

CHAPTER 3. ETHIOPIAN EXPERIENCES AT DEMOCRACY

INTRODUCTION

Over its long history different regions of Ethiopia had one or the other type of governance. Benevolent leaders who appeared at different times in its long history could not overcome or right the wrongs done by brutal rulers. The Ethiopian highland farmer who has triple harvests in a year, barely, wheat and teff (in November), barely (in February) and shimbra or teff (in April), remains miserable and impoverished (Bruce, 1769). The lowland framers of Ethiopia suffer similar hardships from poor governance.

Is the farmer better off now? Has the administration stopped being an impediment to the well being of the farmer? Drought and floods are weather and climate phenomena. However, it is poor administration that nurses famine, destitution and economic stagnation. The fathers of the religions of Ethiopia (Jewry, Christianity, and Islam) have not taken roles that bring about economic progress, as did similar religions in other parts of the world (Tekle Tsadik Mekuria, 1951 E.C.). The Ethiopian religious fathers focused only on virtues of ethics and morality and on aspects of going to heaven or hell or on the nature of Christ.

Though the creator has provided Ethiopia with abundant rivers, these resources have not been dammed to serve the water needs of the people, for irrigation of farmlands, for hygienic needs of families, and for recreation purposes.

The overall problem of Ethiopia lies on the administration, which is not responsive to the needs of the people. The solution to such persistent problem is to have a people's representative government that is democratic. However, democracy is not only a principle that democrats implement it is also a word that tyrants and despots use to legitimize their tyrannical rules. Therefore, it is important to understand the essentials of democracy so that one can distinguish democrats from tyrants. Democratic principles embody the following components.

1. One-person-one vote principle. This principle respects the dignity of the individual and makes his/her vote count. However, taken without paying attention to rule of law, as Mahatma Gandhi noted the governance by majority vote alone could turn into "mobocracy" instead of democracy. Also, language-centered parties are exclusionary of the views and interests of people of other linguistic groups. Accordingly, it is logically clear that a language-centered party governing a multilingual country rules only through tyranny.
2. Rule of just law. Democracy embodies the application of just laws that are ratified by the people. All individuals including rulers must be equal under the law. Clearly, not all laws are just. Tyrants not only present unjust laws but also they disrespect their own laws. Their laws are intended to subjugate the people and not to provide justice to all.

As hinted above, in its long history, Ethiopia has tried various aspects of governance based on which we can, from the experience of Ethiopia, extract practices that will help

us base democracy on Ethiopian Heritage. Three parts in this chapter provide different aspects of this effort.

Part 1 offers Ethiopian experiences at Democracy before the 21st Century. In this part three examples will be explored. One of the examples relates to the story of Abune Tekle Haymanot of AD 13th century. The other relates to the rotating luba aspect of the Gada System of the Boren and Beryetuma tribes that migrated over most of Ethiopia in 16th century. The other relates to the role taken by the Council of Ministers of Emperor Menelik, particularly after the death of Menelik of AD 20th century.

Part 2 offers the attempts by Diaspora Ethiopians at participating and managing democracy in Ethiopian political associations. Several of these attempts lacked comprehension of the Ethiopian heritage, and some did not have clearly defined bylaws. This part provided useful pointers to democratic associations.

Part 3. Offers the Ethiopian Democratic Instrument with its vision-mission-goals-objectives-strategies- tactic system. This is aimed at offering a better future.

PART 1. ETHIOPIAN EXPERIENCES AT DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE.

Part1a. The AD 13th Century story related to Abune Tekle Haymanot

The history of Abune Tekle Haymanot (1208-1307) as shared by Tekle Tsadiq Mekuria (1951 E.C.) helps understand the earliest practices of democracy in Ethiopia. As of AD 4th century the patriarch at Alexandria sends bishops as high priests over the Ethiopian church, and that tradition continued even though Moslems governed Egypt. In the early AD 13 century, an emperor of Ethiopia, Yekuno Amlak, had subjugated Moslems in Ethiopia. Claiming hardships to Moslems of Ethiopia, the Egyptians Moslem leaders refused to send a bishop to Ethiopia. Under these circumstances, the Ethiopian church fathers elected the famed priest and monk, Abba Tekle Haymanot, as the Bishop (Abune) over the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Later, when the Alexandrian Patriarch appointed an Egyptian Bishop over Ethiopia, Abune Tekle Haymanot relinquished his bishopric functions and focused on the work of Debre Asbo (later called Debre Libanos), which he had founded years earlier.

