

## **HATE SPEECH AND SECURITY CHALLENGES IN NIGERIA: THE 2011-2019 ELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN PERSPECTIVE**

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### **Abstract**

Hate speech - verbal or written - on persons or groups based on shared attributes such as ethnicity, race, religion, political beliefs, gender, sexual orientation, or disability, hinders peacebuilding, development, and peaceful co-existence among diverse groups in (not limited to democratic) societies. This paper examined the effects of hate speech on security challenges in Nigeria. The paper is anchored on structural-functional theory to provide theoretical orientation to the paper. The methodology of the paper is content analysis (i.e. rely on secondary data) from which analysis was made and a conclusion drawn. The paper concluded that Hate speech publicly incites violence against individuals or groups of people. It has exacerbated the security challenges and worsened the situation of peaceful co-existence in Nigeria. The paper recommends criminal sanctions should be used as a measure of last resort and, all along, a balance must be kept between fighting hate speech on the one hand and safeguarding freedom of speech on the other.

**Keywords:** Hate speech, Security challenges, Human rights, and Freedom of speech

### **Introduction**

It is believed that hate speech and fake news are pervasive in Nigeria today. Over the last few decades, the issue of hate speech has been widely debated by scholars in multiple fields of knowledge (Olanrewaju, 2019). The subject of hate speech was developed through the collective efforts of experts in the field of social science and humanities as well as media experts and computer scientists e.g. what is Hate Speech? (Alexander, 2017), Hate Speech and its effects on the Nigerian Communities: A case study of Ibadan Metropolis, Oyo State (Olufunke, 2020). Hate speech as Bagdikian (1997) opined, refers to communication that employs intolerant appellations to insult and denounce others vis-à-vis race, religion, ethnicity, gender, or other forms of a group membership. This is believed could consequently lead to rhetoric strategies that can generate hostility and confrontation in society as against the norms that enable the democratic government to function (Chaiken & Eagly, 1978).

Just like in other countries of the world, radio, television, newspaper, and the new media (social media) are major sources of news. Some of the sources promote hate speech, particularly the new media, while others exaggerate the issues they report. Some of these invalidated speeches coming from media houses, newspapers, and those found on social media have created a lot of problems not only for individuals indicted and their families but it has led to disunity and conflicts of various types in Nigerian communities. Unfounded and unverified stories have led to killings and crises of various types in the country. This is why the Federal

Government of Nigeria thought it is expedient to draw the line on hate speech declaring hate speech as a form of terrorism (Olufunke, 2020). It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to examine the effects of hate speech on the security challenges in Nigeria.

## **Conceptual Review**

### **i. Hate Speech**

Hate speech is any speech, gesture, conduct, writing, or display which could incite people to violence or prejudicial action. Essentially, such speeches rob others of their dignity. According to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (2013 p. 4), hate speech includes:

- (a) All dissemination of ideas based on racial or ethnic superiority or hatred, by whatever means;
- (b) Incitement to hatred, contempt, or discrimination against members of a group on grounds of their race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin;
- (c) Threats or incitement to violence against persons or groups on the grounds in (b) above;
- (d) Expression of insults, ridicule or slander of persons or groups or justification of hatred, contempt or discrimination on the grounds in (b) above, when it clearly amounts to incitement to hatred or discrimination;
- (d) Participation in organizations and activities which promote and incite racial discrimination.

In his submission, (Neisser, 1994 p. 337) opines that hate speech refers to, all communications (whether verbal, written, symbolic) that insult a racial, ethnic and political group, whether by suggesting that they are inferior in some respect or by indicating that they are despised or not welcome for any other reasons. Neisser argues that apart from causing danger of physical assault, hate speech risks violent reaction. In an agreement with Neisser's notion, Kayambazinthu and Moyo (2002) conceive hate speeches as wars waged on others by means of word.

