

Archie Mafeje Research Institute for Social Policy (AMRI) College of Graduate Studies (CGS)

Identity: Does Social Cohesion exist? Engaging Issues of
Diversity and National Identity in South Africa.

A Proceedings Report of the ROUNDTABLE DIALOGUE held
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Preface

The Archie Mafeje Research Institute for Social Policy (AMRI) has undertaken to host a series of national roundtables on selected themes that include the themes of Power, Knowledge and Identity; Conflict, Violence and Ideology; State Governance and Social Justice; Development, Inequality and Poverty; Land Reform, Agrarian Questions and Agricultural Questions; and finally African Social Formations, African Families and Social Policy. The roundtables bring together academics, practitioners, political, religious and community leaders with knowledge and expertise on the selected themes to assist with preparing policy recommendations.

The roundtables have a similar format. AMRI invites leading thinkers to contribute to the discussion and to offer ideas that we wish for participants to consider. Participants are requested to offer their viewpoints, comments and to ask questions of the speakers and the discussants. A rapporteur will produce a report based on the proceedings of the roundtable.

The published proceedings will inform ordinary members of the public of the issues raised and addressed in the roundtable discussions. It is anticipated that publication of the roundtable proceedings will prompt further consideration of the ideas and debate captured in the reports and encourage South Africans to attend and facilitate debate at the public hearings or to make written submissions with further thoughts and recommendations to AMRI. The intention is that these discussions not serve merely as vanity platforms with little impact but rather that the issues raised assist with general understanding and consciousness.

We are deeply indebted to presenters, discussants and participants on the Identity Roundtable for their contributions. This proceedings report is intended to stimulate further dialogue and positive changes in policy. Your views and recommendations on this important issue are welcome. We welcome your thoughts and ideas at the address set out elsewhere in this document and you are welcome to attend the AMRI roundtables and seminars.

Introduction

One of the biggest questions since 1994 has been South Africa's move towards building an integrated society based on respect and understanding. The Freedom Charter outlined the importance of nation building and the late President Nelson Mandela's dream was that people of all races, creeds and colours live together. Today, however, twenty years on, we are still asking ourselves; how far has that goal been realised? This roundtable dialogue on identity and social cohesion was conceptualised with these views in mind.

Specific objectives of the Roundtable were to:

- Stimulate awareness of the importance of investing in social cohesion and creating a collective national identity. To ensure that there is understanding, commitment and implementation in this area and that it is consistent with the principles of the Constitution.
- Identify key elements required for social cohesion, collectivity and diversity. While states can be erected, governments and the support state bureaucratic institutions can be created, but nation building requires an emphasis on the shared elements that bind citizens together.
- Recognising diversity but acknowledging collectivity. Creating national identity in a diverse nation is complex and it requires consistent effort to avoid inter-group tensions. Even if the society does not possess shared ethnicity, a common set of shared ideals, values and history will translate into a communal sense of identity.

Identifying nations with ethnic groups, of which South Africa has many that are other- and self-defined, is very narrow and outdated. Self-consciousness provides political awareness and this is often done through anthems, flags and memorials. National identity does not appeal necessarily to common blood or organic claims but instead can be part of an ongoing metamorphosis. Nations are malleable and self-defined requiring political leadership and social guidance. Defining the nation is a continuous process as the definition is not a given or a constant but rather it is in flux – taking on new characteristics and discarding others. This is the growth of nations and the growth of populations and the growth of a country. If nations did not grow and transform and instead remained static, South Africa would not have transitioned from racial separateness and exclusion to a moderately racially tolerant society.

South Africans have the freedom in political expression but what are they saying about their collective South African identity? National identity is an expression of social cohesion; it incorporates a sense of belonging, generating deep feelings, and expressing history, language and experiences. There are heroes, iconic figures, who fought and died for the liberation of the country but many are unfamiliar with their names and their struggles. South Africans remain informed of their past classified identities that highlight their cultural identities as primary. These same identities promoted separateness/difference rather than unity. To proceed we require a group identity and an assertion of a community that requires commitment and an acceptance of a nation's common values. The identity must be broad and inclusive rather than exclusive and

discriminatory, but it must engender liberal nationalism. Rejecting ethnicity is unrealistic in an environment where hierarchical racialised and culturalised identities were salient for centuries. Ancestral and kinship relations are secondary to the psychological bond of uniqueness, but simultaneously the consciousness of togetherness that extends beyond language. Nationalism, the collective politicised identity of common origin, does not make South Africans chauvinists or jingoists; rather it presents citizens with a sense of pride in their territory and its people in a common identity.

