Xenophobia and Alienation. Apprehensions on the Integration of Migrants and Refugees

DR. GABRIELA GOUDENHOOFT[1]

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR PHD AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ORADEA, ROMANIA,
HEAD OF DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND COMMUNICATION

Abstract: The identity of the migrant and refugee communities is built at the intersection of the many perceptions and representations that the exiles form and that partially overlap and sometimes do not resemble their own representations at all.

The degree to which a host society opens up economically, politically, legally, but especially culturally towards the communities of migrants and refugees, as well as their real integration possibilities, is the stake of a dynamic game that is difficult to predict.

The problem of transnational groups, the polarization of the experiences of their integration, of dual belonging to the homeland of origin and the one of adoption, where the world is divided between "here" and "there", generates frustrations and specific reactions, including strengthening the function of the collective imaginary.

Xenophobia and alienation are secondary effects of these experiences and are sometimes generated by the poor management of public policies or by poor communication processes against a background of pre-existing prejudices and current crises.

Key words: EU, xenophobia, alienation, identity, prejudices, host society

INTRODUCTION

Migrants and refugees often face alienation and this particularly happens the more willing they are to integrate into the host societies. More often than not they face xenophobia, and then alienation and xenophobia can become related in several ways. Xenophobia is defined as fear or dislike against people from other countries, feelings manifested as a negative attitude or prejudice towards migrants or refugees. Wondering from where the force of prejudice comes from, Pierre-André Taguieff, examining the relationships with foreigners and more generaly with „otherness" defines xenophobia as „fear, and consequently the rejection, hatred, or desire for exclusion, of strangers"[1]. Mobilizing fears and aggression against foreigners, xenophobia is based on the false pretence of the threat to the political body that foreigners may pose.

Being a social construct of fear and oppression, alienation and marginalization of migrants cause discrimination, exclusion, hostility, and lead to insecurity, social isolation disconnection. Nevertheless, a vicious circle is been created increasing suspicion and hostility towards migrants and exacerbating their sense of alienation. When migrants are seen as outsiders and excluded from the

[1] **Pierre-André Taguieff,** *The Force of Prejudice: On Racism and Its Doubles*, **University of Minnesota Press, 2001.**

social, economic, political and cultural life of the host community they become targets for more and more discrimination: unequal access on the labour market, education, healthcare etc. This, in turn, can lead to further marginalization and social exclusion, contributing to the wider development of xenophobic attitudes among the host community.

Therefore, addressing the alienation of migrants is important in reducing xenophobia and promoting social cohesion. This can be achieved through policies and initiatives that promote inclusion, diversity, and equal access to resources and opportunities for all members of the society, regardless of their background.

XENOPHOBIA: SOCIAL CONSTRUCT AND DISCOURSE

Xenophobia is envisaged as a social construct since it is a societal phenomenon involving attitudes, behaviours and structures that marginalize and discriminate against individuals or groups based on their perceived otherness. Xenophobia isn't a natural phenomenon but something that communities and individuals construct and perpetuate through beliefs, stereotypes and actions. Nevertheless "prejudice, xenophobia, resentment, and hence racism may be seen as universal or natural for any group—an argument routinely used by all contemporary racist groups and parties, and presupposed by such racist slogans as "Les frangais d'abord," "British first," and the like"[2]. The types of slogans prioritizing nationalism are to be seen as problematic and harmful because they contribute to division, marginalization, exclusion based on race, ethnicity or nationality.

Xenophobia relates with other more benign social constructs like race, ethnicity, religion and nationality. Reflecting specific historical, cultural and social contexts in which it arises, xenophobia can differ in form and intensity across different societies and periods of time.

On the other hand, racism, prejudice and xenophobia have been conceived, quite often, as a discourse, composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of action, conceived as social practices that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which someone is speaking. Individuals are generally motivated in preserving or achieving positive social identities and xenophobia could be seen as "mechanisms through which positive distinctiveness and positive social identity are achieved"[3]. Also, one can examine xenophobia especially through the lens of critical discourse analysis. From this perspective xenophobia is not just a set of attitudes and behaviours but a specie of discourse that constructs social reality and identities, influencing public opinion and shaping policy and social practices. And when we say discourse, we mean all the ways in which language verbal and non-verbal is used in social life.

