



HYBRIDITY AND BELONGING IN MULTICULRAL WORLD IN MAROO'S *WESTERN LANE*

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Abstract

This study explores the complexities of hybridity and belonging among diasporic communities examining the intricate relationships between cultural heritage, adaptation and sense of belonging. Through a qualitative analysis of existing literature, this research reveals the struggles diasporic individuals face in reconciling their dual identities, navigating conflicting loyalties, and establishing a sense of belonging in their host countries. The findings highlight how shared experiences, and cultural identities shape their path through grief and connection. Furthermore this study underscores the importance of finding connection and identity within the multicultural fabric of modern life particularly through shared family experience and resilience. The research also explores the role of narrative, intersectionality and transnational perspective in shaping diasporic identities and experiences. By examining of intersection of identity and culture this study contributes to a deeper sense of hybridity and belonging in multicultural societies. Overall this study provides new insights into the complexities of diasporic experiences, highlighting the need for nuanced and contextualized approaches to understand and support diasporic communities.

Keywords: *Cultural Identity, Diaspora, Hybridity, Identity, Multiculturalism.*

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1. Introduction

In the age of cultural interchange and globalization, cultural hybridity has become a defining characteristic of heterogeneous societies. New cultural forms arise as a result of cultural blending and intersection, upending conventional ideas of identity, culture, and belonging. Conventional notions of cultural authenticity and purity are called into question by cultural hybridity, which emphasizes how dynamic and adaptive culture is. Comprehending this idea is essential for negotiating the intricate and constantly shifting cultural terrain. Examining cultural hybridity helps us better grasp the complex relationships between identities, culture, and belonging in heterogeneous cultures and provide insight into the cultural forces influencing our society. Interactions between indigenous, colonial, and diasporic cultures give rise to cultural hybridity in post-colonial settings. It upends essential zed identities, encourages cultural variety, and gives voice to those who are marginalized. In addition to redefining citizenship and belonging and promoting inclusivity, hybridity empowers post-colonial cultures to claim their distinct cultural identities.

By examining the mixed experiences of Indian immigrants in Chetna Maroo's *Western Lane* (2023), this study illuminates current issues. As diaspora people navigate numerous cultural identities and reconcile their history and present, the book emphasizes the cultural obstacles they face. By shedding light on the intricacies of cultural hybridity and the continuous search for self-definition among diaspora societies, Maroo's narrative provides a sophisticated examination of diaspora experiences. The work delves into themes of confusion, alienation, and self-fragmentation, all of which are made worse by nostalgia and yearning for the past. In the midst of social unrest, diaspora people must reconcile their past and present selves, which presents additional challenges. As a result, they are forced to reinterpret their cultural identities and establish new bonds in their new country. As people negotiate their heritage culture, host nation norms, prejudice, socioeconomic hardship, and psychological suffering, cultural hybridity and political unrest have a significant impact on how they view themselves and their place in the world.

Gopi's narrative exemplifies the complexities of cultural identity formation as she navigates the interaction of her mixed heritage, familial upbringing and Indian lifestyle. Her journey is a poignant reminder of challenges of reconciling multiple cultural identities and forging a sense of belonging. As a member of a minority culture living in the western world she faced the challenges of navigating the interactions of her heritage culture and the dominant culture. This study illustrates the complexities of "hybrid culture" and the ways in which individuals adapt and evolve over time.

Through Gopi's experiences navigating her Indian ancestry and the Western influences of London, cultural hybridity is clearly depicted. The merging of Gopi's two identities is symbolized by her friendship with a British boy named GED and her commitment to squash, a sport that is not often connected with her culture. The story highlights the difficulties of cultural adaptation and preservation while examining the generational disputes in her family. Through the journey of Gopi, Maroo provides a sophisticated examination of how identities are formed in a mixed society. The delicate balance between respecting one's heritage and embracing new cultural influences is ultimately highlighted by *Western Lane*.

As she juggles her Indian ancestry with her life in London, Gopi negotiates the challenges of cultural hybridity. Gopi considers her experiences as the narrator, emphasizing the contradiction in her identity. As a metaphor for her attempts to reconcile her Indian heritage with Western influences, she talks about her commitment to squash, a sport that is not typically connected to her culture. Gopi offers perspectives on cultural blending through her encounters with British boy GED, highlighting the difficulties and benefits of building cross-cultural partnerships. Readers can gain a sophisticated grasp of how cultural hybridity influences Gopi's identity and personal development from this narrative viewpoint.