As Tekle Tsadiq Mekuria (1951 E. C.), further pointed out, St. Tekle Haymont vacated his office and gave all the materials necessary for the functioning of the bishopric office to the new appointed Egyptian Bishop, Abune Selama, and did so without rancor, war or creating schism.

We need to remind ourselves that Abune Tekle Haymanot succeeded in receiving 1/3 of the revenues and proceeds of

the government ("siso mengist") as part of a deal which resulted in the transference of governance from the Zagwe Dynasty of Lasta to the restored Solomonic Dynasty of Shewa. Clearly, the Abune administered over a significant portion of the government of Ethiopia. Ethiopian was then governed by the hatsege (emperor) and the etchege (Ethiopian highest priest).

Given the historical setup shared by Ethiopia's foremost historian, Ato TeKle Tsadik Mekuria, let us examine Abune Tekle Haymanot's role based on the two principles of democracy.

1. Concerning the business of being elected. Though we are unsure if the assembled church fathers pursued a one-person-vote principle, there likely was an overwhelming vote or unanimous support for electing Abba Tekle Haymanot to the title of Abune of Ethiopia. It is clear that he was elected to his title and the responsibilities of the office the title entailed.

2. Concerning just law. Abune Tekle Haymanot obeyed the laws governing the entitlement to bishop of Ethiopia, which, according to the Fetaha Negast, required that the Patriarch of Alexandria shall appoint a Bishop for Ethiopia. As recounted by Tekle Tsadiq Mekuria, Abune Tekle Haymanot removed himself from the office and permitted the Egyptian appointee to take over the role. It is to be underscored that Abune Tekle Haymanot obeyed the Christian laws as given in the tradition of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

What we observe from the story of Abune Tekle Haymanot is how an elected leader obeyed the law of the land about seven hundred years ago.

Monday morning quarter-backing might lead one to question why the Abune respected the Feteha Negast, which had an unjust clause that disabled Ethiopians from being elected bishops? Why didn't the Abune declare that the specific clause of the Feteha Negast relating to the appointment of bishops was unjust and therefore null and void? Wouldn't that have been considered cherry picking articles to obey and others to disobey within the same document? We may never know. However, on the ground that Ethiopians would not be ordained bishops, a Patriarch from Jerusalem had appointed Abba Eyob, a Syrian, as leader of the Ethiopian Church. He along with two Dominican Catholic helpers came to Ethiopia, stayed in Tigrey, but did not visit the emperor in Shewa perhaps because Abune Tekle Haymanot might have not indicated his appreciation of the appointment of Abba Eyob (Tekle Tsadiq Mekuria, 1951 E.C., p.37).

The multifaceted contributions of Abune Tekle Haymanot are quite fascinating. Historians would have to dig deeper and bring to the fore why, with "siso mengist" garnered for it by Abune Tekle Haymanot, the Ethiopian Church did not evangelize much more vigorously as underscored by Tekle Tsadiq Mekuria, and even better why the church did not bring about economic prosperity to its congregation. Indeed, later, Abba Philopos of Debre Asbo had sent 11 disciples to southern regions in the reign of Amde Tsion (Tekle Tsadiq Mekuria, 1951 E.C., Tadesse Tamrat, 1972). Moreover the Jihad wars of Ahmed Gragn and the

northern migration of the Boren and Bereytuma tribes had destroyed churches and displaced or killed priests that the efforts of the "siso mengist" likely were overwhelmed.

What would have happened had no Egyptian Bishop arrived in Ethiopia after the election of Abune Tekle Haymanot, and before his death? We are informed that Abune Selama came to Ethiopia in 1341 (Getatchew Haile, 2000) about 42 years after the death of Abune Tekle Haymanot. If Abune Tekle Haymanot was not confronted by the presence of an Egyptian Bishop after he was elected to lead the Ethiopian Church, it meant that the Abune did not have an opportunity to address the clause in the Feteha Negast, regarding the appointment of bishops of Ethiopia. Yet, we need historians to provide informed inferences on the view of Abune Tekle Haymanot regarding the pertinent article in the Feteha Negast, a document that was written by Egyptians. Nonetheless, the history shared by Ato Tekle Tsadiq Mekuria offers a glimpse of the rudiments of democracy involving election of a leader and the leader respecting the rule of law.

