

# Anzaldúa: Authentic Leadership and Indigenous Feminism in XXI<sup>st</sup> Century

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## ABSTRACT

Anzaldúa challenges the Anglo by developing authentic leadership. This article briefly traces some of the new directions in the twenty-first century with respect to border studies and strategies / methods to articulate, validate and disseminate Indigenous feminist epistemologies. Like Anzaldúa, Indigenous feminist theorization similarly seeks the democratization and autonomy of the authority to theorize and resist; they reclaim rights to their own jurisdiction to produce knowledge, develop capacity based on that knowledge and courage to take action. This paper posits that twenty-first century indigenous activists –authentic leaders– continue along the *Borderlands* territory as they embrace a key non-Western ingredient of their epistemology, Kawsay (good life), pertaining to a wide spectrum of linguistic, environmental, physical, social, political, and cultural trespasses toward collective good.

Keywords: Indigenous knowledge, authentic leadership, knowledge production

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RESUMEN

Anzaldúa desafía al mundo anglosajón al desarrollar una auténtica conciencia de liderazgo. Este artículo traza brevemente algunas de las nuevas direcciones vigentes en el siglo XXI con respecto a los estudios fronterizos y las estrategias / métodos para articular, validar y diseminar las epistemologías feministas indígenas. Al igual que Anzaldúa, la teorización feminista indígena busca de manera similar la democratización y la autonomía de la autoridad para teorizar y resistir; reclaman derechos a su propia jurisdicción para generar conocimiento, desarrollar capacidades basadas en ese conocimiento y valor para actuar. Este artículo postula que los activistas indígenas del siglo XXI continúan con *Borderlands*, ya que adoptan un ingrediente clave no occidental de su epistemología, Kawsay (buena vida), perteneciente a un amplio espectro de aspectos lingüísticos, medioambientales, físicos, sociales, políticos, y transgresiones culturales que llevan hacia el bien colectivo.

Palabras clave: Sabiduría indígena, liderazgo autentico, desarrollo del conocimiento

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Leadership is mobilizing people to contend and wrestle with adaptive challenges, where there is a gap between their values and the way they live and operate.  
Ron Heifetz

A tribe is a group of people connected to one another, connected to a leader and connected to an idea.  
Seth Godin

I will not stand for your pain or your lies  
Or a ticket to the home  
Of the free and brave cowboy land  
I have an anger you cannot quench  
With your jive coca-pepsi-un-up-cola  
Designed to hit just the right spot  
Suzan Shown

Gloria Anzaldúa's pioneering tour de force on the *Borderlands/New Mestiza* (1987) posits a challenge to hegemonic power paradigms in the creation and articulation of a previously unexplored category of borderlands. Toward the latter part of the Cold War, she identified the incipient problem of identity formation while living in, or

on a border, open or closed, or living along its edge on either side. The constellation of implicated issues soon to emerge as global concerns related to this new category spanned unprecedented human population growth, migration and trafficking to economic, social, sexual, linguistic, and political exploitation of the immigrant or undocumented.

The borderlands was/is a figurative, psychic, sexual, physical and material liminal space. In that place, the new Mestiza consciousness was born and thrived. Her acute “consciousness” of what “being” is in the liminal interstices transcended disciplines, geography, gender, and ethnic/racial distinctions. She provided inspiration and unrestrained exploration of her identity as an Authentic Leader of a new tribe, taken from the Godin’s definition above. Based on “real news” and facts, reclaiming the “1950 mile-long wound” along land, cultural and physical space of the Native people, her words find resonance with contemporary Indigenous feminists who strive to unearth, heal, recover and vindicate their own authentic alternative theorization of power, materiality, gender politics, and knowledge.

In this article, I acknowledge Anzaldúa as the matriarch who births borderland feminist studies of the 1980s with an authentic leadership consciousness. I will trace briefly some of the new directions her descendants have traversed in the twenty-first century with regard to border studies and strategies/ methods for articulating, validating and disseminating indigenous feminist epistemologies. In so doing, we explore the convergence of Anzaldúa’s and contemporary indigenous feminists’ intellectual artefactual debris, although none claim to be unilateral or the monolithic voices/ representatives of Indigenous feminist theory.

