

Women in Adé́báyò Fálétí's Poetry

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Introduction

Women have been victims of gender ideology which, according to Hussein (2005), is a systemic set of cultural beliefs through which a society constructs and wields its gender relations and practices. Gender ideology contains legends, narratives and myths about what it means to be a man or a woman and suggests how each should behave in a society (Olabode, 2009). Women are a non-homogenous group as their status and roles in the society are determined by a complexity of factors such as being a daughter, sister, and wife; a cultic member; and the economic and political positions they hold in the market place and in local governance (Ilesanmi, 2013). Sub-ethnic variations were also reported in customs and practices such as a marriage and family life, pre-natal and post-natal practices and others. Men in various sub-ethnic (Yorúbá) groups are given privileges in matters relating to power and control in domestic and public spheres. Since culture is not static but rather dynamic, therefore contemporary writers are now advocating for portrayal that will extol women's virtues, thereby bringing to the fore the indispensable roles women play in society.

In order to redeem and recreate an enhanced status for women, studies about women abound in literary studies, with little attention given to issues of women in Adé́báyò Fálétí's poetry. Thus, using the feminist approach examines how women are portrayed in Fálétí's poetry so as to establish his view about the womenfolk.

Women in Yorùbá Literature

Literature is human imagination of the total human experience and the human activities in elaborated language (Adewoye, 1988:1). It is also a dramatic and verbal dressing of human activities and the fictional representation of reality. Literature as an instrument for addressing social problems by artists uses any of the genres (play, prose and poetry) to pass comments on noticeable flaws in society. In African literary experiences, these three genres have been utilized to draw attention to feminine issues in the society.

Collier (1974) discusses women in politics. Louise (1974) dwells on strategies, cooperation and conflict among women in domestic groups while Michelle (1974) works on woman, culture and society. While Oyesakin's (1982) work centers on women as agent of indiscipline in Yorùbá oral literature, Allen's (1984) focusses on the annihilation of women. Oyesakin (1984) discusses the good and bad sides of the woman as conceptualized in the Ifá corpus. Ogunyemi (1988) works on women and Nigerian literature in perspective from 1770 to 1988. Ilésanmí (1991) focuses on the place of women in Yorùbá cults. While Ijeoma's (1994) work discusses the image of woman in four selected Africans novels, Ògundí pè-Leslie (1994) dwells on African women and their critical transformation. Òpèfeyí tìmí (1994) works on Yorùbá women's power over life and death. Other scholarly works on women include Bashir (1996), Ilésanmí (1996), Yusuf (1994 and 1996), Kòláwọ̀lé (1997), Àìná (1998), Fámílùsì (1998), Schultz (1998), Sheba (1999, 2006, 2008, 2016), Shehu (2001), Adé lékè (2017), Adé jùmò (2016, 2017), Philips (2002), Olújìmí (2004, 2005, 2016), Adágba dá (2005), Ìdòwù-Òshò (2008), Ilésanmí (2013), Ògunsí ná (2016) and Solájà (2016).

The Sociological Importance of Poetry

Poetry as a form of literature functions as a reflection of the society. It is also used for expressing beliefs, feelings, ideas and thought, thereby portraying the image of the society. According to Olatunji (1979), Yorùbá poets, whether oral or written, are entertainers, custodians of culture, social commentators, political activists, students of history, and the advocates of norms. Yorùbá poets are indebted in their work to their society as they draw materials from the community. These raw materials may be issues bordering on politics, social, religious and economy. Poetry is a concentrated form of imaginative writing which exploits certain special word patterns and rhythmic structures (figures, diction, sound system, and the like) to create meanings and thoughts that may have social, political or cultural implications (Bodunde, 2007). Olújìmí (2007) opines that poetry is not just a work of art but an art for the survival of humanity. Due to its sociological importance,

works abound on poetry. The works include: Oḷábímtán (1974) which is a critical study of Yorùbá written poetry. Olúkojú (1978) works on place of chants in Yorùbá traditional oral literature. Oyèbísí (1981) dwells on If-áyemí Eḷébuìḅon's poetry. Fọlọrunsó (1998) and Oḡúndèjì (1992) contribute to historical development of Yorùbá written poetry. Aji bóyè (2002) and Adébòwálé (2003) discuss the basic rudiments that a creative writer must possess. Oyèwálé (2014) does a comparative analysis of poetic works of two poets. Oyewálé (2018) appraises trends and question of female expertise in Yorùbá written poetry while Adéjùmò (2018) focuses on thematization and perspectivization of human rights and development in Yorùbá poetry.