To prosper a state requires a national identity as a necessary condition for self-determination. Ethnicity is not the past but collective identity is our future - we require these convictions.

Defining national identity is complex; it has been argued to be racial, culturalist, ethnicist and therefore exclusionist. However, it can also be tolerant, diverse, engaging and inclusionist. It is emotional, psychological and sentimental evoking feelings of unity, collectivity and boundaries. Although unpalatable to many, nationalism provides these emotional and value-laden attachments. You cannot have national identity without nationalism. You cannot have national identity without markers of identity to inculcate pride and the desire to build and strengthen the nation. For too long South Africans have not known, nor understood, the right to a country that requires nurturing. The desire for self-interest needs to be curtailed and the notion of sacrifice and empowerment must be promoted.

If you do not value your country then who will? There is an urgent need to move from rhetoric to action to ensure that South Africans feel a sense of national identity. Often an important factor in forging national identities is a common language; a shared 'original criminal history', for example a violent event such as a war; subjugation of a particular population group and/or the movement of borders. We cannot ignore that South Africans cannot follow the above pathways without cementing the differences that have defined and characterised their identities as social memory. To achieve unity, consciousness and national pride may seem ambitious, but it can be achieved through:

- Creating an emotional conscious dimension of national identity and a love for the nation. The multiethnic states require patriotism and nationalism. Walker Connor argued that patriotism and nationalism are not the same. Patriotism is the loyalty to the state whereas nationalism is the loyalty to the people. Scholars, such as Peter Alter (1985), argue that patriotism is an old concept compared with nationalism that according to Anthony Smith (1994) is linked to the French Revolution. Regardless of the arguments put forward in both scenarios there is respect for the state institutions that allows the population to gain a sense of common experience and therefore an identity with other South Africans.

- Symbols around which the population develops a sense of common identity. Through the use of nationalism there is knowledge of the flag, works of art, national anthems, architecture, currency, passports and pride in the land, the people and their accomplishments and contributions. National socio-political interests must inspire loyalty and reinforce national consciousness.
- *Raison d'être* for the nation is its values located in a particular territory. The territorial space allows the nation to express itself and give relevance to the population there. A state without a reason for *being* will not receive commitment and loyalty from its people and such misgivings can lead to fragmentation and the salience of particularistic identities that are divisive.
- Transmission of commonality through communities. The nation considers itself a community, in a rhetorical sense, but the family unit and other social institutions form part of a tangible experiential community. The success of generational reproduction of the symbols contributes to the stability and longevity of national identity, social cohesion and commitment to the values of the state.

The national government already plays a critical role in encouraging social cohesion in the country. For example, the government, through the Department of Arts and Culture, convened a National Summit on Social Cohesion from 4-5 July 2012 at Walter Sisulu Square of Dedication, Kliptown, Soweto. The Department of Arts and Culture argued that social cohesion was based on four key pillars namely diversity, inclusiveness, access and values. It defined social cohesion as the degree of social integration and inclusion in communities and society at large, and the extent to which mutual solidarity finds expression among individuals and communities. This ensures that inequalities, exclusions and disparities based on ethnicity, gender, class, nationality, age and disability, or any other categorisations that fuel divisions, distrust and conflict, are reduced or eliminated in a planned and sustained manner (Dept of Arts and Culture). There is therefore a need for a conceptualisation of diverse identities that would enhance social cohesion in the country.

The Roundtable brought together individuals who are invested in nation building – including members of government, academics, students and educators – to stimulate awareness of the crucial issues surrounding social cohesion, diversity, nationalism and patriotism. There was a particular emphasis on internalising the ideas and values required in a nation. Participants came together to share their knowledge, experiences and observations of the most effective and efficient methods to initiate, replicate or support viable programmes. Through this process the Roundtable was able to build upon the dialogue started by other advocates before us.