Several attempts have been made to define the meaning of hate speech. The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe conceived hate speech as covering all forms of expressions that spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, or other forms of hatred based on intolerance. As a result, it generates stigmas, stereotypes, prejudices, and discriminatory practices against those who are constructed as being different (International Center for Investigative Reporting (ICIR), 2015). Hate speech to Kukah (2015) is any communication that denigrates a particular person or a group based on race, color, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, or other characteristics; it can be in the form of any speech, gesture or conduct, writing, or display and usually marks incitement, violence or prejudice against an individual or a group. It is speech that employs discriminatory epithets to insult and stigmatize others on the basis of their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or other forms of group membership (Adibe, 2015). Hate speech in the Nigerian context includes acts of insulting people for their religion; abusing people for their ethnic affiliation; expressing contempt against people because of their place of origin (Rufus & Michael, 2015). Within the context of this research, hate Speech is any negative speech made out of envying or enmity. From the foregoing definitions, it suffices to align with Adibe (2015) that hate speech is a catalyst for violence and that it is very doubtful if there would be hate-motivated violent attack anywhere.

### **ii. Security Challenges**

The security challenges of a nation could be internal or external. The internal ones in Nigeria refer to problems of armed robbery, sea piracy, kidnapping, and hostage-taking. The problem

also includes ethnic, religious, and electoral violence as well as the Niger Delta crisis. On the other hand, the external security challenges are supposed to be coming from outside the nation. For now, such problems are minimal. Apart from the Bakassi crisis between Nigeria and Cameroun over the ownership of the Bakassi peninsula, the country does not have much external threat. The problem of arms and human trafficking often reported by the media all result from the country's inability to effectively police its borders. It is a result of systemic failures and corruption than any other thing.

### **The Political and Scientific Concept of 'Security Challenges'**

The term 'challenge' has often been used for security and global issues but it has hardly been defined, and in many cases, it is used synonymously with 'threat' (Brauch, 2011). Dodds and Schnabel (2001 p. 42– 43) pointed to 'new' and 'non-traditional' security challenges as a major concern in the post-cold war security environment. They argued "that the general public's conception of the security environment has altered so dramatically as we enter the new millennium is an indicator of how significantly this environment may have actually changed". They see as major forces for the reconceptualization of security "the increasing level of globalization" that "has engendered a growing sense of vulnerability to remote threats, such as distant conflicts, contagions, crop failures, and currency fluctuations".

### **Application of the Concept of 'Security Challenges'**

Van Ginkel and Velásquez (2001: 58–70) pointed to these environmental challenges: (a) ozone depletion; (b) impact of toxic chemicals on the global ecosystem; and (c) increasing greenhouse emissions and their negative reinforcements as well as to "uncertainty about the future and an element of surprise", especially if associated with natural and man-made environmental disasters. They stressed eight sub-themes: "global environmental governance, water, urbanization, industry and sustainability, global food security, energy requirements for the next millennium, global governance of biological diversity, land degradation, and the atmosphere".

In the face of these challenges, Nigeria, like many other countries of the world today, has in the past couple of years been battling frantically to get herself disentangled from the ugly grips of insecurity, but to no avail. However, in confronting this challenge, successive governments have over the years and at different times erroneously adopted an anachronistic strategy and definition of security as "National Security" where the protection of the nation's territorial integrity is the focus. This definition, close-minded as it is, has had a lot of implications on the country's efforts to achieve sustainable peace and by extension, national development. According to the United Nations (UN, 2009), the end of the Cold War reconfigured the global environment in several ways that challenged traditional security paradigms. This explains why all efforts by the Nigerian government in not making human security its pillar have always failed and, of course, would continue to collapse.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This paper is anchored on structural functionalism. The structural-functionalist theory was propounded by Spencer, Durkheim, and Parson in the late 1950s. One of the assumptions of this theory is that certain functional requirements must be satisfied if a society is to survive. Put differently, there should be the existence of functional subsystems to ensure the survivability of society. The subsystems are expected to perform their functions credibly. Society is, therefore, composed of a certain arrangement of parts (structures) or subsystems which undertake various responsibilities (functions) in a coordinated and independent manner so as to achieve societal goals and objectives (Ugwuja, 2016). The structural-functional theory has been one of the theoretical explanations aimed at ensuring a deeper understanding of the societal process which invariably leads to societal progress and sustainability.