Theoretical Framework

Feminism

Feminism concerns the study of human relationship at the gender level. It is a call for a new kind of knowledge about human society, recognition of the power structure and how this makes for equity in the relationship between men and women. Awé (2004:41) defines feminism as a creation of space for women, the establishment of a level playing field to enable women realize their potential.

Feminism is therefore, transformational because it involves a vision of society that does not exist and sees social, political and economic change as necessary for that vision to be realized. Feminist theory offers some kind of analysis and explanation on how and why women have less power than men and how this imbalance could be challenged and transformed. Feminists have produced diverse and competing theories about the general patterns of inequality and the broader structures, belief systems and institutions, which produce and organize particular experience in order to analyze, understand, and hopefully, challenge women's subordination.

Feminism as a theory, over the years, has developed into various groups and applications, such as integral feminists, radical feminists, liberal feminists, literary feminists; and into various other disciplines and fields of study such as feminism and literature, feminism and religion and others. Whatever name given to female emancipation, it focuses on females' efforts towards liberation and appropriate integration in all spheres of human endeavor. This fact is further substantiated by Bryce (1988:11) that:

Feminism projects a total transformation of society and a distribution of power, which will eradicate permanently all divisions into dominated and dominate. It is far more than either a search for mere social equality within the status quo or individual fulfillment.

This paper therefore focuses on Adébayò Fálétí's poetry with a view to bringing to the fore his portrayal of womanhood.

Women in Adébayò Fálétí's Poetry

Adébayò Fálétí was a renowned playwright, a celebrated novelist, a skillful actor, a seasoned poet and one of the most versatile among Yoruba creative writers. He was a prominent figure among the set of literary writers who see the need to elicit the positive worth in one's own culture as well as appreciate the value of the mother tongue in imaginative creativity. Adébayò Fálétí's poems were written between 1954 and 1964 and a critical evaluation of his poems shows that a humane philosophic disposition underlies his works (Olatunjí 1982:31). Fálétí's poetry demands critical attention not only because he was popular with and be loved by Yorubá audience but because his work has great poetic merit.

The woman is portrayed by Fálétí as one who gives birth to many children. Women had always taken the leading role in the care of the children brought to life. In "Èḍá Kò Láròpín" the poet tells the story of a woman who gives birth to eight jobless children.

*Ìyá kan, ìyá kan, ti ni bẹ̀ Nílùú Àjàṣẹ̀.
Ní lǎélǎé kí wọn tó bírúu wa.
Ìyá bẹ̀rẹ̀ sí bímọ̀ kalẹ̀ bí ì dun Ó bímọ̀ tí tí ọmọ̀ lọ̀ bẹ̀rẹ̀
Ọmọ̀ mẹ̀ jọ̀ nìyá Àjàṣẹ̀ bí
Wọn yarúkírú wọn yọmọkọmọ
Wọn n rìn bẹ̀nṣẹ̀bẹ̀nṣẹ̀ káàkiri ì lú
Wọn n fẹ̀ṣẹ̀ palẹ̀ kagboro
Kò sóhun tí wọn kò dánwò tán
Torí ká jẹ́ ó le rógún sí wọn lọ̀wọ̀ gbogbo
Ṣùgbọ̀n gbogbo rẹ̀ n jẹ́ ọ̀tubántẹ̀.
Bí ó ti wu Olúwa ló n sesé Rẹ̀ (Ewì Adébayò Fálétí Ìwé Kínní 1982:6).*

There was a woman at Àjàṣẹ̀
Long time ago before I was born
The woman gave birth like bed bug
She gave birth until they are many
Àjàṣẹ̀ woman gave birth to eight children
They were bootless, they were feckless
They were walking vagrantly about the town
There was nothing they didn't try
So that they might all have money

But to no avail.
As it pleases God, so he works

The poet condemns the way the woman gave birth to many children who are reckless. Contrary to this, Yorùbá women rejoice at experiencing and desire the joy of motherhood, nursing and nurturing children and watching them develop and prosper. Unfortunately, the woman's children in "Èḍá Kò Láròpín" did not prosper, let alone taking care of their mother due to no fault of theirs. The eight jobless brothers in "Èḍá Kò Láròpín" could not take care of their mother. Therefore, their mother's hope of giving birth to them was in vain because she died in abject poverty. However, the woman was glorified in death, and she became a point of reference for good. This glory and honour in death lend credence to the fact that motherhood is honourable despite the natural attendant problems and obligations attached to motherhood.