Unprecedented and unimagined, borderlands became the touchstone in the non- and canonical market as compelling branch of ethnic/feminist theory in the late twentieth century. The new consciousness was about denizens of this contradictory space undertaking a social metamorphosis of the stagnant, staid, demure identity entrenched in submissive and obsequious attitudes toward the White hegemony of racism, homophobia, patriarchy and other oppressive ethnic, gender, sexual, and racial sources of power. She initiated a rescripting of the predominance of “hatred, anger and exploitation.” In this remarkable book that questions and generates genre as a singular pastiche of *poesis*, *prosa oratio* (a straightforward speech), and code-switching linguistic tropes culminating in an aesthetic manifestation of the borderlands, Anzaldúa attempts to give shape to this nascent identity and consciousness. Yet borderlands is and remains an ambiguous, paradoxical literary, linguistic, social, geographic, collective incarnation of consciousness. It is a space we

inhabit of discordant and unpredictable halcyon existence and at other times, like life, the perturbation of violent interactions.

Anzaldúa originally defines the borderlands in *Borderlands/La frontera the New Mestiza* in 1987 as:

I stand on the edge where earth touches ocean/ where two overlap/a gentle coming together/ at other times and places a violent clash. (23) [...]

Two worlds merge by the river, creating a frontline, a war zone. The convergence has created a shock culture, a border culture, a third country, a closed country. (33)

Furthermore, in a strange prolepsis of the recent obsession with erecting and imposing a US Mexican border wall, she describes a “tortilla curtain, a steel curtain chain link fence” that severs and purloins land that “was once Mexican,” traced back to its origin “was Indian always/ and is/And will be again” (25). Encompassing two sides, as well as the bridges between which we carry on our back, the borderlands refer to geographic locales and figurative spaces of ubiquitous modern cultural encounter: rural and urban, national, international and transnational. Nevertheless, the original legal claim to the land hails back to Indigenous dominion, usurped and glossed over by imperialism and colonialism.

Before I depart from the timeless work of *Borderlands* situated in the 1980s, I would like to describe how Anzaldúa embodies the qualities of Authentic Leadership as first articulated by Bill George, a movement bridging business leaders and mindfulness practice involved in transformational change of brick and mortar organizations as much as global consciousness. Perhaps inserting a trendy concept in vogue in 2017 from organizational development theory is not most appropriate for understanding Anzaldúa. However, my rationale for appropriating the concept here is supported by the myriad examples identified as Authentic Leaders from beyond the business world who have played a fundamental role in transforming consciousness and the material realm where it plays out. Such examples would include: Nelson Mandela, Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King Jr. and others who may or may not have consciously chosen to lead and act as change agents in society. Anzaldúa’s preface pinpoints; “I have a sense that certain ‘faculties’ –not just in me but in every border resident, colored and non-colored– and dormant areas of consciousness are being activated, awakened” (my emphasis).

The characteristics of Authentic Leaders are: courage, self-galvanized by inner conscience and core values, self-awareness, mission-driven for long-term sustainable change. Authentic leaders invite a concept touted by Brene Brown as vulnerability

and recast in authentic leadership principles —“those who can bring the wisdom of self-awareness and systems thinking to their decisions and actions” (Walumbwa et al. 90). Vulnerability couples with mindful presence in the moment, drawing on present existence for its authority. Anzaldúa identifies her preoccupation with the “inner life of the self” (Anzaldúa preface) as the source from which she speaks and acts.

Authentic Leaders find sources within to bridge a gap between their values and the way they exist and interact. “They are inner-guided, yet other-focused; guided by principles for the betterment of humankind, not for one group of people at the expense of others.” (Avolio & Wernsing 147) They work in concert with others as agents of deep change or transformation, a simultaneous process of letting go and of creating something new. For Anzaldúa, the courageous act of theorization is akin to the experience of the bordercrosser: “la mojada la indocumentada, doubly threatened. Must contend with sexual violence, she is prey to a sense of physical helplessness. As a refugee, she leaves the familiar and safe home ground to venture into unknown and possibly dangerous terrain” (37). The act of departure and abandoning the recognized and sacred, in the act of relinquishing everything known as well as the legal covenant of homeland, liberates her to shed the epidermis of the unwanted, inflicted oppressor culture in order to generate a tougher more natural skin.