Setting the context

The Hon. Thoko Didiza, a Member of Parliament of the Republic of South Africa also a consultant at the Archie Mafeje Research Institute for Applied Social Policy (AMRI) was the Programme Director of the proceedings of this Roundtable dialogue. Hon. Didiza emphasised the importance of raising the discussion of national identity and social cohesion in South Africa. She reminded the audience that twenty years into democracy, the society is still struggling to find a shared common national identity.

Honourable Didiza noted that during the budget debates in the National Assembly of our 5th democratic Parliament, Honorable Lindiwe Maseko raised an important question to the South African Broadcasting Cooperation on whether as part of Nation building it should not open and close with the National Anthem. In her view, this gesture by the broadcasting cooperation would constitute the building blocks for social cohesion and nation building. Within the same week, the Prime Minister of Britain, His Excellency David Cameron raised the need for teaching British values. Of interest was how our own print and electronic media treated these two statements coming from our respective legislators. In South Africa, there was much skepticism regarding the proposal from Hon. Maseko, yet the Prime Minister Cameron's call from Britain was newsworthy and important to their socio-political development.

These debates which are not confined in the media, but very much in our society are important and require in-depth probing. We must reflect on how we regard the Constitution and how we internalise its acknowledgement of our diversity. How do we foresee unity within this framework? Similarly how do we ensure that in building a national identity we do not sow divisions with those who may not belong to the national geography and also those who do not possess citizenship? These concerns must be noted because collective national identity should transcend race, culture and religion.

The fundamental relationships that define us as South Africans are vitally important. These relationships will bind us together in moving toward a shared future. The first element that binds us as South Africans together is a shared history. Our rich Constitution is a testament to that history. It is a social compact that carefully defines our togetherness and accords rights and exacts obligations from each of us.

*– National Development Plan
Vision 2030*

Hon. Didiza highlighted that this Roundtable dialogue was only the beginning of a series of discussions of social cohesion in the country, which is of vital importance considering the historical, social and economic legacies that minimised the contributions of the majority of citizens.

The proceedings commenced with an official opening and welcome speech delivered by Professor Lesiba Teffo, Director of the School of Transdisciplinary Research Institutes (STRI), College of Graduate Studies (CGS), UNISA. Professor Teffo opened the Dialogue by a call to all in the audience to contribute towards the crafting or building of a South Africa we want, modelled along an inclusive society that was envisaged by the late President Nelson Mandela. Professor Teffo asked if since 1994, there has been progress towards the building of such an inclusive society. He, however, cautioned that social cohesion is not a project that could be completed overnight, but a lifelong programme that everyone should work towards with a sense of the country they want to build. Professor Teffo then declared the roundtable dialogue officially open.

The speakers, the Honourable Lindiwe Maseko, the presenter, and the discussant, Professor Wendy Isaacs-Martin introduced different approaches to interpreting and implementing methods to inculcate national identity. Both speakers highlighted the need for commitment towards implementation of national identity symbols and historical narratives. However, each used a different approach and methodology understanding for the interpretation and implementation of viable strategies. Each contributor conveyed an optimistic approach in a collaborative way. The discussion brought together different approaches from the theoretical to the daily reality of lived experiences. The structural aspect of communities influences the manner in which identities, including national identity, are informed then constructed. It is from that point that we initiate the discussion in understanding national identity, social cohesion and diversity.

Does Social Cohesion Exist? Engaging issues of Diversity and Collective Identity in South Africa?

The speaker was Hon. Lindiwe Maseko, Member of Parliament of the Republic of South Africa and Speaker; Gauteng Provincial Legislature.

Honourable Lindiwe Maseko introduced the Roundtable discussion to the notion of nation building and national identity. She began by reminding the audience that the roundtable dialogue was being held during the month of September when the nation was celebrating its Heritage and also remembering the tragic death of one of the country's outstanding revolutionaries, Steven Bantubonke Biko, and his immense contribution in the struggle for a democratic South Africa, and a time when the country was celebrating twenty years of hard-fought democracy. Attempting to define social cohesion, Hon. Maseko quoted Shelagh Gastro and Tariq Mellet of Inyathelo

who argued that while much of the initial literature on social cohesion attempts to define the paradigm, descriptions are expansive with little overlap. Tangible definitions are rare, with research bodies showing little effort to define it. An International comparison of definitions and terms by the Department of Canadian Heritage, for example, revealed that neither the EU and the OECD, nor the Council of Europe have official or working definitions of the concept. While the OECD's vision for social cohesion puts emphasis on the right to *economic wellbeing*, the Council of Europe stresses *democratic citizenship*, and the EU, *solidarity* (Jeannotte, 2000).