Teun Van Dijk is one of the most prominent scholars on discourse analytic studies of racism and on the discourse analysis method and racism theory. He examines the forces perpetuating racism as the discourses of elites in society.[4] Therewith, Van Dijk discusses how racist and xenophobic ideas are produced through language and discourse. Racist slogans are typically used by nationalist and populist movements and they reflect and reinforce xenophobia, fear, dislike, reluctance of people from other countries. This type of discourse is divisive and conflicting people by dividing them in opposite camps: "us" versus "them" implying that those who are not part of the „in-group" are less worthy or less deserving of rights, opportunities or resources. Discourses and slogans like this can oversimplify and distort the complex issue related to immigration, multiculturalism and national identity and they drive to alienation. They often imply a call to nostalgic notions like „historical and

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[2] Teun A. Van Dijk, *Elite Discourse and Racism*, Sage, London, 1993, p.174.
[3] Echabe, A. E., & Castro, J. L. G., "Images of immigrants: a study on the xenophobia and permeability of intergroup boundaries" in *European Journal of Social Psychology,* 26(3)*,* 1996, pp. 341–352, 342.
[4] Teun A. Van Dijk, op.cit.

homogeneous nations" ignoring modern nations which are not homogeneous but etherogenous, being shaped by a large variety of influences.

But xenophobic discourse is not only the prerogative of the elites. It can occur in various ways and social contexts: political speeches, media coverage, social media, literature, everyday conversations.

The xenophobic speech is recognizable, according to the critical analysis of the speech by the recurrence of specific patterns, tropes and themes such as:

Dehumanization or demonization and Othering – foreigners are depicted in dehumanizing/demonizing terms. In this way they are reduced to either harmful stereotypes or to scapegoats for societal problems. The process of "othering" can involve various stereotypes, depicting immigrants as criminals, terrorists, or economic burdens.

Politicians always uses the immigration topic in election campaigns to gain votes; local communities need someone to blame for budgets dissipation or for the budget's deficiency, people are dissatisfied, they are affected by economic crises, unemployment, crime and the easiest way of bearing all of this is to find a scapegoat. Romanians and Bulgarians are an ad-hoc group and have become the new bone to be chewed in any opportunity. They came from the South East of Europe, they are associated with poverty, lack of education, poor skills and qualifications, no German language proficiency, are predisposed to abuse social welfare burdening the system, increasing the crime and the extremity. And these allegations are documented with numbers. Statistically the percent of immigrants exploded. But sometimes numbers are deceitful. We presented some data showing that the number of Romanians and Bulgarians in Germany is actually not so big and the welfare benefits[5] are not as burdened by this group as it is claimed to be. Not every Romanian and Bulgarian is poor or uneducated, many of them are high qualified, skilful, able to adapt and easily to be considered an asset not a risk.[6]

After lifting the restrictions on the labor market, in the EU in January 2014, many Western countries used the Romanians and Bulgarians who were going to invade these countries as scapegoats. In fact, the lifting of work restrictions for Romanian and Bulgarian citizens "encountered much resistance both in European political discourse and the media, as these migrants became demonised and presented as social and economic threats. In this article, we show how the Romanian press dealt with such discriminatory discourses against the Romanian migrants"[7].

The Channel 4 documentary series *The Romanians Are Coming*, stressing the unfair depiction of the Romanian immigrants through its disproportionate focus on extreme poverty and the Roma community[8] is an example of inflamatory rethoric in the UK.

In fact, the very modest number of Romanians and Bulgarians coming to work in UK is in high contrast to the inflammatory rhetoric used by populist politicians in their xenophobic and anti-immigration speeches.

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[5] An example of Welfare benefit is **Arbeitslosengeld II**, **ALG II** or **Hartz IV**, which was an well-known type of financial assistance in Germany until 2023, when it was replaced by *Bürgergeld*, helping people in need to pay for basic needs when they have no income.