Anzaldúa spawns a new language of the borderlands, intrepid in its code-switching structures and content. Her audacity, vulnerability and invitation to new *mestizas* finds resonance in the hearts of many in its capacity to express that which had not been put down on paper previously, experiences that many could identify with, and which validated what they had carried within for so many generations. *This Bridge Called my Back* (1979) a collection, coedited by Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga, of “writings by radical women of color” begins with the acknowledgement of, and by women of color who first discovered the book that “justified” and spoke from the inner reaches of their experience.

In her scholarly article on “What it means to be an indigenous woman in contemporary times” Kichwa Luz María de la Torre Amaguaña (2015) relates the hesitancy of Indigenous women to take up this public, formidable act of power appropriation -writing- and yet, the imperative to give shape through language and words to their experience for which Anzaldúa bravely leads the charge.

Authentic leaders listen to inner conscience to guide them in decision making and taking a stand on controversial issues in tense circumstances. Yet, the truth they listen for from within themselves is how to best serve their constituencies or progeny or Community or People through self-awareness. Thus, Authentic Leaders, according

to Otto Scharmer in *Leading for the Emerging Future*, see the big picture moving from egocentrism to ecocentrism, an appreciation of the whole in compassionate mindful ways. In so doing, the diversity of experience and need for inclusivity ground Anzaldúa's perspective. The Borderland's space was one that contended with, and subscribed to, contradiction and a precarious instability. In the reframing of the edge, as an overlap both gentle and violent in nature, Anzaldúa initiates the representation of heterogeneous Indigenous feminist theorization, elusively fixed and permeable in character, which other Indigenous women would develop further. Although borders are set up to "define places that are safe and unsafe," and to distinguish "us from them" the threats remain constant.

It is in constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants... Los atravesados live here... those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of 'normal.' The only legitimate inhabitants are those in power, the whites and those who align themselves with whites. (25)

Her blueprint reclaims and embraces the derogatorily referred to *mojada*, wetback, one of the most extreme cases of the illegal outcast who crosses through water literally and figuratively at risk to her life in order to escape from past misery, deprivation, and violence. It is in embracing the figure of the godforsaken *mojada* that Anzaldúa sets the stage to reclaim and revitalize even the most demeaned aspects of their cultural heritage in the present day. Reclaim then subvert power through the process. Those who inhabit this perilous space live doubly threatened, triply marginalized at times, with the notion of abuse, exploitation, illegality, undocumented /refugee status constraining their quotidian awareness and action.

In parallel, de la Torre Amaguaña (2004) vindicates and resuscitates the original meaning of the Quechua word for human being "Runa." Transmogrified by colonizers into a derogatory appellation for "Indians" over four centuries also referring to anything of poor pedigree, worthless, useless and dirty, she reclaims the original meaning of human being, restoring the linguistic and socio-cultural appraisal with pride and urgency in her theorization of identity.

Resemantization can assume many expressions. De la Torre Amaguaña (2015) dons her typical garb in an act of defiance and political power. By literally and figuratively clothing herself in Indigenous dress, culture, and language she can recontextualize its' inherent power, beauty, and centrality to the expression of her gendered cultural identity. Quiché Irma Velásquez Nimatuj reinvigorates the cultural identity embedded in her traditional clothing. Making the process overt, she eventually brings a court case

in Guatemala that affirms the rights of Indigenous people to wear their traditional garb in public places. It is a right to assume the identity markers both seen and unobserved that tie them to their essence as human beings with a unique cultural heritage. Its equivalent lies in notions of acceptance of bilingualism as officially sanctioned.

Clothing is tied further to racism and violence in Victoria Tubin's essay "Being Woman and Maya." From her earliest memories, she describes women's and girl's self-censorship, a reaction to the impunity of entrenched external and internalized racism. If one identified with, or was identified by, their clothes as Indigenous/Indio, in the desire to assimilate into the culture, often from fear of racist violence, they renounced their symbolic attire. As she says, this situation would often be the most violent in nature, as the disdain and rejection was internalized by the Indigenous subject and simultaneously projected onto them from external sources. For Tubin, the effect was opposite, instilling greater resistance and self-affirmation when she intentionally embraced the symbolic power of the culture and identity she wore.