**Functionalism**, also called structural-functional theory, sees society as a structure with interrelated parts designed to meet the biological and social needs of the individuals in that society. Functionalism grew out of the writings of English philosopher and biologist, Herbert Spencer, who saw similarities between society and the human body; he argued that just as the various organs of the body work together to keep the body functioning, the various parts of society work together to keep society functioning. The parts of society that Spencer referred to were the Social Institutions or patterns of beliefs and behaviors focused on meeting social needs, such as government, education, family, healthcare, religion, and the economy.

### **Justification of the Theory**

Functionalism emphasizes a societal equilibrium. If something happens to disrupt the order and the flow of the system, society must adjust to achieve a stable state. According to Durkheim, society should be analyzed and described in terms of functions. Society is a system of interrelated parts where no one part can function without the other. These parts make up the whole of society. If one part changes, it has an impact on society as a whole.

The theory is quite relevant to this thesis in the sense that, Nigeria is a structure with substructures inside it such as states, ministries, parastatals, and agencies, that are working based on the responsibilities that they are charged with, for the good function and survivability of the structure. Among them are the Ministry of Women Affairs and the Human Rights Activists, set in place to protect the dignity of Nigerians. Therefore, any structure that malfunctioned or fails to discharge the true responsibilities or violates the conduct of their duties, for their personal interest such will wick the entire structure. Thus, this theory explains the subject matter of this paper.

### **Criticism**

One criticism of the structural-functional theory is that it cannot adequately explain social change. Also problematic is the somewhat circular nature of this theory; repetitive behavior patterns are assumed to have a function, yet we profess to know that they have a function only because they are repeated. Furthermore, dysfunctions may continue, even though they do not serve a function, which seemingly contradicts the basic premise of the theory. Many sociologists now believe that functionalism is no longer useful as a macro-level theory, but that it does serve a useful purpose in some mid-level analyses.

### **Nexus between Hate Speech and Security Challenges in Nigeria**

Hate speech covers many forms of expressions that advocate, incite, promote or justify hatred, violence, and discrimination against a person or group of persons for a variety of reasons. It poses grave dangers for the cohesion of a democratic society, the protection of human rights, and the rule of law. If left unaddressed, it can lead to acts of violence and conflict on a wider scale. In this sense hate speech is an extreme form of intolerance that contributes to hate crime.

Hate speech, a verbal or written attack on persons or groups based on shared attributes such as ethnicity, race, religion, political beliefs, gender, sexual orientation, or disability-hinders peacebuilding, development, and peaceful co-existence among diverse groups in (not limited to democratic) societies. It has fueled violent conflicts, civil wars, and genocide, as seen in the anti-Semitic prelude to World War II, in the anti-Muslim campaign in Bosnia, and in the anti-Tutsi hate campaign before the Rwandan genocide (Olusola, 2018).

Nigeria returned to democratic government in 1999 after years of military intervention in her politics. But while Nigeria is working to consolidate democracy, hate speech is also increasingly becoming a challenge. While hate speech occurs regularly in the media and public discourse in Nigeria, it often heightens and crystalizes during election periods, contributing to

violence and hampering political reconciliation after the vote. As a federation of about 214,685,304 million people, over 300 ethnic groups, and religious and social diversity coupled with a political system characterized by intense contestation for power and a winner-take-all environment, Nigeria provides a conducive environment for hate speech to fester (Worldometer, 2022). As a result, elections post-1999 have seen violence stoked by hate speech. Election-related rioting, public violence, murder, and thuggery have resulted in hundreds of deaths and economic destruction and have also fueled secessionist and anti-secessionist movement tensions. With the approaching 2019 elections, Nigeria must consider options to ensure that hate speech does not derail democracy, harm peacebuilding, and increase division in the country (Olusola, 2018).

