in an antagonistic

relationship with the Islamic and Asian Other” (p.200). Shamsie (2017) in her *Home Fire*, entails the Greek myth of Sophocles’ Antigone. It shows an intersection of mythology and politics in Literature. It illuminates the predicament of a family which is charged with the legacy of terrorism in contemporary England. Shamsie’s most recent work uncovers the disarray and dismemberment of Muslim diaspora. It projects how home gets inflicted with terrorism (Shaheen, 2018 ). It also highlights the connection of an individual to the state and how an individual is marginalized by the unjust state laws.

### Discussion

This section discusses how Shamsie has portrayed the ‘othering’ of Muslim diaspora in the so-called multicultural and transnational space of Britain. The study also unravels how the colonial binaries have reappeared with the motive of demoralizing Islam and its allegiance in all possible ways. The analysis focuses on the incidents in which Shamsie has projected the continuous dejection and isolation of Muslim diaspora on the land of Britain. Moreover, it also shows the crisis which rise due to intimidating global force of anti-Muslim sentiment and Islamophobia and its negative effects on the lives of innocent Muslim migrants. The issues like displacement, identity and homelessness are also duly discussed. It uncovers the Western monopoly which

first materially allures third world migrants but afterwards it makes circumstances hostile for them. In addition, the study also shows the resistance on the part of young Muslim diaspora who resist and retaliate to the unjust othering in their own ways.

Without any doubt, Shamsie in *Homefire* explicates the othering of Pasha’s family due to their irrevocable relation with Islam in the Post 9/11 Britain. It is very unjust that Isma and her siblings are stigmatized due to the sins of their estranged father. Adil Pasha (their terrorist father) has never been a true father due to his unstable, indifferent and self-centered approach towards life. Pasha’s disdainful attitude turns worst when he joins the terrorist movement of ISIS and later on dies somewhere in Bagram. Isma explains the unproductive personality of her father by saying, “...i don’t know him. He tried his hand at many things in his life-guitarist, salesman, gambler...jihadi- But he was most consistent in the role of absentee father” (47). Ironically, this absent father becomes the long lasting stigmatizing tag for Isma and her siblings. Well, the western exploiters get a good chance to label this Muslim Diasporic family as radical terrorist scavengers. Shaheen and Islam (2018) laments on such seclusion by delineating:

Shamsie, by narrating the story of a family with the history of terrorist father and terrorist brother, intervenes in

time by asserting that such families deserve more attention, both socially and governmentally, to keep them in solidarity with the nation by being more warm and considering to them rather than putting them under constant surveillance and demonizing them as 'Others' for the misgivings of their family members 'lost' to fundamentalism and terrorism (p.154).

The interrogation scene of Isma at the airport proves that the brute othering of Muslim diaspora is a part of routine in current Western world. As a precaution she first tries to clear out all those items which would make her susceptible, like Quran, family photos, books etc. But being a Muslim is enough to face any form of interrogation. Western double standards are hard to understand, where a Christian would never be asked why he is wearing a cross but a Muslim would never be excused for wearing Islamic symbols. In fact the officer scans her body intensely through her hands like if some hidden pockets would be figured out. Bazian (2018) articulates that even in the absence of ban the department of the Custom and Boarder Control Agency is unable to undo the selfish American ideology. As they consciously and unconsciously scrutinize Muslims (coming and going) at the ports. In fact Muslims are repeatedly questioned about their religious background and are asked to give access to every accessory they carry. Isma undergoes through this heavy scrutiny only because she is othered as a Muslim

in the polarized world of West. This is a tormenting experience of Isma, "Heathrow interrogation still jangling her nerves, she had been able to think only of surveillance satellites wheeling through sky..." (p.9)

Shamsie portrays Isma as an accomplished student (despite all hardships). She gets a privilege to do PHD in America with scholarship. However, even her learned background does not change things for her because her religious and racial othering is unalterable. During a lecture, Isma raises her voice to advocate the binaries exercised by Britishers:

...if you look at the colonial laws you'll see plenty of precedent for depriving people...the only difference is this time it's applied to British citizens.....because they are rhetorically being made unBritish.....Even when the word "British" was used it was always "British of Pakistani descent" or "British Muslims".....always something interposed between their Britishness and terrorism (161).

