

A Mother is a Living Home. Making a Stand for Domesticity

La madre es un hogar vivo. En defensa de la domesticidad

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Resumen: En el presente escrito se reflexionará sobre la centralidad de la *imagen materna* en el hogar familiar, y por ende en la edificación de toda comunidad humana, desde la comprensión de *tres relaciones sociales básicas*: 1) la relación “conyugal” entre varón y mujer; 2) la relación “filial” entre padres e hijos; 3) la relación “social” entre el hogar y la comunidad. Consecuentemente, se defenderá la necesidad política de proteger el hogar familiar en cuanto institución sagrada que garantiza el bienestar social, ante la necesidad imperante de la permanencia de la nación.

Palabras clave: Hogar, Maternidad, Familia, Trabajo, Comunidad.

Abstract: The following text will reflect on the centrality of the *mother's image* in the family home, as well as in the making of every human community, from a deeper understanding of *3 basic social bonds*: 1) the “conjugal” bond between man and woman; 2) the “filial” bond between parents and offspring; 2) the “social” bond between the home and the community. The political imperative of our time, as a consequence, would be to safeguard the family home as a sacred institution that guarantees the permanence of society itself, in front of the paramount need to promote the permanence of the nation.

Key Words: Home, Motherhood, Family, Work, Community.

1. Introduction

It is known that *second wave feminism*, growing rapidly in the late 60's, declared open war against the *family home* and its traditional values. In it, the *husband-father* was the primary *breadwinner* and family protector of the household, while the *housewife-mother* was the primary homemaker and caregiver of their children. Together, as a marriage, they were considered the primary economic unit of society, one based on gender differences and intergenerational responsibilities. Alternatively, what later became known as *radical feminism*, headed by Betty Friedan –honouring Ch. P. Gilman and S. de Beauvoir– played a determinant role in the diminishment of the image of the *mother as a homemaker* who decided to put aside a professional career and stayed home. For this reason, the feminist juggernaut struck the family nucleus first, while the new image of the “liberal woman” was promoted, one that would not prioritize husband and children over career, putting in the centre of her aspirations the emerging professions in the new labour market.

In order to accomplish such goals, feminists concluded that the traditional family structure would have to change up to the point of freeing the homemaking mother of *domesticity*. The key to their success lies in the notion that she should see herself as a “parasite”, a vestige of the patriarchal era who would spend her days doing infantile activities, as Hanna Arendt stated¹. This thesis was validated by many intellectuals, labelling the family home as a “comfortable concentration camp” in Betty Friedan’s words². New cultural changes derived from such radical criticism (including the new sexual revolution) being the industrialized societies in the West the first ones to embrace this new liberal ideology. As a result, a new rationality in which men and women would share their responsibili-

¹ “La labor no permite el desarrollo de la individualidad ni la realización personal a través de la participación política. Por eso en el mundo clásico, se condenaba a los esclavos y a las mujeres a realizar las actividades necesarias para el sostenimiento de la vida, a fin de liberar a un puñado de ciudadanos (principalmente varones) para ejercer la ansiada libertad a través de las grandes acciones políticas” (Galindo, Hurtado, 2020, p. 50).

² “The comfortable concentration camp that American women have walked into, or have been talked into by others, is just such a reality, a frame of reference that denies woman’s adult human identity. By adjusting to it, a woman stunts her intelligence to become childlike, turns away from individual identity to become an anonymous biological robot in a docile mass. She becomes less than human, preyed upon by outside pressures, and herself preying upon her husband and children. And the longer she conforms, the less she feels as if she really exists. She looks for her security in things, she hides the fear of losing her human potency by testing her sexual potency, she lives a vicarious life through mass daydreams or through her husband and children” (Friedan, 2001, p. 328).

ties in the family home and society according to a 50-50 standard became the social norm.

Even the more recent *Third Wave Feminism* has been declared by many as a new “diverse” and “compatible” movement in favour of pro-lifers and pro-motherhood advocates. Among those new discourses, there is one that has been promoted as pro-family and pro-domesticity as well: the new *work-family balance studies*. Their primary aim can be summarized as follows: an effort to develop a new *culture of choice*, where both husband-fathers and housewife-mothers should freely be able to enter the work force according to their own ambitions and needs, favouring diversity, equality, progress, freedom and domestic participation of men and children. Family policy, accordingly, should be directed to support enough benefits for women and mothers who decided to work outside the home and, to some extent, to husbands who should support the new “two-income” families. To my understanding, these trends, though understandable from the modern-liberal rationality, are leaving on the side the possibility that there are still mothers who freely decide to stay at home and become the primary homemakers and caregivers of their children. The purpose of this paper is to briefly explore these social trends, rooted in classic liberal authors, aiming to identify the anti-homemaking mother discourse and confront it with a more Christian understanding of the concepts of marriage, family, and most of all the family home.

2. Making a Stand for Motherhood and Domesticity: Losing the Battle?

The ancient Greeks introduced the formal study of economy (οἰκονομία: οἶκος, “household”; νέμωμαι “manage”) to humankind. According to their wisdom, the correct understanding of the concept of economy began with the bond between husband and housewife in matrimony, with the purpose of living under the same roof. Their spirit would expand through their children, their progeny and extended kin and, eventually, towards the well-being of the community and society at large. In other words, they understood that a good economy is rooted to marriage and it settles in the *family home*: a place where humans learn how to *make* and *use* things, yearning for the classic *eudaimoinia* (εὐδαιμονία: to live a virtuous, flourishing, happy life). Needless to say, one cannot accomplish the later without the proper balance between *work*, *leisure* and *rest*, that is, to live according to virtue (ἀρετή: “excellence”).