Hon. Maseko thus highlighted that it was this flexibility and variety of definitions that led some social scientists to classify social cohesion as a quasi-concept or hybrid concept. Citing the Commissariat General du Plan of the French government, she described social cohesion as a set of social processes that help instil in individuals the sense of belonging to the same community and the feeling that they are recognised as members of that community. She argued that while social cohesion was often contested, there is some consensus that social cohesion is present in societies to the extent that societies are coherent, united and functional, and provide an environment within which its citizens can flourish. In other words, social cohesion is what holds societies together, and a key component for social cohesion, is social justice. This is a measure of the extent of fairness and equity in terms of access to and participation in the political, socio-economic and cultural aspects of society.

Hon. Maseko strongly believes that using symbols such as the national flag and national anthem can help in creating a unified nation. She thus argued that “We need educate the people we represent, with special focus on learners and young people on the national symbols, especially the national flag and the national anthem. Every school should hoist the flag, know its meaning and foster patriotism around it. Likewise, the anthem is not something we should only remember during international events; the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) should play the national anthem every day.”

She highlighted how, when growing up in Soweto (at the height of the apartheid era), they had limited options of television or radio stations to listen to. While we did not agree with the establishment of the Bantustans, we had an option of listening to radio and television stations of Bophuthatswana where they used to play the rendition of their national anthem at 06h00, 12h00, 18h00 and 00h00 daily. So, whether they liked it or not, the lyrics always permeated their minds and they would recite them perfectly. This caused the Bophuthatswana community to have a notion of identity and the values attached to it through the national anthem. The need for repetition was central to the notion of inculcating a sense of common identity, love for the nation and the accompanying symbolism.

Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.

– John F. Kennedy

Hon. Maseko highlighted that there are some groups of people in post-1994 South Africa who do not know the national anthem. She remarked that, for example, on one occasion when a group of people was asked to sing the national anthem, an elderly woman stood up and began singing *Lefatshe leno la bo-rrarona* (this land of our forefathers). The woman was informed that that particular anthem was not the South African anthem but an anthem relegated to the past. For the Honourable Maseko it raised two important issues, firstly that this elderly woman still affixed identity to the old anthem and that secondly the South African anthem, a hybrid of *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika* (Lord bless Africa) and *Die Stem* (The Call) is not in totality a uniquely South African anthem. *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika* was a hymn that was later adopted as the national anthem of five African countries namely Namibia, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Each country, however, has its own unique national identity and values that are unique to the territory.

Hon. Maseko therefore argued that values and education are central to South Africans being informed of their national identity. She argued that as a people, as a nation and as South Africans, people have to work together to protect national symbols especially the national anthem and the flag even if not for the present generation, but doing it for the generations to come who do not know the racial divide we talk about and who do not see colour but South Africans, united in diversity and as a rainbow nation, ensuring that nation building, social cohesion and patriotism are taught in our schools, from kindergarten to tertiary level, or we will be failing the generation behind us.

For Hon. Maseko instructing learners to be patriotic is central to understanding their national identity. She considered that patriotism would inform learners of their role within and their contribution to their country. While this was not always popular, it was an effective manner to ensure that learners grew up into adults proud of their nation. The popular Jesuit Francis Xavier's assertion of "Give me a child until he is seven and I'll give you the man", is most apt here.

Hon. Maseko also argued that the state has a moral responsibility to lead the process of nation building, based on the above-mentioned principles. Given the fractured and divisive history in the country, everyone has a role to work hard to agree on those factors which bring us together rather than those which divide us. She argued that there was need to agree on a common set of values, norms and standards of what makes us South Africans, thus requiring immense self-sacrifice across racial lines and acting in the interest of what is best for humanity rather than that which is good for our immediate conditions. She highlighted the need to vigorously undermine the legacy of patriarchy, which discriminates against women in the nation-building process.