Throughout her narration, Gopi explores the generational disputes in her family, highlighting the dichotomy between cultural adaptation and preservation. She emphasizes how her parents and she have different perspectives on cultural integration, illustrating the difficulties of preserving cultural identity while accepting outside influences (Maroo, 2023). The issue of cultural hybridity is made real and poignant by her first-person narrative, which offers a very personal account of her challenges and victories. Maroo's depiction of Gopi's journey highlights the fine line between respecting one's ancestry and adjusting to new cultural environments, compellingly examining identity creation in a multicultural world.

British Indian novelist Chetna Maroo, who was born in Kenya, has achieved great success in the literary world because to her vivid narratives. After receiving training as an accountant, Maroo switched to writing and discovered her true calling. Her 2023 debut book, *Western Lane*, received praise from critics and was even included on the Booker Prize shortlist. Maroo's writing talents are not limited to books; her short tales have been published in prestigious magazines such as the Dublin Review, the Paris Review, and the Stinging Fly. The Plimpton Prize for Fiction, which she received in 2022 for her short tale "Brothers and Sisters," further solidified her reputation as a significant figure in modern writing.

1.1. Research objectives

- Examine how the characters in the novel navigate and embody cultural hybridity especially in context of their diasporic experience.
- Analyze how squash serves as a medium for cultural exchange and hybridity in the novel.
- Investigate how cultural hybridity influences the identity formation of characters particularly Gopi and her sisters.

1.2. Research questions

1. How do the characters journeys of self-discovery interact with their experiences of cultural hybridity?
2. In what ways does the novel illustrate the tension between tradition and modernity in the context of cultural hybridity?
3. How does the sport of squash serve as a metaphor for cultural hybridity and identity negotiation in the novel?

2. Literature Review

Complex cultural dynamics have emerged as a result of globalization, a multilayered phenomenon marked by the growing interdependence of the world's economies, communities, and cultures (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, & Perraton, 1999). According to Levitt (1983), globalization has caused markets and cultures to become more homogenized as a result of multinational firms spreading standardized goods and concepts all over the world. However, as many cultures contact, cross, and affect one another, new cultural forms and identities have also emerged alongside this process (Bhabha, 1994; Pieterse, 2004). The process of "globalization," in which global cultural flows are modified and reinterpreted in local contexts to produce hybrid cultural forms, is a result of globalization, according to Robertson (1992).

The merging of many cultural traditions in this process of cultural hybridity leads to the development of new cultural identities and expressions (Canclini, 1995). Cultural hybridity includes, for example, the development of new linguistic forms, the mixing of various culinary traditions, and the combination of old and modern music styles. Emerging forms of cultural expression are influenced by the intricacies of globalization and arise from the intersection and interaction of civilizations. Cultural hybridity ultimately highlights how fluid and dynamic culture is in the era of globalization.

Hall's research on cultural hybridity fundamentally changed our understanding of cultural identity and its intricate relationships. Making the insightful observation that "cultural identities are constantly in transition, and are subject to transformation and change" (Hall, 1990, p. 225), he brought attention to how adaptable and agile culture is. By accepting the intricacies and subtleties of cross-cultural interaction, Hall's concept of cultural hybridity subverts conventional ideas of cultural authenticity and purity.

Cultural hybridity, as defined by Edward Said, highlights the ways in which cultures overlap and intersect, underscoring the intricate and multidimensional structure of cultural identity (Said, 1993, p. 57). Particularly in light of imperialism and globalization, Said contends that encounters and exchanges between many cultures lead to cultural hybridity (Said, 1993, p. 67). (Said, 1993, p. 72) He argues that cultural hybridity exposes the complicated and subtle character of cultural identity, challenging conventional ideas of cultural authenticity and purity. Said emphasizes in his writings the value of appreciating and embracing cultural hybridity as opposed to attempting to impose oversimplified or essentialized ideas of cultural identity (Said, 1993, p. 79).

Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003) delves at the cultural hybridity of the Ganguli family, immigration from India to the United States. As the family adjusts to life in New York, the story emphasizes the conflicts between traditional Indian culture and contemporary American culture. Feeling torn between his Indian roots and his American upbringing, the main character, Gogol, battles with his own cultural identity. The difficulties of cultural hybridity, where people must balance their many cultural identities, are depicted by Lahiri through Gogol's experiences. The novel concludes by arguing that as people learn to manage and balance their many cultural identities, cultural hybridity may be a source of strength and innovation.

Zadie Smith *White Teeth* (2000) traces the interwoven lives of two families from disparate cultural backgrounds in order to examine the intricacies of cultural hybridity in postcolonial Britain. By showing how various cultures interact and overlap, the book honors the pluralism of London's immigrant communities. Smith uses the characters of Archie, Samad, and Irie to highlight the conflicts and inconsistencies that arise when people have to manage several cultural identities. People can be creative and innovative when they draw from other cultural traditions to create new identities. By reflecting the intricacies and diversity of modern urban life, "White Teeth" ultimately offers a view of cultural hybridity as a dynamic and continuous process.

The main character is Irie Jones, a second-generation British-Jamaican adolescent who personifies the difficulties of cultural hybridity. It is challenging for her to identify with either her Jamaican or British heritage because of her mixed cultural background.

Ire's experiences lead her to create a new, hybrid identity that combines aspects of both British and Jamaican cultures. Ire's cultural hybridity ultimately empowers her by enabling her to develop a distinct sense of self and traverse many cultural contexts.

3. Theoretical Framework

Spivak presents a critical and nuanced view of cultural hybridity, contending that it is a complicated and paradoxical phenomenon that is intricately linked to the power structures of imperialism and colonialism. She argues that the word "cultural hybridity" is not a celebration but rather a reflection of the violence and disruption caused by colonialism, which results in a "hybrid" culture characterized by ambiguities and contradictions of colonial power (Spivak, 1988, p. 291). Spivak further highlights that the subaltern subject is a fractured and contradictory self, created by the intertwining forces of capitalism, patriarchy, and colonialism, rather than a single, cohesive person. Spivak concludes by saying that cultural hybridity is a place of power struggle in which dominating cultures erase the voices and agency of subaltern cultures by imposing their norms and values on them.

The groundbreaking essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" by Spivak examines cultural hybridity critically in 1988, contending that it is a complicated and paradoxical phenomenon that is intricately linked to the power structures of imperialism and colonialism. "The subaltern is not a homogeneous category, but rather a site of multiple and contradictory subject positions, which are produced by the intersecting and conflicting forces of colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy." (p. 284) Spivak, (1988) Cultural hybridity, as used in the context of colonialism and imperialism, is not a term to be celebrated, but rather a symbol of the violence and disruption caused by colonialism, which results in a "hybrid" culture characterized by the ambiguities and contradictions of colonial power.

Spivak work provides a critical and nuanced view of cultural hybridity, emphasizing the paradoxes and intricate power relations that underpin the blending of various cultures. For Spivak, the phrase "cultural hybridity" is not celebratory; rather, it refers to a place of conflict and negotiation in which subaltern cultures reject, undermine, and redefine the norms and values imposed by dominant cultures. Her argument that cultural hybridity must be viewed as a complex and varied phenomenon that cannot be reduced to basic conceptions of cultural fusion or interchange is reflected in her different writings, such as "An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization" (2012).

Spivak emphasizes the significance of aesthetic education in advancing cultural hybridity as a site of subversion and resistance. She supports an aesthetic education that

educates students to study and interact critically and nuanced with cultural literature (Spivak, 2012, p. 40). This method goes beyond merely showcasing cultural diversity to help students understand and confront the power structures that create cultural hybridity.

A key notion in Bhabha's writings on postcolonial theory and cultural studies is the idea of cultural hybridity. According to Bhabha the binary oppositions between cultures, such as colonizer/colonized, self/other, and traditional/modern, are challenged by cultural hybridity, (Bhabha, 1994, p. 112). This challenge is important because it creates a third area where cultures can connect and intersect by erasing cultural borders.