PART 1B. THE STORY OF THE GADA SYSTEM.

We are fortunate to have a contemporary account of the rotating Luba governance and implemented by the Boren and Beryetuma tribes as they migrated northward in Ethiopia in the sixteenth century. This organization and migration was described by Abba Bahriy in his article *Zenahu ze Galla* (Getatchew Haile, 2002).

There are two aspects to the Gada System of the Boren and Beryetuma tribes. One of these relates to an age-graded Gada of eight years span such that people are assigned appellations based on their age. Age-graded Gada appellations are Debaile for ages 8 to 16, Foli for ages 16 to 24, Qondala for 24 to 32, and Dori for ages 32 to 40 (Yilma Deressa, 1999 E.C., p.217). According to Abba Bahriy (1586) the age classification that the tribes gave was *mucha*, *elman*, *gurba*, and *quendela* (Bahriy, Section 20). The *quendela* [*qondala*] that were not circumcised would shave their heads by leaving a tuft of hair in the middle if they had killed large animals like lions, elephants, etc. Those who hadn't killed, even if they were married, did not shave their heads.

The other aspect of the Gada System is called Luba. According to Abba Bahriy Luba simply means "those who are circumcised at the same time." The group which undergoes this ceremony administers the affairs of the tribes for eight years, after which another Luba, composed of individuals who have undergone the ceremonial circumcision with much fanfare and ceremony including feasting by a *buta* (slaughtering cattle for the occasion), will take over (Yilma Derassa, 1999 E.C., p.218). An

individual belongs to a Luba forty years after his father assumed his (Abba Bihriy, 1586, Yilema Dressa, 1999).

Thus, the Luba is a generation-graded administration of eight years duration that rotates from father to son every 40 years. Though the Luba rotates every 40 years, the same Luba name does not recur every 40 years. For example, the Luba called Jibbena was followed 40 years later by Muddena (Abba Bahriy, 1586, Section 4), which in turn was followed 40 years later by Robale (Abba Bahriy, Section 12). Each Luba rules over the tribes for a period of eight years and the tribe migrated northward over Ethiopia to conquer new land.

It is not the purpose of this description to indicate the harm that befell the inhabitants of Ethiopia by the ruthless conquest of the migrating pastoral Borena and Beryetuma tribes. The purpose is to underscore the governance they had over themselves and the others whom they incorporated. As Professor Getatchew Haile in his book on Yeabba Bahriy Dirsetoch (2002) put it, Ethiopia was ruled by the hasege, etchege and lubage. The lubage is in reference to the Luba system. Ethiopia began to be ruled by the hasege, etchege duality in the Early 13th Century, since Abune Tekle Haymanot became the Bishop over the Ethiopian Church. The reign of the etchege had diminished since Emperor Zera Yacob assumed chairmanship of the Council of Churches that were assembled at Debre Mitmaq (1445), and more so after the Ahmed Gragn's revolt in the 16th century. It was during and in the wake of the Gragn revolt that the Boren and Beryetuma tribes migrated northwards. Currently the Boren and Beryetuma tribes are part of the Ethiopian heritage, and their language has

propagated (Appendix 2) over vast areas of Ethiopia. What in our heritage from the Boren and Beryetuma tribes can we call upon to guide us in a journey of democracy that we seek?

The most significant contribution of the tribes is the certainty of replacing leaders after eight years. They had instituted term limits to leaders, not only to the entire governing Luba but also to the supreme leader, the Abba Bokka.

The need for term limits for administration was recognized by the USA in the early 20th Century. Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR), who succeeded Herbert Hoover, served from 1933 to 1945 for four terms. FDR's latest Vice President was Harry S. Truman. After FDR's rule, the USA wrote in its laws to have presidents serve no more than two terms, i.e., no more than eight years. The citizens of USA wised up to the concept of term limits in the 20th century. Ethiopians, particularly the Boren and Beryetuma tribes, had lived through governments that practiced term limits from the 16 through the 17th centuries. Part of their practices continued through the 19th Century, though in some regions their kings ruled them. In the 19th century, Emperor Menlik II who had set out to centralize power ordered the stoppage of the practices of the tribes.