During the 2011 and 2015 general elections, politicians, religious figures, public officers, citizens, and ethnic jingoists deployed hate speech throughout the electoral cycle. Using traditional and social media, contenders deployed derogatory words and terms in local dialects to label and demean opponents. Also problematic is that ownership of Nigerian media is highly concentrated in the hands of elites who sometimes use it to promote hate messages against the opposition. For instance, the African Independent Television (AIT) and a group of radio stations, which are owned by a prominent member of the People’s Democratic Party (PDP), the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), and Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), which is owned by the federal government and controlled by members of the ruling party, have been used to propagate hate speech during election periods (Olusola, 2018). The National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), although empowered by the federal government to enforce punishment for hate speech offenses, finds it difficult to impose sanctions due to the wide attention gained from broadcasting hate messages against the opposition. In 2015, politicians associated with President Goodluck Jonathan employed Cambridge Analytica to produce and distribute an Islamophobic video to scare the electorate from voting for the opposition. The video associated the opposition figure, General Muhammadu Buhari, with Boko Haram and used graphic images of violence committed by Boko Haram to convey to the audience what they should expect if Buhari won. Table one below presents the evidence of hate speech in Nigeria.

**Table1.** Hate speeches in Nigeria, 2010-2015

S/N	Year	Hate Speaker	Hate Speech	Sources
1	2010	The former Governor of the old Kaduna State, Alhaji Lawan Kaita	The North would make the country ungovernable if President Goodluck Jonathan wins the 2011 polls... Anything short of a Northern President is tantamount to stealing our presidency.	Jason, 2011 (See references)
2	2010	Shehu Sani, a Kaduna based civil rights activist	President Goodluck Jonathan should not contemplate contesting the 2011 presidential election. Any attempt by him to contest amounts to incitement and a recipe for political instability	www.nigerianbestforum.com./shehusani-warnsjonathan-against contesting

3	2010	National Coordinator of the Coalition of Northern Politicians, Dr. Junaidu Mohammed	It must be a Northerner or no Nigeria... If Goodluck Jonathan wins the PDP's endorsement to contest the 2011 presidential election, there would be violence.	Interview with Guardian Newspaper, 2nd November, 2010
4	2011	Presidential Candidate of Congress for Progressive Change, General Muhammadu Buhari	God willing, by 2015, something will happen. They either conduct a free and fair election or they go a very disgraceful way. If what happened in 2011 should again happen in 2015, by the grace of God, the dog and the baboon would all be soaked in blood	Reported by Lika Binniyat in Vanguard Newspaper on May 15th, 2012
5	2012	National Coordinator of the Coalition of Northern Politicians, Dr. Junaidu Mohammed	Unless efforts are made to ensure that the 2015 general election are free and fair, it may turn out to be the last election in the history of the nation	Leadership March 29, 2012
6	2012	Chinua Achebe, a foremost Nigerian writer	The Igbo culture being receptive to change, individualistic and highly competitive gave the Igbo man an unquestionable advantage... Unlike the Hausa/ Fulani, he was unhindered by a wary religion and unlike the Yoruba, he was unhampered by traditional hierarchies	Achebe, Chinua (2012: 74)
7	2013	National Coordinator of the Coalition of Northern Politicians, Dr. Junaidu Mohammed	There will be bloodshed. Those who feel short-changed may take the war path and the country may not be the same again	Reported by Kemy Oguns in Osun Defender, 2nd December, 2013

8	2013	Femi Fani-Kayode, a former Aviation Minister	The Igbos are collectively unlettered, uncouth, uncultured, unrestrained and crude in all their ways...Money and the acquisition of wealth is their sole objective and purpose in life	Daily Post, August 8, 2013
9	2013	The leader of the Niger Delta Peoples Salvation Force (NDPSF), Alhaji Mujahid DokuboAsari	There will be no peace, not only in the Niger Delta, but everywhere if Good luck Jonathan is not president by 2015, except God takes his life, which we do not pray for	Vanguard Newspapers, May 5, 2013
10	2013	Chief Arthur Eze PDP Chieftain	That short man called Ngige, we gave him power and he joined the Awolowo people; the people that killed Igbos	Premium Times, November 13, 2013
11	2014	Publicity Secretary of All Progressive Congress, Alhaji Lai Mohammed	If the 2015 elections are rigged, the party will not recognize the outcome and will go ahead and form a parallel government	Leadership 21st November, 2014; Sahara Reporters 22nd November, 2014
12	2014	Governor Shema Ibrahim of Kastina State	You should not be bordered with cockroaches of politics. Cockroaches are only found in the toilet even at homes, If you see cockroach in your house, Crush them	Reported by Premium Times on 19th November, 2014
13	2014	An Islamic cleric, Ima Sadiq	Muslims, vote for Buhari. It is a sin to support a non-Muslim	Twitter handle, Saturday, 27th December, 2014
14	2014	Northern Elder Forum	Those who vote for Jonathan and the PDP in 2015 will be considered an enemy of the north	Vanguard, 15 October 2014.
15	2014	Asiwaju Bola Tinubu	It is going to be rig and roast. We are prepared not to go to court but drive them out	Tell, 7 July 2014.