Bhabha's (1994) "third space" is the transitional area where cultures converge and blend. Different cultural norms and values are negotiated and challenged in this space, which is marked by ambiguity, ambivalence, and uncertainty. It is noted by Bhabha that "the third space of hybridity displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 38). One of the most important aspects of cultural hybridity is the relocation of histories and the development of new authority structures.

In Bhabha's view Cultural hybridity is a tactic of opposition to prevailing cultural norms and power structures. Because of hybridity, subaltern cultures are able to challenge and undermine prevailing discourses, resulting in new forms of identity and cultural expression. Bhabha contends that "hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, and the site of its instability" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 112). The hybridization process, which questions the prevailing norms and values, is what causes this instability of colonial rule.

Bhabha's idea of cultural hybridity is another critique of essentialism, which holds that cultures have permanent and essential identities. This presumption is contested by hybridity, which emphasizes how intricate and fluid cultural identity is. Bhabha observes that "the hybridity of cultural identity is not a fixed or essential identity, but a process of identification that is always in excess of itself" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 113). Because the process of hybridization produces new forms of cultural expression and identity, there is an excess of cultural identity. Bhabha's idea of cultural hybridity challenges essentialist presumptions and binary oppositions by highlighting the dynamic and complex nature of cultural identity. His art emphasizes the capacity for creativity and resistance that comes with cultural hybridity, especially in postcolonial countries.

4. Discussion

4.1. Belonging to negotiated identity

As a negotiated identity, belonging encapsulates the dynamic process by which people balance their cultural heritage with their modern environment. A coherent self-identity is shaped by this constant adaptation in the face of the dynamic interaction of various stimuli. This book depicts belonging as a continuous process that is deeply integrated into the lives of the protagonists. Gopi and her family are forced to manage two identities as they come to terms with their Gujarati ancestry and the British culture they live in. The generational language barrier, their common but alienating squash experience, and the constantly shifting dynamics of their relationships all poignantly depict this negotiating of belonging. As the family members struggle with their identity and location, Maroo masterfully conveys the subtleties and complexity of belonging in a heterogeneous society.

Speak frequently discussed belonging as a negotiated identity particularly when it comes to marginality and post colonialism. She highlights that belonging is a dynamic process of negotiation and contestation rather than a fixed or predetermined state. According to her, underprivileged people have to continuously negotiate and claim their identities within prevailing political and cultural contexts. This is a constant fight for acceptance and representation, frequently opposing and dismantling established hierarchies of power. The path of Gopi in Maroo's book serves as an example of how belonging is a negotiated identity. Gopi's sense of belonging is continually being rebuilt and remade as she balances her Indian ancestry and British upbringing. Given that cultural identities are complicated and context-dependent in diasporic societies, her experiences of dislocation and confusion underscore the difficulties of belonging. The dynamic and negotiated aspect of belonging is demonstrated by Maroo through Gopi's attempts to balance her relationships, cultural norms, and an idea of "home," demonstrating that identity is not static but rather a constant process of self-definition and negotiation (Maroo, 2023).

Eleven-year-old British-Gujarati girl Gopi, the main character, must deal with the challenges of her mixed existence. Following the death of her mother, Gopi's father used squash as a way to connect with her and her sisters and help them deal with their sorrow. This squash immersion demonstrates the family's attempts to balance their cultural background with their current British surroundings. Because Gopi manages to reconcile her Gujarati heritage with the British culture around her, her path exemplifies the fluid and changing nature of belonging. Due to this duality, one develops a hybrid identity in which one's place is continually negotiated and modified. As she struggles with expectations and identity, her relationships with her family and fellow squash player GED serve as additional examples of this negotiation.

This book captures how living between two cultures causes a sense of displacement and adaptation. Gopi's father's comment that the family no longer "looks like all other Gujarati families" highlights how they have deviated from customs and are constantly redefining who they are. The difficulties and subtleties of preserving cultural identity while blending in with a new culture are shown to the reader through Gopi's perspective. Maroo's story masterfully captures the intricacies of belonging, presenting it as a fluid process influenced by both internal and external factors. The book is a comprehensive examination of cultural hybridity and the need for belonging because it revolves on this issue of negotiated identity.