Sahamsie's *Home Fire* uncovers how few black sheep are presented as epitome of Islam by Westerners. Without considering the fact that even Muslims are victims of such black sheep. *Home Fire* uncovers that the discourse of war on terror is primarily a war on Islam. Shamsie admonishes how all Muslim

diaspora are generalized as terrorists. Unfortunately, Islam as a whole is portrayed as radicalized religion by the Western lobby. To clarify her point, she juxtaposes the actions of innocent Muslim characters like Isma, Aneeka with the radical members of ISIS (like Farooq). Moreover, she also depicts the shrewdness with which the manipulative terrorist organization targets young Muslim diaspora. Such as Farooq (a recruiter of ISIS) very guilefully and slyly traps Parvaiz. In fact, Farooq very manipulatively exploits the injustices of Britain against Muslim Diaspora in order to incite a sense of hatred for Britain inside Parvaiz. Shamsie shows here that it is the othering and constant exclusion of Muslim diaspora by the foreign society which give an edge to such terrorist organizations to emotionally manipulate the youngsters (especially the disgruntled youth). Farooq persuades Parvaiz by putting forth the argument, "...it is understood that a welfare state was something you built up instead of tearing down, when it saw migrants as people to be welcomed, not turned away" (p.144). This is how Farooq plays upon the personal experiences of Parvaiz because Parvaiz has actually been deprived of freedom, material goods and a sense of belonging in London. Farooq recreates the image of Raqqa (Islamic State) as an idealistic cosmopolitan place on earth that embraces everyone, he exclaims, "...place where migrants coming into join are treated like kings, given more in benefits than the locals..." (p. 144). It

can be seen that Shamsie very subtly criticizes and blames Britain's constant push of Muslim diaspora towards periphery and its avid failure to provide homage to expatriate community. This particular failure gives a leverage to violent organization to hunt down weak spots. So, it is the disillusionment which drives young Muslim diasporas like Parvez to become target of extremist groups. Shamsie in her interview shares her own experience being a Muslim expatriate:

..... from the age of 18 what it feels like to move between a place where you're part of the majority to someplace where you aren't. .... But of course, given the context of the world we live in, the issue isn't just being a minority; it's specifically about being Muslim. Of course it can get exhausting or upsetting to be part of a minority that's so demonized in the country where you live -- but it does make you look quite closely at the society you're in, and how different groups interact. And if you're a novelist, you channel that into your writing in ways that feel rewarding.... When you ask if it's possible for a minority to be accepted without having to resort to jettisoning part of themselves, my response is to want to know who you think needs to do the accepting. I live in London; it's a very mixed, heterogeneous place. Some people here may not accept minorities.

Moreover, *Home Fire* gives a humane persona to Parvaiz which fully explicates his situation. Before joining ISIS he is a nineteen year old immature and emotional individual. Like any other teenager, he has passions for music, photography, travelling etc. Though he is a Muslim but religion does not play a vital role in his life. Being a part of a struggling Muslim diasporic family, he always feels Isma's pressure of forcing him to do some better job in order to pay all the household expenses. He has been trying hard to find some source of earning. Being a struggling youngster he is confounded between passion and profession as Shamsie writes, "...he'd start sending it out to both the big and little gaming outfits, and –please God!— work offers would come in" (122). None the less, he is like any other young, reckless and unstable boy who lives in a racist society. His innocent interest and curiosity in his father's life (the way any son would have) is brutally exploited by Farooq. For instance, Farooq creates a very heroic image of Adil Pasha, "The father everyone wishes for" (p. 128). This stance moves Parvaiz more close to Farooq's company. This happens partially because somewhere deep down the repressed emotions for his father start to uncover. The little direction towards his father's past gives him an uncanny experience and he gets motivated to explore his exotic father. The constant surveillance of M15 on the lives of Isma, Aneeka and Parvaiz not only outcasts them emotionally and socially. But it also

forcefully, tries to inhibit any kind of natural affiliation towards their father. But, Farooq's trigger outbursts those repressed emotions to the level that it completely takes hold of Parvaiz. And this anew fascination towards his deceased father convinces him to rediscover his father's heroic past by joining ISIS. Shamsie by showing this stance, proves the innocence and unawareness of a young son who gets manipulated by a knave person. Obaidallah delineates the barbarity of ISIS which is an organization against Islam and humanity:

The so-called Islamic State is the enemy of Islam. In fact, ISIS is the enemy of Judaism, Christianity, Yazidism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism, atheism and all others who oppose its evil and barbaric agenda. The difference, however, is that Muslims suffer by far the most from ISIS' horrific attacks.