Hon. Maseko also noted that the scourge of poverty and underdevelopment in South Africa has both a racial and gender bias, which militate against efforts towards a common nationhood. This has to be overcome in this democratic dispensation to ensure equality across the nation in all spheres, racially and gender wise. According to Hon. Maseko, nation building, social cohesion, patriotism and Ubuntu, when embraced as our core values, will ensure that we guard jealously the gains and sacrifices of our freedom, that we fight and expose fraud and corruption in our

society and share a dream of building a clean and accountable government that deploys public resources to assist the most vulnerable in our society and enable all citizens to live productively and meaningfully. In this quest, she reminded of the responsibility each individual has towards achieving this by drawing from JF Kennedy when he said "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country". The Father of our Nation the late Tata Nelson Mandela qualified it when he said: "The call now is for each of us to ask ourselves: are we doing all we can to help build the country of our dreams?"

Discussant: Professor Wendy Isaacs-Martin

The discussant was Professor Wendy Isaacs-Martin from that Archie Mafeje Research Institute for Social Policy. Professor Isaacs-Martin used a structural approach to explain the construction and internalisation of identity within communities. She framed her argument as a response to the discussion on national identity, diversity and social cohesion. The responsibility of manifesting identity lay with academics that are meant to inform others (political leadership and the public) of the socio-political realities. Academia should be the initiator, mediator and guide to the discussion of national identity.

The dichotomy of identity is a starting point to comprehending the complexity of national identity. Identity is a personal perspective of self yet it is informed by the social environment in which we exist. We are only as unique – the majority of us although there are exceptions always – as influenced, guided and tolerated by our environment. Therefore the identity we think of as unique is constructed within boundaries that we must maintain if we want to belong and/or to be accepted as another within the group. How is national identity constructed? Is it different from other identity formation?

Identities are constructed through proximity, experience, boundaries and sentiment. Proximity can best be described in terms of the closeness to symbolism, the family and the social environment. While the interpretation of the symbols (e.g. religion, history, cultural experience) is not interpreted in exactly the same way by everyone in a particular environment such as a community, it is shared to the extent that all those who identify with the symbols have a common interpretation. Experience arises out of social life and how individuals draw on the symbols into their daily experience. The experience of these symbols assists in developing the person's identity. It is initially not a conscious undertaking but later many individuals begin to question how they have internalised symbolism and characteristics.

Symbols are imbued with meaning for individuals and communities but they are subject to change. Symbols are never constant but are adaptable; although the perception is that they are tradition. Depending on the information received and the experiences individuals have, the symbols take on meanings that are relevant to particular situations. These experiences occur

within boundaries. These boundaries are the distinctions that communities make between themselves and others and can take the form of a road, river and mountain, but often it is linked to consciousness. Communities are located and defined within boundaries that define those within and those considered outsiders. Often communities use the consciousness to manifest the physical, creating spatial difference to separate themselves through language, clothing, rituals and belief systems. This interpretation of the symbols is emotionally dense. This leads to issues of sentiment regarding the symbols, experiences and the proximity that creates understanding located in time and space. This is located in a community of particularistic identities.

Communities are informed of national identity but it is differentiated in the following manner. The national community is one in which the members do not know one another. Instead individuals are informed of the national community (the nation), but it is a spatial reality in which only a fraction of individuals will be identified and known. In reality the national community is reduced to existing and known communities namely that of family and/or neighbours and peers. The 'brothers' and 'sisters' in the 'father/motherland' remain abstractions. Instead we are informed of this relationship, but who informs us of that relationship? Therein lay the complexity of constructing, maintaining and sustaining a national identity.

Establishing national identities in diverse societies has adhered to a particular process. The method used has been to establish a singular ethnic and linguistic identity that is often assumed by outsiders to be the dominant (or uniform identity) in that particular state – hence the term the nation-state. However, there are no uniform nation-states with a single ethnic group that shares sentiment, culture and history in the same manner; nor do they experience symbolism in the same manner. The dominant identity is not representative of the majority of its inhabitants, in fact the national identity is often the largest ethnic group (or it can be the minority ethnic group who has achieved political authority and power) that will determine and define the national identity. Its application and method is universal, there is a single national identity and even where there are overtures to multiculturalism, the implication is that those communities are outsiders to the nation. So the understanding is that there are many cultures but they are distinct from the national identity.