[6] Gabriela Goudenhooft, "Romanian and Bulgarian – Communication and Stereotypes about the Eastern European Integration Issues", în *Studii Europene- ECSA Moldova,* ISSN 2345-1041, nr.5/2015, pp.203-218, Mihaela Daciana Natea, Protecting Traditional Knowledge through Historical Arguments, Studia Universitatis Petru Maior Historia, an 2017, pp. 173-178

[7] Breazu, P., & Eriksson, G. Romaphobia in Romanian press: The lifting of work restrictions for Romanian migrants in the European Union. *Discourse & Communication*, *15*(2), pp.139–162, 2021.

[8] Andreescu, F. C. (2019). The Romanians Are Coming (2015): Immigrant bodies through the British gaze. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, *22*(5–6), 885–907.

"US VERSUS THEM" MENTALITY

A xenophobic discourse often constructs a binary between "us" (members of a dominant or majority group from the host society) and "them" (members of minority or immigrant groups), source of division, exclusion and hostility.

"Us versus them" mentality refers to a perception structured on a fundamental dichotomy between two groups and creating a fictitious in-group and an out-group where the in-group is invested with positive features and characteristic, whilst the out-group is depicted in a negative way; the two groups are also in competition and in conflict for limited resources.

The identity of the in-group (the host society is often contrasted with migrants' identity even with regard to their own society. There is a criticism of migrants as renegades, "those who leave" coming from their own society of origin. The Romanians for instance developed an "us versus them mentality" about "those who left" to earn much more money, to have a better life versus "us who stayed" even in hard communist times, eating "soya beans". Labelling migrants as "renegades" one simplifies and misrepresents the diverse motivations for migration. There are harsh realities grounding migration: economic crises, political instability, persecution, natural disasters, and many of them are often beyond individual control. Shifting the blame for societal problems onto those who leave, rather than examining systemic issues within the society might be contributing to migration. Also looking down on migrants and seeing them as renegades fails to consider the emotional and psychological toll of migration. Leaving one's home is often dramatic and challenging by the prospect of integrating into a new society, learning a new language, adapting to a new culture, and coping with the potential of social support networks. Blaming those who leave one forgets the potential benefits of migration, the contribution of remittances, boosting economies, acquiring new skills and knowledges abroad and implementing them when returning home. Creating division between migrants and the home society perpetuates resentments and mistrust on both sides, damaging the potential for positive harmonious relations and mutual support.

An illustration of this picture is Romania, where there were voces expressing "Romanian' hostility towards those who left Romania, not paying taxes and contributions to the healthcare system even though they have family (old parents and children) at home to take care of, towards those who forgot to contribute to education, healthcare, social assistance, but dare to criticize the system, towards the IT specialists who do not pay any taxes and expect quality and good services from a country they no longer support"[9]. According to this mentality diaspora does not qualify for a vote because "they left the country for selfish reasons, they do not contribute to the country's welfare, they don't know and don't care about much"[10].

The host society may perceive migrants as competitors for jobs: "They are taking our jobs", developing a form of economic anxiety, which is a common sentiment in times of economic crises particularly, based on the belief that migrants, due to their willingness to work for lower wages or in unfavourable conditions, could displace native workers, leading to jobs losses or wage suppressions among the local population.

In this context, politicians' discourses, subordinate to their electoral agenda, circulate through various media the anti-migrations topic; some of them have a populist justification, whilst others come from a larger, European context of broader radicalization of the right wing, anti-migration and xenophobic ideologies. Not incidentally, the influence of representatives of the critical discourse analysis school (CDA) labelled politicians' discourses as containing elements of the new strategy of

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[9] Gabriela Goudenhooft, *Going back home through one's language. Romanian diaspora in Germany,* Editura Nomos, Baden Baden, 2016, p.55.
[10] Ibidem.

racism (Euro-racism and xeno-racism) (Wodak, Van Dijk, Bulmer, Solomos, Lentin, Essed, Cole etc.)[11].

The resentment might occur from labour market misunderstanding, in regards to the various number of jobs in an economy, where migrants can actually stimulate economic growth or fill the roles that local workers are unwilling or unable to perform. Migrants can also supply sectors like healthcare, IT, or agriculture. The narrative of migrants "taking jobs" can be used as a political tool (scapegoat strategy) by some politicians in order to stir up nativist sentiments and to divert attention from other issues in the host society.