Let us examine the role of the rotating Luba based on the two principles of democracy.

1. Concerning the business of being elected. Members of the Luba were not elected. The children become members

of the Luba forty years after their fathers entered the Luba to serve for a period of eight years. The Abba Bokka is however selected from among the members that qualify for that honor.

The Luba was an language-centered organization, which allowed the pastoral tribes to attack and migrate over the territory owned by other Ethiopians. It was an exclusionary system, in that other Ethiopians were subjected to attack by the Boren and Bereytuma tribes, while the attacking Luba group operated in an internally ordered and organized way. However, it is a very interesting organizational structure that even Abba Bahriy, who belonged to the people who were displaced by the tribes, wrote about dispassionately.

2. Concerning the business of having a just law. Though the Boren and Beryetuma did not write laws, Each Luba had agreed to asset of action that the tribes obeyed. They had procedures, which they followed when dispensing justice to their tribal members. They had assemblies to elect the Abba Bokka, and to pronounce the laws for the eight years of the empowered Luba. What happened to the regions the Luba conquered changed with time as they learned different approaches. The first few Lubas wiped out the vanquished humans and domesticated animals except for cattle, sheep and goats that are good for the eating. Subsequent Lubas learned to ride horses and used those to great effect. They also took prisoners and made them "gebar", and slowly members of their households (Yilam Deressa, 1999).

PART 1C. THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS.

In the later years of his administration Emperor Menelik II had a council of twelve ministers, which oversaw the affairs of the country. Each minister discussed issues with the emperor once a week but were otherwise empowered to administer the responsibilities within their departments.

During the long sickness of the emperor and after his death the council continued to function as an advisory body to the emperor's heir, Lij Iyasu. However, Minilik's wife, Empress Tayitu was interfering with their task. The council deposed her, and enabled Lij Iyasu, to be an emperor with an elderly person as a regent. After the death of the regent the young Iyasu refused to accept another regent and began implementing his wishes. Many of Iyasu's actions had dissatisfied the Council of Ministers. Consequently, the Council of Ministers deposed Lij Iyasu, and placed Zewditu, Emperor Menelik's daughter as empress. They also raised the rank of Dejazmatch Teferi to Ras Teferi and appointed him as crown prince and regent.

Ras Teferi skillfully used the Mahle Sefari (militia that was assembled from different regions of Ethiopia to defend the crown) to gain power and to disband the Council of Ministers. He became King Teferi and Crown Prince, and upon the death of Emperor Zewditu he ultimately was crowned Emperor Haile Selassie. Emperor Haile Selassie claimed that he was both elected to office (via the council of ministers) and was elect of God (siyoume egziabeher), as all Ethiopian emperors before him are used to claim.

Let us examine the role of the Council of Ministers after Emperor Menelik's death based on the two principles of democracy.

1. Concerning the business of being elected.

Members of the council of ministers were appointees of Menelik. However, after the death of Menelik they elected who should be emperor of Ethiopia, by first deposing Empress Tayitu and appointing Lij Iyassu, only to depose him and appoint Empress Zewditu with Ras Teferi as regent. To the extent they had agreed to remove and to appointment leaders, they had behaved in a democratic way among themselves. Their actions were done by a consensus.

2. Concerning rule of just law.

Perhaps the greatest failing of the Council of Ministers was that they did not have laws, which they had written and ratified. Nor did they have the culture or custom that would serve as precedence to back up their actions. They acted out of common sense and a feeling of good will to the nation. However, commonsense and goodwill are not good enough. The council was unable to curtail the Ras Teferi's absolute power by removing his role as regent. For example, Dejazmatch Beyene, who publicly struggled hard to depose Iyassu and place Ras Teferi as regent and crown prince, was later flogged publicly by order of Ras Teferi, when Beyene wanted to curtail the Ras Teferi's power as regent and make him only a crown Prince.

The three experiences described above indicate that Ethiopian had tried to implement some versions of

democracy in parts of the 13th, 16-17th, and 19th century. Unfortunately, succeeding generations did not learn from the practices of previous ones so that each one offers yet untried experiments.