The point of contention is why West doesn't realize that Islam has nothing to do with this bloodshed, in fact Islam like any other religion truly condemns any form of violence. Why do they simply scapegoat the lives of innocent? What form of peace they are trying to spread by inciting hatred for Muslims?

Furthermore, the realization of constant depravation and Islamophobia on the part of West spurs 'identity crisis' and negative thoughts of hatred against



London in Parvaiz . He starts to feel suffocated in the ambience of London. On contrary to Gosh's neutral, borderless and open cosmopolitan space in *Shadow lines*; the space in *Homefire* is highly polarized and divided into binaries. The Islamophobic attitude towards Muslim diaspora creates a void in Muslim identities. No matter how much they try to fit in but still some way or the other they get accountable for being fundamentalists. The characterization of Isma, Aneeka and Parvaiz do not concede that they hold radical views in fact they embody desires, aims and passions like any other Western youngster. Garner (2014) puts it like, "A Londoner of Pakistani descent, Isma, has a student visa and is flying to study sociology at Amherst College. Because she's Muslim and wears a hijab, she knows to expect delays and perhaps worse at security" (p.1).

Unfortunately, manipulative factions of West always mark the Pasha family with extremism by highlighting those markers only which corresponds to religion. For instance, a white boy spits on Aneeka's hijab. Isma and Aneeka always get mocked and condemned for wearing hijab in London. But no one praises the Western practices which they follow. Like Aneeka is very open towards relationships (boyfriends) and she is a girl who follows the Western notions of liberation. But ironically, only those aspects of these Muslim youngsters are highlighted by so-called cosmopolitan

liberalists which give slight indication of their association with Islam. The so-called claim of Britain of being a multi-cultural liberating space is not visible, because a multi-cultural cosmopolitanism does not disapprove someone on the basis of their cultural dress. Abraham (2011) in *Arab Detroit 9/11: Life in the Terror Decade* shows the similar hostile treatment against Arabs and Muslims in the United States. It highlights "the first decade after the attacks of 9/11 as post-9/11—a time/space in which they (American Arabs and Muslims) were linked to enemy Others and were expected to prove their loyalty to the nation-state in ways other Americans were not" ([23], p. 2). Haddad and Harab (2014) explain how anti-Muslim faction takes advantage of 9/11 to propagate anti-Islam premises .Like Sid Roth (the founder of a Jewish Messianic movement) openly advocates Islamophobic conceptions like "stealth Jihad". He further states that Muslims are eager to devastate America and Europe (p.480). Unfortunately, just months after 9/11, FBI officials "arrested, convicted, detained, and deported thousands of individuals due to their national origin or religion" (p.24).

*Home Fire* portrays a not so Islamic image of ISIS in fact a hilarious one. Parvez observes that ISIS members who are residing in Raqqa are idiosyncratic in their actions. For example, in Raqqa they have a tradition to give a wife to recruit after the tenure of

six months. And one of the member utters in front of Parvez, "try and find a European girl online. They know how to do more things than the Arabs, if you get my drift..." (p. 160). It seems that these members are more interested to quench their other desires instead of complying with some serious ideological mission. Likewise, Parvez also observes the counterfeit and sham of this organization in the name of religion, as he articulates, "impossible here to know who was a true believer and who was playing along for any of a host of reasons from terror to avarice. The price of letting your mask slip was far too high for anyone to risk it" (p. 169). After all this bitter experience, he never develops any form of allegiance towards this bizarre organization and he decides to go back to London (and atone for his mistakes). He realizes that all the way long he has been fooled by Farooq and he even imagines "running a sword through Farooq's throat" (p.178). After having some communication with Aneeka, he expresses, "I made a mistake. I'm prepared to face trial if I've broken laws. Just let me go to London" (p.171). And then solemnly he gets shot (by his so-called ISIS partner) in front of British Consulate. His last move towards his home ends with last breath and finally he shuts his eyes, the eyes which have craved to behold his sisters in London for so long.