NATIVISM OR NATIONALISM

Xenophobic discourse often appeals to nationalist sentiments, asserting or emphasizing the superiority or rights and the primacy of the native-born or dominant ethnic group. They claim that the interests and rights of native-born or majority-group citizens should be prioritized over those of immigrants and or minorities. It can be exemplified in slogans like "France for the French", "America first etc.

The prioritization of citizens' need**s** over immigrants' or minorities', disregards the ethical perspective, as citizens and minorities or migrants should be equally perceived and treated; one should prioritize human rights and social justice, asserting that everyone deserves access to resources and opportunities. From this point of view, prioritizing citizens against others is discrimination. The idea that citizens are paying taxes and have a long-term vested interest in the society is often related to the perspective of limited resources an economic stability. There are deferring views about whether and to what extent a country has obligations to non-citizens, and they are often influenced by political ideologies, economic conditions, cultural norms, and individual beliefs.

Slogans like "France for the French", "America first" and so on, involve a nationalist perspective together with the belief that the nation's culture and interests should be prioritized above all else and it can lead to policies that favour the majority or dominant group at the expense of minorities or outsiders. These slogans can also be interpreted as a form of populism because populist movements are usually claiming to represent "ordinary people" against a perceived elite or establishment. This political rhetoric promotes specific politic identities and generates debates.

The 'belonging' feature is revisited in relation to a nation and nativist feelings are resuscitated. Cas Mudde defines nativism as entailing "a combination of nationalism and xenophobia. It is an ideology that holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group ('the nation') and that non-native (or 'alien') elements, whether persons or ideas, are fundamentally threatening to the homogeneous nation-state"[12]. According to Mudde, "in Europe the nativism of the populist radical right has mainly targeted 'immigrants' (including guest workers and refugees) in the West and 'indigenous minorities' (e.g. Hungarians or Roma) in the East. The basis of the nativist distinction can be multifold – including ethnic, racial, and religious prejudices, which are often combined in one form or another. For example, Islamophobia, the prime nativist sentiment of the contemporary populist radical right, combines ethnic, religious, and sometimes even racial stereotypes. At the same time, populist radical right parties will use both socio-economic and socio-cultural motivations to 'justify' their nativism'[13].

In Fukuyama's view, national identity got a bad reputation lately "because it came to be associated with an exclusive, ethnically based sense of belonging known as ethno-nationalism. This type of identity persecuted people who were not part of the group and committed aggressions against

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[11] Gabriela Goudenhooft op.cit.2016, p.58.
[12] Cas Mudde, *The populist radical right : a reader*, Routledge, New York, 2017, p.26
[13] Ibidem.

foreigners on behalf of co-ethnics living in other countries. The problem, however, was not with the idea of national identity itself; the problem was the narrow, ethnically based, intolerant, aggressive, and deeply illiberal form that national identity took"[14].

Resentment and loss of status, fear of displacement are feelings and themes often associated with nativism (Hochschild, 2018) driving political attitudes and actions. Nationalism is in fact a political principle (Brubaker, 2019), holding that political and nation should be congruent, often related to discourse and power. Even though they are distinct nationalism and populism can combine in various ways.

INVASION AND THREAT

The idea behind is that immigrants and foreigners are invading the country threatening its security[15], culture or resources, with narratives of being overwhelmed or "swamped" by immigration.

The "immigration threat narrative" or the "nativism" has been part of the political and social discourse in many countries for a long time. It is grounded on fear and flourishes mainly in economic crisis periods, cultural change, social instability, perceived as threats to national security. Associated with this idea, the narrative often portrays immigrants and refugees as potential security risks, forgathering them with crime and terrorism. Several studies consistently argue against this idea showing that immigrants are less likely to commit crimes than native-born citizens (Adelman & all., 2016)[16]. In fact, the relationship between immigration and crime is complex, depending on socioeconomic status, community support systems, education, the role of policing and criminal justice systems and so on.