South Africans display a paradoxical attitude when it comes to national identity (particularly at attempts to promote it). On the one hand the audience is apathetic to overtures of collectivity that can be as a result of overload. Yet, on the other hand there is a plea that little is done to promote a uniquely collective South African identity. Research shows that racial identities are regarded as salient over national identity in South Africa. Perhaps herein lay the problem, what is the collective identity? Can there be social cohesion (collectivity) and diversity (difference) at the same time? Can you form them simultaneously? In the current context of how national identity is formulated the answer is NO. It is particularly NO in a country where difference is salient and collectivity is secondary.

The formulation of identity is a process that requires inward as well as outward perspectives. Looking at other countries and the methods used to create the national identity is instructional for many new nations. It has taken European countries more than 200 years to formulate national identities and these have often been under strain from ethnic groups within the states that perceive their cultural/linguistic/regional/religious identities as salient, but few demand self-determinism. Let's not forget how long it took Europe to construct the sovereign states before national identity as a result of popular sentiment could exist beyond elite identities and interests. Europe had to overcome the Thirty Years' War and the Eighty Years' War to culminate in the Treaty of Westphalia (1648), yet several states remained at war after the treaty was signed. But this would lead to national self-determination and later inform us of *Que'est-ce qu'une Nation* (1882) and *La Réforme Intellectuelle et Morale* (1871) by Ernest Renan. Renan provides a collective multiculturalist approach to that of Johan Gottlieb Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation* (1808) that subscribes to the primordialist ethnic/linguist tribes in Gaius Tacitus' *Germania* (*De origine et situ Germanorum*).

The discussion on national identity cannot be solved with immediacy. It is a process in which ideas can be borrowed on the experiences of other nations, but its implementation within a particular state is individualistic. Like the European counterparts, identities take years, even decades, to be internalised on a level where it is accepted as a natural aspect of personal identity.

Discussion

During the discussion, participants argued that the prevalence of racism, ethnicity and xenophobia in South Africa are a serious threat to social cohesion in the country. Participants raised concern over the lack of national identity in the country and the challenge vis-à-vis influencing the youths of this country. Some of the identities assumed by some citizens are colonial constructs. As such there were some structural issues that needed to be addressed first by the government vis-à-vis social cohesion versus different-lived experiences. Some South Africans still identified themselves through their ethnic groups. All these were issues which needed to be addressed.

Outcomes

There was consensus that there was need to continue this dialogue and extend it to the public for contribution. This discussion was the benchmark standard for enhancing or 'scaling up' the debate on diversity and social cohesion. In future roundtable debates it is hoped that more speakers will contribute to the debate. Hon. Didiza noted that Arts and Culture Minister Nathi Mthethwa wants to inculcate South African national identity amongst school children. Every school will possess the national flag and it is further envisioned that all South Africans will know the national anthem in an attempt to forge unity and national identity. The minister is raising an issue that is of concern to many citizens.

CONCLUSION: THIS IS ONLY THE BEGINNING...

The Roundtable took a step to challenge prevailing notions that national identity in South Africa is either complete or that it is a pointless undertaking. The dichotomy in these approaches offers little understanding of the complexity of national identity, or in fact of identity formation. This discussion began with the voices from government and academia but it is imperative that it belongs to everyone. Nation building requires grassroots activity in all environments and regional contexts.

Central to this effort is the partnership between government, academic institutions and the population. This is a process that includes all individuals within the society regardless of age or cultural background. An effective partnership requires collective identity education for schools as indispensable to meaningful primary education and central to community construction and boundary formation. Rather than a collective national identity that exists on the periphery of the community boundary, it should be enmeshed with the community identity.

It must be acknowledged that the youth are key participants in informing their families, social groups and communities in internalising and accepting new thoughts and ideas. Therefore the idea of national identity and particularly social cohesion must be accompanied by good knowledge rather than temporary measures located simply in jamborees or sporting events. A consistent application leads to healthy internalisation of identity, toleration of others and pride within the country.

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Notes

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