16	2014	Former Governor of Akwa Ibom State, Godswill Akpabio	Those who want to take power through the back door will die. They will die	Punch Newspaper, 17th July, 2014
17	2014	South East Self Determination Coalition (SESD)	We assure those cold blooded murderers that this time, their blood thirsty campaign will not go unreplied	Reported by Clifford Ndujihe in Vanguard Newspaper, 5th December, 2014
18	2014	Alhaji Mujahid Dokubo-Asari	2015 is more than do-or-die. You are a man and I am a man, we are going to meet at the battlefield	News Express 3rd May, 2014
19	2014	Alhaji Mujahid Dokubo-Asari	If they contest (Northerners) they are wasting their time. He who pays the piper will dictate the tune. We own them. We are feeding them. They are parasites. A beggar has no choice...They are beggars and parasites	<a href="http://www.vanguardngr.com/2014/12/north-ungratefulparasites-asaridokubo">http://www.vanguardngr.com/2014/12/north-ungratefulparasites-asaridokubo</a> ).
20	2014	Rivers States Governor, Rotimi Amechi	The challenge of the Nigerian military is not funding but corruption. Now they want to kill some 50 officers for their own failure to equip them properly to fight terrorism. The soldiers have the right to protest for the federal government's failure to fully equip them	This day and Nations, Tuesday, 9th December, 2014
21	2015	Wife of former President, Patience Jonathan	<i>Wetin him dey find again? Him dey drag with him pikin mate, old man wey no get brain, him brain don die pata pata</i> - What is Buhari looking for? Old man that does not know his age. Your brain is dead.	At a PDP rally in Kogi state, Reported by The Express New, 4 March, 2014

22	2015	Wife of former President, Patience Jonathan	Our people do not give birth to uncountable children. Our men don't give birth to children that they dump in streets. We are not like people from that part of the country (apparently the northern Nigeria)	Presidential campaign in Calabar, The Nation, March 10, 2015
23	2015	Wife of former President, Patience Jonathan	Anybody that come and tell you changes, stone that person... What you did not do in 1985, is it now that old age has caught up with you that you want to come and change...You cannot change rather you will turn back to a baby	The Complete Works of Patience Jonathan, The Nation on Sunday, 15th March
24	2015	The Governor of Ekiti State, Peter Ayodele Fayose	Buhari would likely die in office if elected, recall that Murtala Muhammed, Sani Abacha and Umaru Yar'Adua, all former heads of state from the North West like Buhari, had died in office	January 19, 2015, This Day and other national dailies
25	2015	Oba Akiolu of Lagos	On Saturday, if anyone of you, I swear in the name of God, goes against my wish that Ambode will be the next governor of Lagos state, the person is going to die inside this water...For the Igbos and others in Lagos, they should go where the Oba of Lagos heads to...	This Day Newspaper, 4th April 2015
26	2015	Dr. Abraham Ariyo, U.S based Nigerian Doctor	You see how they (Igbos) are being slaughtered in South Africa. That is what is going to happen to them in Lagos... When are they (Igbos) going to be slaughtered in Abuja? We will continue to bus them to Onitsha	Facebook page of Dr. Ariyo, Reported in Quick News Africa, April 20, 2015.