Indigenous feminist theorists capitalized on these concepts and their protocol, "to leave home so I could find myself, find my own intrinsic nature buried under the personality that had been imposed on me" (Anzaldúa 25). They find their voice to articulate an Indigenous feminist theory and praxis. They salvage their identity and recover their own way of theorizing, speaking/parole and producing knowledge. Countering patriarchal white methods that self-perpetuate white-hegemonic perspective, power and knowledge, the Indigenous feminists question classic methods of academic research, understood as "White methods" driven by a "White logic" to reinforce White supremacy (Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva). In some cases, it is not so much a question of dismantling and challenging unilateral White hegemony over knowledge, rather it involves the recuperation and building on their own epistemology, particular lifeways and cultural practices, that draw on their indigenous roots.

The emerging branches of theorization of Indigenous feminism have solidified around questions related to framing disciplinary organization, philosophical/epistemological constructs, rhetorical and linguistic practices of rebellion, power and struggle (Mestiza Rhetoric, which Cherríe Moraga refers to as "theory in the flesh"), attributions of agency, political and gender identity, activism and resistance, and the demystification and decolonization of research and discursive methods. With globalization and interconnectivity, borderlands transcend nations, frontiers, markets, ethnic differences and sameness. Native peoples have interacted with their nonindigenous counterparts across a wide range of contexts in complex imperial, colonial, and modern societies. From those socio-political and economic encounters

their unique theorization, practice, and alternative knowledge is now being reinstated. Their heritage and knowledge offer an alternative to the failed modernist project estranged from social justice and sustainability that is core to native peoples.

Indigenous feminist theorists in this century are keen to identify and assume characteristics that define them. They position themselves, asserting what Holquist calls “politics of representation” (2-9) and building on what Coulthard states is “politics of recognition.” They examine power dynamics and who and how space is controlled refining and remapping “geographies of privilege” (Twine). They discover and encourage the “innovative capacities of the actors” to appropriate and redefine aspects of the white’s world through the cultural logic of the indigenous (Eloy & Lasmar 91-102). They become political subjects (Venkateswar & Hughes) that use non-native organizational forms coupled with the recuperated vestiges of Native practice to maintain their traditions in new geographic, decolonized spaces and to survive/resist as a culture.

Based on the cross-sectionality of these theories, I offer a flow field chart various contemporary Indigenous feminist have followed to fortify Anzaldúa’s bridges and foundations. Like lava, they share commonalities; yet each flow has unique attributes and output. Its distinct composition and surfaces from glassy to rubbly to thick to blocky to ropey to shelly or entraillike beg attention.

One important theme running its course is the remapping and redefinition of the alternative research methods to classic White patriarchal scientific methods. Anzaldúa challenges the Anglo world through linguistic terrorism, reclaiming and untaming a wild tongue and the deficient language (“somos los del español deficiente” 58), “overcoming the tradition of silence” (54), accepting a “living language” (their homeland, 55) as a discounted, legitimate point of departure for identity albeit demarcated as shameful, wrong or rebellious by the whites. Research methods are subjective, colonized forms of systematic procedure. They reflect social and scientific constructions by imperialist powers that impose presumably vetted monopoly, preeminence and legitimacy only of White scientific knowledge and theory. Because Indigenous feminist theory falls outside the boundaries of white science/knowledge, indigenous feminism (IF) and her tongue have been demonized, and remain on the periphery as invalid.

Elizabeth Archuleta in “I Give You Back” defends IF’s unique way of theorizing beyond the constraints of hegemonic (white logic) critical analysis principles. Although the collective community decides and validates what constitutes knowledge, white logic has judged indigenous theorization and knowledge as fallacious and unscientific. The thrust for indigenous feminist theory is to continue to recoup their exclusive and

innate rhetorical practices, which constitute sites of knowledge production. Using their own words and experiences to “(re)conceptualize the processes and epistemological bases of their research, indigenous women must recognize that they theorize their lives differently, without relying solely on Western tools, worldviews or epistemologies as methods of interpretation.”