In Yorùbá world view, mothers are always hopeful that their children would support them in their old age. There is also a joyful hope that one's child would culturally bury one after death. Since the children in "Èḍá Kò Láròpín" could not take good care of their mother as expected when she was alive, people therefore opine that they cannot give their mother a befitting burial as custom demands. At the end of the story, the eight brothers in "Èḍá Kò Láròpín" though they were not physically or materially rich but because their mother nurtured them with wisdom and inculcated the societal norms and wisdom into them while alive, found this helpful in their day of need. With their cooperation and intelligence, they shamed their detractors by giving their mother a befitting burial.

The funeral ceremony of the mother of the eight brothers in "Èḍá Kò Láròpín" was the talk of the town and their detractors could not but praise them. Therefore, the poet's voice admonishes not to underrate anybody.

*E jòwọ́ ma ẹ ro ní ń pin
Ní torí ẹḍá kò l'áròpín
Èḍá nretí ẹlẹyà
Ní bo lẹ fi t'Olúwa sí
Ẹni t' ó bá wà n'ípò ọ̀tòsì
Bí ẹ bá n'ípa ẹ ẹ ẹ loore
B'èni à ọ̀ gbè nyí n, Allah yí ọ̀ gbè yí n
Ọba Olúwa ní n san oore fún ni (Ewí Adé́báyò Fálétí Ìwé Kínní 1982:21)*

Please do not underestimate anyone's future achievements
For a man's future achievements cannot be estimated
People expect that others should fail

Why don't they take God into consideration
 If there is someone who is poor
 If you can afford it, be kind to him
 If no one rewards you, God will reward you,
 It is God the king that pays back one's kindness.

People should not underestimate the prospects of the lowly but rather assist them. Despite the fact that the eight brothers in “Èḍá Kò Láròpin” were unable to care for their mother while she was alive, however despite their joblessness, despite being despised by their neighbors, they in the end were able to give their mother a decent burial.

Fálétí also exhibits women's ability to endure hardship. In “Èḍá Kò Láròpin,” the woman that gave birth to eight children endured hardship, she did not abandon her children but hoped for the best.

*Àwọn ènìyàn bèrẹ̀ sí maa fìyà sèrínrín
 Wọn ní sọ plólórí burúúku ló bí jọ lómọ
 Ìyá kò kò, ó gba kádàrà
 Ó ni iṣẹ̀ tó w'Olúwa l'ò ṣe (Ewì Adébayò Fálétí Ìwé Kínní 1982:6)*

People started ridiculing the woman
 They said all the children she gave birth to are unfortunate
 The woman did not resist, she resigns to fate
 She said the Lord does what pleases Him.

Due to myopic views and opinions about women in post-colonial Yorùbá society the burden of childrearing rests squarely on the mother. A well-behaved child belongs to the father, while an ill-mannered child belongs to the mother. The society blames a mother for the misfortune or failure of her children not minding the degree of labour that she puts in for her children's upbringing. In contemporary Yorùbá society, there are few women who cannot endure hardship and prefer to live a life of affluence, but the woman in “Èḍá Kò Láròpin” decided to stay with her children even till she breathed her last, and this negates peoples' belief that women are docile and weak.