The narrative shoes Karamat's selfish union with Western ideology. He plays a poignant role in the othering game

of Muslims. He is a man who has integrated in the Western Society to an extent that he is even more nationalist than the Britishers. *Home Fire* shows how the so-called liberal society embodies mimic men like Karamat who try to subdue the lives of Muslim diaspora. It is even more painful for Muslim diasporas to witness brute othering through the hands of a person of their own clan. But Western lobby has always been shrewd enough to misuse such traitors like Karamat who can do anything to maintain their position. Shamsie models Karamat Lone on Theresa May (the former British Home Secretary from 2010-2016). The violent anti-immigration and anti-terrorist laws employed by her are recreated through the character of Karamat who indiscriminately revokes the nationality of Muslim British immigrants (Shaheen, 2018, p. 162). However, the character of Karamat is even more hostile, as he himself belongs to Muslim clan. So, his denial towards his own Muslim identity and his disapproval for Muslim diaspora reaffirms the power of colonial binaries.

Karamat is Westoxified and an Islamophobic. "Mr striding away from Muslimness" (p.52) puts himself in the center of Western society and declares an open confrontation with Muslim Diasporas. Being a politician he completely closes his doors for Pasha's family and tries his level best to shun them even of basic rights. By doing politics over Parvaiz's dead body, he

exemplifies colonialist brute mentality. Islam (2018) discusses the toxic effects of this blind westoxification:

Shamsie problematizes such a 'Westoxification' because it will not only be Islamophobic but also attract a more fundamentalist response, lethal enough, to further tear apart the multicultural fabric of British society as shown through the fictive desertion of the Muslim British youth like Farooq and Parvaiz Pasha to join the fundamentalists and terrorists (162).

*Home Fire* displays Aneeka's epic resistance against British regime and a struggle for basic rights of Muslim Diaspora. She does not compromise with the constant othering of her family. First, she cannily plots to bring her twin brother back by developing a relationship with Karamat's son. Fearlessly and knowingly that Parvaiz is a member of ISIS, she still maintains contact with Parvaiz, trying her level best to make arrangements for him to come back. And then, when Parvaiz is killed, she boldly goes to Pakistan and protests for justice. She does not give up the idea that London is their home; they deserve to live and die on this land. Aneeka does not meekly embrace her marginalization in fact she retaliates in a vigorous manner to an extent that powerful Home Secretary becomes powerless in front of her final show.

## Conclusion

Shamsie through *Home Fire* has unfurled the continuous othering and discrimination of Muslim diaspora in polarized transnational space of West. The novel truly depicts the reappearance of colonial binaries in the contemporary Britain where Muslims have been indiscriminately labeled as 'other'. The global seclusion of Islam shows political condemnation which spurs anti-Islamic reaction and Islamophobic actions. The characters of *Home Fire* experience the same agony when their Islamic diasporic background delimits them and makes them vulnerable to social mockery. Moreover, *Home Fire* shows how terrorist legacy and its associations are often misrepresented. The way Pasha's estranged children face the consequences of a reckless terrorist father, similarly Muslim diasporas have to face the punishment because of a fraudulent terrorist organization of ISIS. Shamsie shows that the common denominator of Islam between ISIS and Muslim diaspora does not mean that Islam is the root cause of terrorism. Terrorism is in fact an intimidating violence which is not contingent on any religion. So, the question is that why West ignores its own terrorism which enacts in the form of 'othering' Muslims. The violence and negative aftermath of biased Western ideologies cannot be justified. The issues of homelessness, identity crisis, racism and deprivation faced by Muslim Diasporas should not be taken for

granted. This is because nature and humanity never desolate anyone, it is the flawed ideologies of colonial legacy which take advantage of various situations so that they can develop their hegemony worldwide.

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