27	2015	Wife of former President, Patience Jonathan	The PDP is a party that talks less and does more, unlike the APC that tells new lies every week. When you catch them today, they will tell another lie tomorrow. We (PDP) do not tell you about change because we are not bus conductors that ask for change.	<a href="https://www.naij.com/663921-2015inreview-events-shook-nigerians-2015.html">https://www.naij.com/663921-2015inreview-events-shook-nigerians-2015.html</a>
28	2015	Wife of former President, Patience Jonathan	Anybody that come and tell you change, stone that person. Anybody that come and tell you he will change, stone that person.	<a href="https://www.naij.com/663921-2015inreview-events-shook-nigerians-2015.html">https://www.naij.com/663921-2015inreview-events-shook-nigerians-2015.html</a>
29	2015	Former River State governor, Rotimi Amaechi	The All Progressives Congress party, (The APC) will form a parallel government if the Feb. 14th and 28th elections are rigged	<a href="http://www.peoplesdailyng.com/2015-elections-and-negative-effects-of-hate-speeches/">http://www.peoplesdailyng.com/2015-elections-and-negative-effects-of-hate-speeches/</a>
30	2015	Director of Media and Publicity, PDP's presidential campaign organization, Chief Femi Fani-Kayode	We (PDP) know that they (APC) may have a few challenges with the English language; so, if they like they can even conduct the debate in vernacular: we would be prepared to pay for a translator or an interpreter just so that they could understand the proceedings	<a href="http://www.peoplesdailyng.com/2015-elections-and-negative-effects-of-hate-speeches/">http://www.peoplesdailyng.com/2015-elections-and-negative-effects-of-hate-speeches/</a>

Source: Rufus & Michael, (2019)

### Efforts to Address Hate Speech

Although there is no Nigerian law that expressly prohibits hate speech, the Criminal Code has provisions related to libel, slander, blasphemy, perjury, and similar offenses. Section 95 of the Nigerian Electoral Act of 2010 prohibits acts that constitute hate speech during election campaigns but falls short of explicitly labeling them as such. On the political front, registered political parties have signed a code of conduct stating that no party or candidate may distribute inflammatory statements, but the code is voluntary and does not prescribe sanctions. The Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON) Act and the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) Code contain provisions that forbid hate messages in the media, and section 26 of the 2015 Cyber Crime Act prohibits the publication of racist and xenophobic materials. However, there is no political will to punish those who use hate speech during elections, and, thus far, no offenders have been prosecuted under any of the laws. It is therefore

difficult to find any legal precedent for tackling hate speech. In February 2018 the Nigerian Senate considered a bill making hate speech punishable by death. In the bill, the explanation of hate speech is ambiguous and associated with the fight against terrorism, as the Vice President of Nigeria, Yemi Osinbajo, has stated that hate speech is a form of terrorism. The bill has faced opposition by media and civil society as an attempt to silence government critics.

### **Conclusion**

Hate speech permeates every sector of the nation and social media play an important role in the spread of hate speech since there are no specified laws on hate speech. The problem of hate speech, ethnicity, and disrespect for the opposition party is more of a universal phenomenon but has become observable widespread in Nigerian politics. Rather than being a medium for conveying messages to the electorate on the ideas the candidate wants to share with the voters, electioneering campaigns are perceived as an opportunity to indulge in defamation, condemnation, and outright disrespect of political oppositions and the ethnic nationalities they belong. Hate speeches directed at gaining political power lead to electoral violence. Nigeria's background of intolerance provides ample grounds for the use of hate speech. Directly, it was hate speech and indirectly it was ethnic and religious intolerance that led to the surge in electoral violence in Nigeria from 2011 to 2015.

The paper concludes that hate speeches were indiscriminately used during the 2015 general elections campaign in Nigeria. The speeches were uttered and propagated by both the print and broadcast media. Hate speeches should not be elements of political messages during electioneering. This is because hate speeches negate the fundamental principles of democracy in any modern society. It is therefore suggested that political actors that engage in the use of hate speeches during electioneering should be punished according to the electoral laws of the country. Furthermore, stringent punitive measures should be meted to media outlets that publish or broadcast hate speeches as a form of deterrent for the growth of democracy in Nigeria. Hate speech publicly incites violence against individuals or groups of people. At the same time, criminal sanctions should be used as a measure of last resort and, all along, a balance must be kept between fighting hate speech on the one hand, and safeguarding freedom of speech on the other. Any restrictions on hate speech should not be misused to silence minorities and to suppress criticism of official policies, political opposition, or religious beliefs.

### **Policy Option and Recommendation**

A criminal sanction should be used as a measure of last resort and, all along, a balance must be kept between fighting hate speech on one hand, and safeguarding freedom of speech on the other.

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