The poet also portrays women as good adviser to their husband. Marriage is not only for procreation, but it is also for companionship. This shows the binary complementarity between genders. Gender role should be viewed as complementary rather than conflicting. In the poem, “Èḍá Kò Láròpin,” the head of the house to the eight jobless children was amazed when he was presented with a cow thigh cut during Ìyá Àjàṣẹ́'s burial. He then consulted

his wives for advice on what to give in return as present to the eight jobless brothers:

*È yin ì yà wó mi gbogbo
 È wá bá mi pé apéro
 Kí è bá mi ro ohun tí ó yẹ́ kí n ẹ́
 Ibi tí ẹ̀nu bá gbé jẹ́ o gó fà
 Ó yẹ́ kí á san o run
 Bí ẹ̀nu bá jẹ́ tan
 Ẹ́ lo ju ǹ tini (Ewì Adébáyò Fálétí Ìwé Kínní 1982:18-19)*

My wives
 Let's deliberate
 Think of what I can do
 Wherever the mouth eats much
 It should be able to pay some
 After eating
 One feels shy

Women are good advisers, they know what to do and the right steps to take when it is time to make special decisions. The senior wife advised the husband appropriately:

*Ní ì yalé bá fẹ́ sí sí ì
 Ó ní. Bí ẹ̀ni yàn yóò bá hu wà àgbà
 Tí yóò sí ẹ́ ẹ̀tọ́
 Ọkẹ́ mẹ́ wáá tí ẹ́ wí yí ì kéré
 Ó yẹ́ kí ó tó iruu rẹ́ mẹ́ta
 Ní wọ̀n fi ǹ mọ̀ni ní baálé gan-an
 Ọrọ́ wọ̀nyí dùn mọ́ baále ní nú (Olatunji 1982:19).*

The senior wife responded
 She said "if one will act like an elder"
 That will do the right thing
 Five hundred naira is small
 It should be up to three of that
 That is how to truly show you are the head
 The head is favorably disposed towards it.

It is obvious that with the advice of the senior wife, the issue of what the head of the house will give to the deceased's children was settled.

Adébayò Fálétí also asserts that women are supporters, helpers and lifters of men. In the poem “Ìgbéyàwó Kan Ní Ìletò Wa,” Fálétí narrates the predicament of Àkàndé, the village celebrity who is expected to dance during the day, thereby exposing his goiter to a community that has eagerly awaited an opportunity to reward him for his sociability and generosity.

Àkàndé is perturbed because the physically challenged and those suffering from one disease or another are stigmatized in his society. Àkàndé remembers a Yorubá adage that says: *ikú yá ju ẹ̀sín* (Death is preferable to disgrace) and decided to end his life. He therefore informed his wife thus:

*Ojò ikú ẹ̀nià kì í pé
Kí a fi a wáwí yẹ kú òhún lórùn ara ẹ̀ni
Àkàndé ní lóni í l'òun fẹ́ bínú kú
Nítorí àbùkù tí n bẹ́ ní sàkání òun
O ní ìtì jù ní l'òpòlòpò
B'aráíyẹ bá rí àlẹ̀bù pàtākì
Tí mbẹ́ lódò t'òun (Ewì Adébayò Fálétí 1982:50)*

When the day of a man's death comes'
He shouldn't find excuses to avoid that death
Akande said that in anger take his Life that day
On account of the deformity in his body
He said it was indeed a huge disgrace
If people should discover the big
Deformity on his body.

Àkàndé's senior wife, being a source of sustenance and pillar of support for her husband, advises him to desist from taking his own life. She encourages him to brace and face the challenge ahead of him with daunting courage and dance to people's admiration. Below is her advice:

*Ìyálẹ̀ Àkàndé bá tún l'ò í baa ní yàrá
Ó ní gbígbé ní kí ẹ́ gbé'tì jù tà
È yọ́jú sí gbangba
Kò sèni à tí yóò fi ó sèsin
Bó bá gbá hun t'Ólúwa fún ọ (Ewì Adébayò Fálétí 1982:50)*

Àkàndé senior wife went to him in the room
She said “You should abandon any sense of shame
Come into the open

There is no one who shall make
Fun of you
If you accept what God has allotted to you.

With the support and encouragement of his senior wife agreed to dance and came out in the open. Instead of ostracizing Akande, people danced and made fun of Akande's goiter and his fear was allayed.

Women are also portrayed as tale bearers by Fálétí. According to his poem "Írínisí" women can engage in tale bearing for as long as six days. The excerpt below attests to this:

*O sò fofó fò loooooo
Ìyáléélé i i sò fofó lo
Ní jò kẹ̀fà lo to wólé
O sò fofó loooooo (Ewì Adébáyò Fálétí Ìwé Kínní 1982:52)*

She is on tale bearing mission
The senior wife embarks on tale bearing mission
She did not return until after six days
She is on tale bearing mission

The poet is one of those people that believed that women generally are tale bearers and that they can engage in tale bearing for as long as they want. In contemporary society, women are no longer always in the kitchen. They are professional, career women who have little or no time for frivolity.