The narrative also depicts immigrants as taking away jobs from native citizens and driving down wages. Even if this is possible in some sectors and regions one should notice the overall positive contribution of immigrants to economies, filling roles in different sectors, contributing as taxpayers and consumers etc.

FEAR-MONGERING

Xenophobic discourse often involves the spread of fear, particularly fear of immigrants or foreigners. This fear is related usually to crime, economic competition, cultural change, or threats to national security or identity.

Invoking threatening narratives about outsiders or "others", xenophobic discourse spreads fear and this idea was documented from differing academic perspectives:

From a socio-linguistic perspective, fear is generated through dehumanizing or threatening language. As we already mentioned above immigrants are often framed as a "wave" or "invasion", an image with anxiety potential of being "overwhelmed" or "taken over" by them. Also, they are depicted as dangerous or harmful groups.

From a psychological perspective, the fear capitalizes on innate in-group/out-group biases. As scholars documented, there is a natural tendency for individuals to favour their own group (the in-

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[14] Francis Fukuyama, *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment,* Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018, New York, p.107.
[15] Natea Mihaela Daciana, "Identitate națională și proprietate intelectuală", în Actele Unirii, Cornel Sigmirean, Silviu Moldovan, Cristina Preutu, (coord.), Editura Hamangiu, București, 2018
[16] Adelman, R., Reid, L. W., Markle, G., Weiss, S., & Jaret, C., „Urban crime rates and the changing face of immigration: Evidence across four decades", in *Journal of Ethnicity in Criminal Justice*, 15(1), 2016, pp. 52–77. The study illustrates haw immigration impacted the decress of crime and violent behaviour in Usa for a period of time from 1970 to 2017.

group) and to discriminate others (the out-group) (Stephan and Renfro, 2002). Exacerbating this bias one could lead to heightening fear and aggression.

From a political science perspective fear is a potent tool in xenophobic discourse used for manipulation and control and this discourse is often transformed into propaganda. Leaders can consolidate power, justify questionable policies, even rally support by stirring up fear.

From a media studies perspective, fear in xenophobic discourse is often amplified through sensationalist reporting and misinformation. Media can contribute to the dissemination and amplification of xenophobic sentiments by uncritically publishing fear-inducing narratives.

CULTURAL PURITY AND LOSS

The main idea of this perspective is that immigration and multiculturalism threaten the "purity" or traditional identity of the nation.

There is a concern regarding the influx of migrants or refugees perceived as a threat to the "imagined purity" or traditional identity of nations. But the assumption of a pre-existing "purity" in any nation's identity is questionable since national identities are complex and multifaceted constructs that have evolved over time, influenced by a lot of factors: geography, history, cultural exchange, political dynamics, economic developments etc. Nations have history that include migration, cultural influences, a mix of languages and religious influences and several melted traditions. The impact of colonialism and of Imperialism are also to be taken into consideration as factors shaping national identities. From a Constructivist perspective, nations are dynamic social constructions influenced by shared history, collective memory, state institutions, governed by a permanent reconstruction over the time. Globalization has accelerated the blending of cultures and identities. Transnationalism has brought not only economic flows of goods and money, but flows of ideas, people and information across national borders, making national identities more fluid and complex.

Also, these ideas on "purity" can involve nostalgia for a supposed past when society was more homogenous as opposed to a present where hybridity, creolization, mixture occurred. But the problem of using terms as *hybridity* comes from the odd nature of the term in biology and from the untruthfulness of the assumption of a pre-existing purity that one would come back to somehow. On the other hand, the term is related to the idea of being halfblooded, which implies inferiority and abnormality.[17] The very idea of a "pure" national identity is being tied to narratives and myths delivered and propagated for political and ideological reasons.

One could not overlook the benefits of multiculturalism besides the challenges involved: diversity of thought, ideas, problem-solving approaches, innovation and creativity; significant economic benefits both for host and origin countries; cultural enrichment enhancing the quality of life and broadening horizons for all members of society; social cohesion and mutual understanding shaping a stronger society; global understanding and cooperation between nations; many cultural and educational perspective and diverse learning environments onto the educational systems, and last but not least tolerance and empathy, enriching human values, challenging preconceptions, reducing prejudices and promoting mutual acceptance.