What is even more lamentable is the total lack of knowledge of Ethiopian history displayed by Tigrawi liberation fronts fielded as the TPLF and EPLF, who end up in placing an international boundary within Ethiopia at the turn of the 21st Century. People often fight to unite folks of the same tribe. However, the EPLF and TPLF fought to separate people of same tribe and who lived within one country (Ethiopia) to be citizens of two countries called Eritrea and FDRE (Federal Republic of Ethiopia). They computed the FDRE, which has more than 12 times the population of Eritrea should have no access to the sea, and that Eritrea will have a small tract of land. They bestowed a geography of poverty to both parts of Ethiopia from the get go and sowed the seeds for wars between the inhabitants of both sides.

Ethiopia has inherited the seeds of instability from the Tigrawi liberation fronts (EPLF and TPLF). There is a need to establish a vision-mission-goals-objectives-strategies-tactics system to get us out of the morass Ethiopia is under. The Ethiopian Democracy Instrument is one such attempt.

The Ethiopian Democracy Instrument is a document, which incorporates the Kinijit Election Manifesto. The Kinijit is a coalition for unity and Democracy (CUD) of four pan-Ethiopian parties: the All Ethiopian unity party (AEUP), the united Ethiopian Democratic Party-Medhin Party (EDP-Medhin), the Ethiopian Democratic League (EDL), and the

Rainbow Ethiopia Movement for Democracy and Social Justice.

When Kinijit was a coalition of the four parties that stood for unity and democracy (CUD) it had drafted an election platform called the Kinijit Election Manifesto, and used a V-sign (for victory) indicated by two fingers as its emblem. However, the electorate knew the coalition of these parties as though it was a single party. In recognition of the popular will of their supporters the coalition of four parties merged to form the Kinijit for Unity and Democracy Party (Kinijit) after the May 15, 2005 elections.

A day after the election of May 15, even Prime Minister Zenawi had admitted that he had lost at least the vote of Addis Ababa by a landslide though as a dictator he wouldn't permit elected officials that he does not approve of to work in administrative capacities in Ethiopia. He imprisoned the Kinijit leaders by creating bogus charges of treason against Ethiopia and genocide against the Tigre. The elected Ethiopian leaders were jailed for 21 months and a verdict that was anticipated in February 2007 had been postponed several times until April 4, 2007. On April 4, Zenawi's kangaroo court ruled that Zenawi's prosecutor has produced sufficient evidence to prove that Kinijit leaders and members of the Kinijit Party have committed treason, and that the accused should defend themselves from the charges brought against them. Then on June 11, 2007 the court presided by Ahmed Adel passed a guilty verdict on charges of "outrage to the constitution and high treason".

Increased internal and external pressures caused Zenawi to negotiate a deal that would allow the Kinijit leaders, journalists and human rights activists to be released if they agreed to take partial blame for the atrocities committed after the elections. They signed such a pact on Friday, June 24, and they were freed on July 20, 2007. However, prior to their release Zenawi caused his prosecutor to seek penalty by death, and his judge to pass sentences of imprisonment. Then, Zenawi's propaganda worked the radio, TV, and print media indicating that the Kinijit leaders had asked for clemency before their release. All along, the elected Kinijit leaders had argued that the accusation is groundless and that the regime is merely trying to falsely gain political advantage.

Twenty six million Ethiopians overwhelmingly voted the nonviolent Kinijit leaders as the leaders of Ethiopia in the May 15, 2005 elections. The polling after elections indicated that 49% voted for the Kinijit, 34 % for EPRDF and affiliated parties, and 17% for Hebrat and other parties. PM Zenawi and his hand picked members of the Election Board took away votes given to Kinijit, through unjust re-election and by other means. By a high-handed approach Zenawi added nearly 229 of the contested parliamentary seats to his party. Moreover, he destroyed the political party offices of Kinijit, killed and imprisoned Kinijit members and leaders, in total disrespect of the vote of Ethiopians. He trampled over the nonviolent movement of Kinijit. This tyrannical condition constitutes a major pressure levied against the democratic aspirations of the majority of Ethiopians. Other pressures against Ethiopian Democracy emanate from the interests of diehard language-

centered individuals and groups as well as from alien regimes that fuel dissent to weaken Ethiopia.