The poet, Fálétí, also portrays women as ones who engage in abortion and divorce their husband despite their age. The excerpt below corroborates this:

*Ọ̀rọ̀ gùdùgbẹ̀ máa bó
Kọ̀rọ̀ ó máa bó gùdùgbẹ̀ létè akọ̀rin
Lọ̀ jọ̀ adé lé bó n sò fofó
Lọ̀ jọ̀ arúgbó sẹ̀yún
Lọ̀ jọ̀ arúgbó kọ̀kọ̀
Àfikọ̀rọ̀ ó máa já gùdùgbẹ̀
Létè agbààà (Ewì Adébáyò Fálétí Ìwé Kínní 1982:52)*

Great words come forth
Let great word proceed out of
The poet's mouth
That day that married woman
Becomes tale bearer

That day that aged woman aborts
 That day that aged woman divorce
 Nothing but great words to proceed
 out of elder's mouth.

From the excerpt above, Fálétí expresses that aged and married women abort and divorce their husbands, and he thinks there is need to caution them. The poem mirrors the society and the poet is at liberty to comment on issues happening in the society. Some women may not like divorce but when the disagreement between them and their husband is between life and death, then it will be appropriate for the woman to leave the husband before the husband kill her untimely.

The women are also portrayed in Adé bá yò Fálétí's poem "Àwọn Obìnrin Tí Wọ́n Fẹ́ Ọ̀ṣọ́" as the one that is promiscuous, jealous, and engage in witchcraft. In the poem, Fálétí reveals that though women cry and become bitter when they lose their husbands, but if it is deeply investigated, most of the women in question are the ones responsible for the death of their husbands. In some parts of Yorùbá society, widows are subjected to dehumanizing rituals after the demise of their husband. This is different from one sub-culture to the other. For example, in some parts a widow is not expected to change the dress she wears from the moment of her husband's death until the twenty-first day after the death in some other areas. The hair of the widow is shaved off immediately after the death of her husband in some other areas. Due to the raw deal that women have in Yorùbá culture when it comes to mourning, women always pray that they and their husbands live up to old age. Contrary to this, Fálétí, in the excerpt below, portrays women as the ones who always want to mourn their husband:

*Mo kí gbogbo opó
 È kú i dárò ọ̀kọ́ yí n tó lọ
 Ọ̀ṣọ́n o, èyí n a gbàà gbà
 È má bá yá dárò ọ̀kọ́ rẹ tó kú
 Gbogbo aya ló fẹ́ ọ̀ṣọ́
 Orí ọ̀kọ́ ló nì kọ́kọ́ ó jaya lọ
 È bá beèrè lọwọ́ akéwí kó ọ̀sàlàyé
 Bá yá taa ní ẹ́ n fí gbogbo ara wákú ènì
 Hò wù! Opó má kèè mó
 Ọ̀ṣọ́ bí wọ́ náà ló tí fí kanra wákú ọ̀kọ́
 Iyàwó yan àlè àì tó
 Ọ̀kọ́ mó, aya ó jọ́kọ́ ó wí
 Ọ̀kọ́ bí nù kú tán*

Ayá a máa ké ni gbangba
Atèyí tó torí owu gba jé
Atèyí tó sòògun ì fẹ́
Tó sèèsì gbewọ́ fọ́kọ́ mì láì mọ́
Gbogbo aya ló fẹ́ sọpọ́
Gbogbo aya ló n fọgbọ́n wá kú ọkọ́ (Ewì Adébáyò Fálétí Ìwé Keji 1982:35)

I greet all widows
 Sorry for the demises of your husbands
 But, you, elders
 Don't sympathies with the wife that lost her husband
 All women want to be widow
 It is husband's destiny that he surpasses the wife
 You should have asked the poet for explanation
 Why one's wife will be looking for his death
 Enough! Widow stops crying
 You are the one that kill your husband with fretfulness
 The wife gets a concubine that is absurd
 The husband gets to know but the wife prevents him from talking
 The husband kills himself out of annoyance
 The wife is now crying openly
 What about the one that become witch due to jealousy
 What about the one that engages in love charms
 And Poison the husband out of ignorance
 All women want to be widow
 All women cunningly look for ways to kill their husbands.