ALIENATION. WHY DOES IT MATTER?

If integration represents the ideal, the positive concept and the goal for both migrants and the host society, alienation is the risk and the opposite term with negative connotation and effects for both migrants and communities. The term is labelled as a "chaotic concept", individualized,

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[17] Goudenhooft, op.cit.

contested and contextual[18], but it's applied to a framework of several core domains: "employment, housing, education and health, assumptions and practice regarding citizenship and rights; processes of social connection within and between groups in the community; and barriers to such connection, particularly stemming from lack of linguistic and cultural competences and from fear and instability"[19].

Integration is the process that involves migrants and refugees establishing a new life and feeling at home in the new society.

Migrant alienation is an experience of social isolation, but at the same time a dislodgement from one's self, from one's identity, from the values that formed someone. This can cause harm in very different ways: social, economic, moral, psychologic and even as political marginalization of people and communities.

Social alienation challenges the possibility of integration in host societies. Migrants are often facing challenges in integrating into social networks, they face social exclusion from community participation, they are overwhelmed by feelings of isolation.

Economic alienation implies the difficulty in finding employment, recognition of foreign qualifications, lower wages compared to native-born individuals, unfair working conditions, leading to economic marginalization.

Cultural alienation refers to cultural differences between the homeland and the host land. It might include differences in languages, social norms, life philosophy, values, customs and so on.

Political alienation is about lack of political rights and political participation, the representation of the migrant in the host country is often affected, leading to feelings of political disempowerment.

Discrimination and prejudices from the host country can intensify psychological alienation among migrants. Unfair or prejudiced treatment of different categories of people, particularly on the grounds of race, ethnicity and so on, can have a negative impact on migrants intensifying their sense of alienation. They feel disconnected both from the origin country and from the host society. They experience feelings of isolation and loos, loneliness and lack of belonging.

Alienation can lead to fragmentation of society and increase social tensions. This can be deciphered in the decrease in participation in communal activities and civic engagement. In the context of labour, alienation negatively impact the productivity, job satisfaction, and work-life balance.

Psychological effects lead not only to loneliness and isolation but often drive to stress and affect mental health, where depression and anxiety occur.

Alienation can lead to increased political unrest and instability. Alienated individual might feel disenfranchised and disengage from political processes, or they may channel their dissatisfaction into protest movements or radical ideologies. Many studies document the relationships between marginalization, alienation and radicalization (Kosrokhavar, 2017, Bhui et all, 2014, Schmid 2013, Silber &Bhatt 2007) etc. Farhad Khosrokhavar[20] emphasizes in his book, *Radicalization*, the role of social, economic, and political alienation in the process of radicalization, arguing that a sense of marginalization and identity crisis, often experienced by second-generation immigrants, can make individuals susceptible to extremist ideologies which are spreading nowadays especially due the internet on various platforms, where individuals are seeking for a sense of community and belonging. The author ends his book showing that beside the individual responsibility or religious or ideological

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[18] Robinson, V., "Defining and Measuring Successful Refugee Integration", Proceedings of ECRE International Conference on Integration of Refugees in Europe, Antwerp, November 1998. Brussels: ECRE.

[19] Ager, A., & Strang, A., „Understanding Integration: A Conceptual Framework", in *Journal of Refugee Studies,* 21(2), 2008, pp.166–191.

[20] Farhad Khosrokhavar; Jane Marie Todd, *Radicalization: Why Some People Choose the Path of Violence,* The New Press, New York, 2017.

radicalism we have to addres "the malaise of modern socie ties— which Durkheim viewed as a relaxation of the social bond— combined with economic exclusion within a mass culture that is egalitarian by its very essence" which gives rising to "a new malady" - radicalization. "If citizenship is defined as economic and social integration into a society, then the affliction of some while others prosper in a globalized world devoid of true global citizenship will continue to haunt all citizens in the form of radicalized terrorism"[21].

So the reason why alienation and lack of social cohesion matter nowadays is not only because they affect marginalized people, migrants and refugees but also because they endanger our societal stability and hope for a peaceful world.

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