Belonging is a negotiated identity, as demonstrated by Gopi's experiences on the squash court. The court represents a place where Gopi negotiates their nuanced ties with their culture, family, and sense of self. Gopi's experiences with the squash court environment influence their sense of identity. The wall's faded marks stand in for shared traditions and experiences, enhancing Gopi's sense of self and their emotional connection to their father. But Gopi's bewilderment and mental clarity are also reflected in the blurry smudges on the wall. This uncertainty draws attention to how complicated Gopi's negotiated belonging is. For Gopi, belonging is ultimately a fluid and dynamic concept that is ever evolving. Gopi told "I was just standing on the T with my racket head down, looking at the side wall that was smudged with the washed-out marks from all the balls that had skimmed its surface." (Maroo, 2023, p. 8) The blurry smudges on the wall mirror the protagonist's mental clarity and bewilderment as they stand exhausted on the squash court. She fears that she will collapse due to her overwhelming feelings. "The smudges on the wall blurred one into the other and I thought that surely I would fall. That was when it started up." (Maroo, 2023, p. 8)

Gopi's emotional bond with their mother serves as an example of the difficulties in establishing a sense of belonging in interpersonal relationships. Gopi's emotional bond with their mother's memories forms the basis of their sense of community upon her passing, offering them a sense of security, camaraderie, and support. This emotional bond also emphasizes how belonging is negotiated, as Gopi manages their sadness and sense of self in connection with their mother. Gopi's emotional bond with their mother allows them to experience acceptance and a shared identity, which highlights how dynamic and flexible belonging is. The protagonist explains "after Ma's funeral, we had driven four hundred miles to Edinburgh to have a meal at our aunt's home to mark the end of our mourning period" (Maroo, 2023, p. 9).

Chetna Maroo examines belonging as a negotiated identity in "Western Lane" by going through Gopi's journey, which is characterized by conflicts between her adopted country and her cultural heritage. The concept of belonging is dynamic and ever-changing,

influenced by experiences of cultural dislocation, confusion, and relocation. The squash court is a metaphorical setting where Gopi negotiates their sense of identity, cultural customs, and familial ties. In diasporic civilizations, identity is continually renegotiated and remade in response to shifting relationships and settings, underscoring the difficulties of belonging. The narrative of Gopi highlights how social expectations, cultural norms, and power dynamics determine the brittleness of belonging. While navigating their cultural history and adopted country is an important part of their belonging, relationships with family members play a critical role in forming their feeling of belonging. The narrative highlights conflicts between cultural identity and national belonging, illustrating how belonging is a complex and disputed idea. Gopi's experiences of belonging are ultimately influenced by intersections with identity, culture, and power, demonstrating how belonging is a negotiated identity that is influenced by a variety of experiences and circumstances.

4.2. Cultural hybridity

A blending of several cultures is known as hybridization or hybrid identity. "Hybrid agencies find their voices in a dialectic that does not seek cultural supremacy or sovereignty" (Bhabha, 2003, p. 58). Diaspora individuals encounter various changes in the new society as they make every effort to settle and establish a positive life in the settled nation. They want to maintain and adhere to their own culture because it has a negative impact on them. When a lot of individuals move to a new country, they attempt to bring their culture with them. Some diaspora members choose to adhere to their own culture, as previously mentioned, while others gladly embrace the culture and beliefs and attempt to integrate into that community.

Bhabha's uncommon and grandiose idea of 'parallel resistance' further draws his thought of 'hybridity or in-betweenness' that eventually prompts him, his creed of 'uncanny/unhomely/unhomeliness that is a really charming one. Bhabha (1994) characterizes hybridity as what is "new, neither the one nor the other" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 59).