A woman who is married to a man that cannot satisfy her sexual urge or a poor man that cannot provide adequately for her needs may get herself involved in a secret relationship with another man who is buoyant enough to satisfy her with gifts, food, clothing and money, and from whom she can maximally reach orgasm despite the fact that having extra-marital affair is not a thing of pride and is not acceptable. Having concubines in Yorùbá land is not strange but most concubines hide their identity. Fálétí in his poem "Àwọ̀n obìnrin Tí Wọ̀n Fẹ́ Sọpọ́" asserts that some women who are mysteriously powerful may go to the extent of revealing their concubine or even bring the concubine to their matrimonial home especially when the rightful husband is feeble or poor. When the husband in question gets to know that the wife is involved in extra-marital affair, the husband may kill himself. After the demise of the husband the wife sheds what Fálétí pictures as "crocodile tears"; a life of hypocrisy.

Fálétí also discusses the issue of women that practice witchcraft due to jealousy. There is a Yorubá adage which says: *orìsà jẹ́ n pé méjì obìnrin kò dénú* (a woman is not sincere when she prays that she wants a co-wife). In a polygamous setting, a man cannot but have a favorite wife and this always gives room to jealousy. If a man is not wise enough and try to be moderate in showing love to his wives, it may eventually lead to his untimely death.

Also, in search for love through diabolical means Fálétí opines that a woman can be given poison instead of love portion and this may lead to the untimely death of the husband of the woman in question.

Women are in close touch with one another and with men. They handle human body from the womb to the grave (Oṣepéfeyí tì mí, 1994:62). Therefore, they know the weakness of men, and they can exploit it for their own advantages. Hence, Fálétí advices men thus:

*È yin ọkùnrin tó n fí gbogbo ara tó jú aya
È má jẹ́ ẹ́ káyaa yí n ó ọ̀fọ̀
È má jẹ́ ẹ́ káyaa o ọ̀pọ̀ ẹ̀sì n léyì n yí n gbogbo
Bẹ́ẹ́ bá jì, ẹ́ máa fura
Gbogbo aya ló n fọ̀gbọ̀n wákú ọ̀kọ
Àfì k'É dumarè o gbé wa lékè aya ọ̀sì kà (Ewì Adébayò Fálétí Ìwé Keji
1982:36)*

Men that strive to cater for their wives
Don't allow your wives to mourn you
Don't allow your wives to be a useless widow after your departure
When you wake up, be vigilant
All wives cunningly look for their husband's death
Only God can save us from wicked wives.

Fálétí advises men to be vigilant at all time so that their wives will not catch them unawares and send them to their untimely grave.

Despite the fact that Fálétí portrays women as species who look for ways of killing their husbands, he also adds that there are women who have nothing to do with their husband's death.

*A mò wí pé aya àtàtà wà
T'É dumarè fi kú ọ̀kọ̀ ọ̀dánwò fún (Ewì Adébayò Fálétí Ìwé Keji
1982:35)*

We know there are faithful wives
That God made their husbands' death a temptation

Though some wives may not be sincere to their husband, and they may be looking for ways of eliminating or terminating their husbands' life, notwithstanding, there are loyal and faithful wives who care, love and cherish their husbands. This category of women the death of their husband is always a big and devastating blow to them.

Conclusion

Women are mysterious and naturally vastly different from men in appearance, character and behavior. Many researchers have said a lot of things about women. Women are everywhere but people's views about them differ. This work examines the portrayal of women in Adébáyò Fálétí's poetry. It has been established that Fálétí on the negative part portrayed women as tale bearer, jealous, promiscuous and as a specie that engages in witch-craft and always wants to mourn their husbands. On the positive end, he presents women as birth-givers to many children, the one that endures hardship, as advisers and supporters to their husbands. Fálétí as a poet did not only condemn vices in women but also extol the good virtues in them thereby striking a balance. Fálétí's portrayal of women in his poems negates the stereotype position of post-colonial Yorùbá society on women. He views gender roles among the Yorùbá as complementary rather than conflicting. This study concludes that the contribution of women to the development of humanity is as vital to all as those of men; therefore, there is need for redress that will enhance the status of women.

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