Another thread taken up by Silvia Cusicanqui is the decolonization of the mind (Dulfano 6-7). Given the overlay of violence (Cusicanqui 275-291) coupled with dehumanization used to disempower and emasculate any sense of self-worth in the concept of Indio/Indian, the colonizers were able to oppress the Indigenous people in psychological and material ways. Native feminists have subverted this concept, turning it back on the colonizer and reappropriating power from that which oppressed them. As Lydia Yellowbird (15) expresses White colonizer/settler hegemony labelled “you,” is a culture devoid of religion and scruples (lacking “spirit and prayer”); you are violator, exploiter, and destroyer of nature (“You ask me to plow the ground/Shall I take a knife and tear my mother’s breast?”). Recalling the dehumanizing mis-appropriation of the word Runa, Yellowbird’s “You” by means of colonization transformed the indigenous into a bestial savage culture: ““When you came/you found a people/they were one/with all living things/But you did not see this/ beauty/ instead you saw them/as animals, primitive/savage” (15). Subsequently the Indigenous internalized this posture of bestiality through the insidious internal, intimate enemy of our minds (Nandy) and turn this message against themselves into a psychological and material reality.

In the theatre of rebellion and rebirth, Anzaldúa recasts the stereotypical, disparaged Indian woman, who was designated by White grand narratives of colonization as the infamous prostitute and traitor:

Making us believe that the Indian woman in us is the betrayer. We, indias y mestizas, police the Indian in us, brutalize and condemn her. Male culture has done a good job on us. Son las costumbres que traicionan. La india en mí es la sombra: La Chingada, Tlazolteotl, Coatlicue. Son ellas que oyemos lamentando a sus hijas perdidas.

Various Chicana and indigenous feminists from Latin America proudly reclaim their foremothers, vindicating and protecting goddess and historical figures like Pachamama, Ix Chel (Lady Rainbow Earth and Moon goddess of weaving, medicine and childbirth), Malinche, or Coatlicue, among others. This is nothing new in feminism, and yet when your voice has not informed or shaped consciousness and material reality, it is a door to an unknown space to enter.

Those who were disparaged and cast out as “traitors” or prostitutes are reinstated as the agents of cultural identification and sources of power and cohesion.

For Anzaldúa, coalitions and collaboration (in contrast to patriarchal opposition and competition) brought fortitude and richness to social change. “To live in the borderlands means to.../ put chile in the borscht/eat whole wheat tortillas/speak tex Mex with a Brooklyn accent;/.../To survive the Borderlands/you must live sin fronteras/be a crossroads” (194-5). As an authentic leader, she was guided by principles for the betterment of humankind, not advocating for one group at the expense of another. Inner guided, outward-focused, visions grounded in sustainability, biocentrism, human and earth-oriented. Her keen ability to distinguish inner conscience from external programming of the mind opened up the possibility for long term systemic social change occurring through spiritual and imaginative strategies. Her spiritual activism shakes consciousness by inviting the human spirit in profound ways to alter material conditions.

The paradigms guiding this theory associate “self” intimately with “lived” experiences in order to claim innate skills and knowledge based on praxis, empiricism, quotidian practice, cultural heritage, and philosophical musings on knowledge production. From an authentic place of self-awareness and self-affirmation, these Indigenous writers offer a space to harness the collective knowledge of individuals whose lives as Archuleta observes have not previously acted upon, because they were negated as valid alternative feminist theories, methods, or manners of policy. They heed the lived experiences mainstream feminists will continue to ignore unless as Archuleta says “Indigenous women now question and deconstruct existing methodologie” (66).

Anzaldúa had pointed to a new Mestiza rhetoric, central to which is writing as a primary rhetorical practice for theorizing their lives. Later indigenous feminist like de la Torre Amaguaña, Archuleta and others engage the realm of the written word.