A particularly sad form of pressure against respecting the votes of the Ethiopian electorate emanates from human frailty and from lack of a democratic culture. A handful of individuals had brought dissent and division among the democratic opposition camp (Appendix 12,13,14, 15). Some of them may well have been paid agents of the TPLF. A major failing of the Kinijit organization and the Diaspora supporters is the inexperience of operating in a democratic culture. This aspect is described more fully below.

PART 2. PROBLEMS OF LACK OF DEMOCRATIC CULTURE.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM.

Ethiopians in the Diaspora, who have good intentions for the wellbeing of their country, form parties and/or coalitions of parties only to find further splintering and disunity. Of course, there are individuals who have other intentions and interests (Appendix 1). The reasons for the majority who has good intentions, yet who fails to forge unity may be summarized as follows.

Problem #1. Absence of clearly written, understandable and just bylaws that provide guidelines by which a group wishes to be ruled.

There may or may not be bylaws, and when present they may have been hastily drafted to the satisfaction of the authors by which they wish to govern their entire membership. Such bylaws are like mantras written on parchment ("Kitab" in Amharic, which the bearer wears around her/his neck, and which are supposed to do good things to the person). However, such bylaws do not perform the intended task of allowing all members to function properly and to permit the growth of membership.

Problem #2. Presence of unruly individuals who attack personalities instead of providing ideas or opposing views. There may be individuals who tend to attack the personal attributes particularly of the executive officers and other influential opinion makers. Their motives and reasons could vary. They may be responding to a "geji and tegeji culture (Appendix 11). Yet, the end result of their role is to

saw dissention and discord and bring about division and disintegration of the group (Appendix, 12). They may succeed in their endeavor because of Problem #1, absence of bylaws and/or inability to insist that the bylaws should be respected.

Problem # 3. Absence of a democratic culture, and the lack of insistence on one-person-one-vote democracy.

There may be individuals who shout the loudest, and who have pre-determined the outcome of a meeting of a group, and participate in a group meeting merely to get their position approved. Such groups might come from the general membership, and or from the executive body.

Problem # 4. Concerns related to the use of funds of a community. There may or may not be precisely defined and agreed upon articles that state how funds are to be collected, and placed in bank by which officer (s), and how the funds ought to be expended. Unclear procedures result in people becoming confused and good intentioned volunteers who maintain the funds of the community being vilified in public by all kinds of people.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS.

The above three problems are causally related. As the old adage asserts, for evil to succeed it is enough that good men do nothing. The "good men" in a meeting should speak up and express their feelings. They should not allow a few bad apples to dominate the show. Also, every one should insist that a universally applicable democratic order should be implemented at their meetings.

Any association could draft its own universally applicable rule of order. Alternatively, the association could implement a universally applicable democratic process called the Robert' Rule of Order. Many more should read the rules and try to apply them. Clearly the solution to the perennial problem of disunity includes infusing democracy and implementing democratic practices. A model set of bylaws for a democratic association is given in Appendix 15.

Democracy relies on the application of just laws (bylaws) that are ratified by a group or association or society. Journalists and other members of society should demand that the laws should apply to all members of the pertinent society.

It would take time to develop and participate in a democratic environment. Pressures that have been identified and others not mentioned here complicate the effort. Yet, even when all pressures are relieved, and a democratic practice is established, the fruition of Ethiopian Democracy requires stipulating and executing the vision-mission-goals-objectives-strategies-tactics system

established in the Ethiopian Democratic Instrument. This chapter presents in Part 3 an Ethiopia Democratic Instrument, which is based on the manifesto of the Kinijit Party, and which should be executed by democratic Ethiopians and their organizations. It is the nemesis of the Revolutionary Democratic Instrument (given in Chapter 4) that Zenawi and his TPLF/EPRDF Party execute to destroy Ethiopia.

Though adjustments might be made to suit internal and other pressures in some aspects of the document, we should, however, not budge from the central premises of the instrument. The document must respect the vote of the electorate of May 15, 2005, in which the people overwhelmingly voted for and preferred a pan-Ethiopian party, the Kinijit Party, to form their government. The nonviolent movement has to transition to “*hizbawi imbita*”, whenever tyranny attempts to take hold of Ethiopia.

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