In *Western Lane* (Maroo, 2023) features characters such as Gopi and the nameless narrator who exhibit cultural acceptance and adaptation. In adjusting to their new lives in England, they preserve aspects of their own cultural identity while embracing the language, customs, and social mores the country. Their experience serves as an example of the difficulties associated with assimilation and the merging of many cultural influences. The experiences of the protagonists demonstrate how to strike a balance between accepting one's new surroundings and conserving one's ancestry. Gopi, who balances multiple identities, is a perfect illustration of cultural hybridity. She swings

between Gujarati and English, celebrates Christmas and Diwali, and combines Western and Indian customs. She considers herself British, Indian, Gujarati, and a Londoner. Gopi's culinary preferences, which blend Indian and Western cuisine, are a reflection of his mixed personality. Her cultural hybridity challenge essential zed notions of Indian identity encourage inclusivity, defy traditional expectations, and demonstrates the complexity of the diaspora. Gopi's experience aligns with the idea of the "third space" (Bhabha, 1994), which is where cultural identities collide and transform. Through Gopi's persona, Maroo highlights the intricacy of navigating diverse cultural contexts and the fluidity of cultural identity. ." She looked at Pa and began to speak in Gujarati, keeping her voice low and even." (Maroo, 2023, p.12)

Gopi's multifaceted persona is a prime example of cultural hybridity, skillfully fusing Gujarati and British aspects. The complexities of diasporic living are aptly captured by her experiences, which cut across linguistic, cultural, and culinary barriers. The book deftly examines Bhabha's idea of the "Third Space," a place where cultural identities converge, change and reshape a moving example of this transitional area is conversation between Pa and Uncle Pavan, in which they recall the past and the news of Pa's marriage. Uncle Pavan asked "Do you remember? The night you told Bapuji you were getting married." (Maroo, 2023, p. 11)

This proclamation redefines cultural identity and challenges patriarchal norms by establishing a boundary between conventional expectations and contemporary desires. Through the negotiation of several belongings and the rejection of rigid classifications, the narrative deftly illustrates the fluidity of cultural identity formation. One particularly moving example of this is when Pa tells Mona, "We're brothers...Indians and Pakistanis" (Maroo, 2023, p. 19). Differences between Indian and Pakistan are eliminated by this conversation.

Cultural hybridity is a main concern in Western Lane, permeating every aspect of the characters' lives and influencing their identities and interactions. Their connections and personal development are facilitated by the merging of their host and native cultures. Because of this hybridity, the characters traverse the difficulties of acceptance, self-discovery, and belonging in a rich tapestry of experiences. Their hardships and victories underscore the complexity of juggling two different cultures and the wonders and difficulties of assimilating. The book shows how cultural hybridity can result in deep insights and a more accepting and compassionate community, despite the fact that it is frequently difficult. The book highlights the characters' tenacity and flexibility while demonstrating how cultural variety can improve lives and extend viewpoints.

5. Conclusion

This publication has offered a thorough and sophisticated investigation of the intricate connections among political changes, migration, and cultural hybridity. The methods in which people and communities manage several identities and create new sensations of belonging in the face of social change and political upheaval have been brought to light by this study's critical examination of the connections between community, identity, and belonging. The results of this study have important ramifications for our comprehension of the intricate processes involved in identity development and how cultural hybridity affects our sense of community and belonging. This research adds to a better understanding of the complex dynamics of human identity and experience by looking at how people and groups navigate various identities and create new perceptions of belonging.

The significance of taking into account the historical, social, and cultural settings in which identity development occurs has also been illustrated by this study. Through placing people's and communities' experiences in these larger frameworks, this study has brought attention to the ways that our world's social and cultural landscapes both influence and are influenced by cultural hybridity. In the end, this study emphasizes the significance of accepting cultural variety and hybridity as well as the importance of complex, multidimensional identities in forming our worldview. The goal of this research is to support a more inclusive and fair society by highlighting the diversity of human experience and encouraging a more sophisticated comprehension of the intricate connections between identity, community, and belonging. Furthermore, this study has ramifications for community leaders, educators, and policymakers that aim to advance a better understanding and inclusion of various populations. This research offers a framework for creating more potent tactics for fostering social cohesion and attending to the needs of different groups by emphasizing the intricacies of identity development and the significance of cultural hybridity.

This study also adds to the expanding corpus of research on identity formation, migration, and cultural hybridity. A comprehensive and contextualized knowledge of the intricate interactions between these aspects is provided by this study's engagement with current theories and frameworks. Ultimately, this study shows how diverse and intricate human identity and experience are. We may endeavor to create a society that is more inclusive and egalitarian by embracing cultural diversity and hybridity and appreciating the importance of diverse, multifaceted identities.

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