De la Torre Amaguaña states:

It is not customary for us to adopt this scaffold of power-- written expression-- for telling our story. Nonetheless, many of us now believe it is imperative to adopt this type of powerful apparatus in order to clarify our quotidian lifestyle, testimonial and from there, to elaborate our own discourse. Above all, we seek to transform this into our own political practice, adopting a gendered perspective, but without losing the cultural aspects, to the contrary assimilating them as elements which can contribute to the questioning of the extant hegemonic sexism of society in general. Launching out from our own communal space, where we have converted these notions into common-day practice that exercises a feminism of ethnic, popular, classicist bent, allows for the vindication of our rights as different women, wherein woman cultivates the

intercultural aspect of these spaces. For that reason, in this essay I voice the narrative that swells within the breast of each silenced woman, an anonymous history born in the most degrading spaces where we have been confined to silence, and not permitted to voice our word in the official world surrounding us. I am energized to inaugurate this space of the written word for the academy, where many of us have felt timorous. Yet some have shaken fear by virtue of the innate satisfaction of assuming the written word. (2015: 82)

Publishing in academic journals is an initial step. However, for many of these theorists, simply writing is a central locus of power and expression. “One tool Indigenous women use to theorize is writing, which provides a space for women to make sense of the world and their place in it” (Archuleta 89). It allows them to be courageous, empathic, compassionate and ground their self-esteem. Other forms of political agency and theorization they adopt include wearing their traditional garb in public as noted previously, particularly in Latin America where clothing has taken on a political significance from impotence and oppression to agency for men and women. For others, their trajectory leads to activism on the frontlines of struggle (i.e. Dakota Pipeline Access protest, Amazonian jungle, Lenca Berta Caceres versus Honduras/Chinese Agua Zarca Dam project) to protect the environment, families, ensure health and food security for all.

Indigenous feminist theorization thus seeks the democratization and autonomy of the authority to theorize and resist; ultimately rights to their own jurisdiction and bailiwick to produce knowledge, develop capacity based on that knowledge and courage to take action. For Archuleta, they must present strategies, echoing Anzaldúa, that empower and authorize, which “includes naming the enemy, ‘reinventing the enemy’s language,’ and writing to survive. An Indigenous feminist theory also reveals overarching characteristics such as responsibility, the promotion of healing, and a call for survival” (Archuleta 90)

Andrea Smith, in “Against the Law,” outlines the cynosure of border studies and Native feminist theorizing in the academy as activism and the redefinition of Native and ethnic studies—

going beyond an intellectual commitment to a politics of multicultural representation. Native feminisms must be oriented less toward questions of representation and more toward questions that interrogate the material conditions that Native women face as subjects situated within a nexus of patriarchy, colonialism, and white supremacy. (62)

Smith paves the way as an activist intellectual, making inroads into agency and rebellion on her own terms.

Maya Kaqchikel Aura Cumes from Guatemala (2016) describes her understanding of indigenous feminist theorization as one that “decolonizes how we produce knowledge in the academic world. In the spheres where we produce knowledge personal and domestic [as well as academic] producing a knowledge that supports, improves, and protects society.” She questions and reframes research paradigms and how science and religion have impacted them (personal interview with Dulfano).

These compendious examples begin to remap the lava flows from the eruption of Anzaldúa’s volcanic theory of the New *Mestiza* borderlands that catalyzed the return, emergence, and recovery of feminist Indigenous knowledge and practice in the twenty-first century. Contemporary theorists flow in natural arroyos or streams following her molten path. They adopt versatile, portmanteau concepts common in the linguistic, cultural, social relational, ecological, quotidian, agricultural, ontological and biocentric borderlands formed through the contact and domination of native peoples and cultures by nonindigenous entities and oppressive interests. This contact zone (Pratt) spans time from colonial to present 2017, and space between contestatory Indigenous cultures and languages, in opposition to hegemonic powerful nations and oppressive races. The Indigenous feminist borderlands reveal myriad types of lava flow on one shifting landscape that is dynamic and solid at once.

In the Borderlands territory, they embrace a key non-Western ingredient of their epistemology namely Kawsay (good life), pertaining to a wide spectrum of linguistic, environmental, physical, social, political, and cultural trespasses toward collective good. Originally a term for “cultural norms, social relations, and agroecological traits, the indigenous movement has adopted Kawsay” (Zimmerer) to connote social and environmental goals for local communities and national/global agendas. Kawsay grounded in social justice and political reform, and environmental sustainability instills a welded cosmovision with dimensions of human-social and natural world, both sacred and equal. That image is coherent with, and symbolic of, the Borderlands Anzaldúa unearthed in her treatise manifesto of this new consciousness.

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