In that sense, the great philosopher Aristotle emphasized the importance of “use value” for those objects (and traditions) made within the family home, followed by the communal duty to share or exchange those “goods” with other households. One cannot deny that a high degree of domestic self-sufficiency must be accomplished in order to enjoy this kind of “domestic” settlement (mainly in front of both political and economic powers). For this reason, the *Stagyrite* also emphasized the just limits to the acquisition of such goods –mostly *property*– encouraging a social order that should rest in a strong *middle class*, composed of autonomous family homes that in time would become experts in agribusiness, horticulture, but most of all in *childbearing*; aiming to become –in time– the seedbed for civic virtue, order, equality and liberty.

Opposite to the classic expectation of a virtuous, flourishing, happy life (*eudaimonia*), the liberal-capitalist revolution that took place over the last two centuries enforced their vision of a “brave new world”. They began by trampling the vision of a *natural domestic economy*, resting on an exaggerated *division of labour*, in light of the thought of the British economist Adam Smith in his book, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776). They replaced the notion of a mere domestic economy with a flood of consumer goods that largely eliminated family autonomy, favouring a new *individualism* that would praise a maximum economic efficiency for the masses. In addition, this new political-economic rationality undermined a *middle-class order*, always tending toward the extremes of great wealth, vast property for the few, and a new form of servility for the property-less many. In time, this model would be severely attacked by the German philosopher Karl Marx in his book *Das Capital* (1867). His thesis was simple: modern history can be summarized as the struggle that takes place between the classes for increasing both wealth and property by means of industrialized production. If this struggle is perpetuated –he thought– radical economic differences will interfere with the liberal-desired *equality* that would bring true *freedom* to everyone, especially to the less fortunate.

Astonishingly enough, Marx’s colleague and benefactor Friedrich Engels analysed the family home through the Marxist optic. Indeed, the author of the book *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884) transferred his “dialectical materialism” to the relationship between husband and housewife. In its most radical proposition, a new stand for absolute equality between the sexes in both the private and public realms started to brew. Passing through the writings of the English philosopher John

Stuart Mill, such as *The Subjection of Women* (1969), a *proto-feminist* imperative became the novelty of the 20th century and further. Several feminists of the fifties dedicated themselves to this life-changing quest. Perhaps the most prominent of them all was Simone de Beauvoir, known for her book *The Second Sex* (1949). Indeed, the French thinker categorically stated that it has been society (governed by men) the one in charge of constructing a sort of *chimera* that she herself calls the "eunuch", but that the whole world calls "woman" (De Beauvoir, 1949, p. 13). This idea gave birth, over time, to what is now called *radical feminist*, and more recently the *gender studies* (under Judith Butler's leadership), both standing for the differentiation between sex (what is naturally given) and gender (what is culturally constructed).

In the middle of this drama, there was another key figure in what experts call the *Second Wave Feminism*, and that is the American writer Betty Friedan. In her book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), she criticized the previous feminisms for not achieving a broader liberation for women. Though many battles were won in the fields of politics and education, the role of mother and housewife, a *homemaker*, was still standing between the new liberal woman and the old patriarchal rag. If one aims to systematically go over all the social and cultural implications brought by the many faces of *feminism* and the *gender studies* (some radical and others moderate), one must commend to the abler hands of the German sociologist Gabriele Kubly in her paramount work *The Global Sexual Revolution* (2012), or the Argentine thinkers Nicolás Márquez and Agustín Laje in their controversial book *El Libro Negro de la Nueva Izquierda* (2016). A more contrasting approach to analyse Betty Friedan's criticism of the homemaker can be found in Carolyn Graglia's *Domestic Tranquility: a Brief Against Feminism* (1998).

Nevertheless, by seeing the big picture of our current cultural wars in terms of marriage and family, domestic and political economy, sex and gender, the image of the classic symbolic battle between the mythic *Hercules*, facing his arch-enemy *Hydra*, comes handy: swords, claws and teeth are meeting in battle; arms and legs bitten; heads severed, no doubt, but new ones keep growing and growing. Analogically, it appears that the more we fight for marriage, family, children and the home, newer "roaring heads" keep growing to bite us. The result of the exposed drama can be summarized in the following question: can making a *stand for the family home* (cf. Hurtado, Galindo, 2019) be seen as a lost cause at the beginning of the 21st century?

3. Sublime Lighted House: About the Home

A way of corroborating these ideas –very popular in contemporary movies and television series–³, comes from detecting certain ambiguity in our current public and political discourse when one reflects on the natural differences between the *man as a husband-father* and the *woman as a housewife-mother*. At most, one can see a few hints in favour of the complementary that both should equally share in order to face the responsibilities that come along with procreation, child upbringing and professional life in both the domestic and public realms (the *work-family balance* rationality) (cf. Chinchilla, Moragas & Masuda, 2010). What is becoming unpopular, nevertheless, is to wonder about what the Greek Philosophers meant by the term *oekonomia*: when *husbands* risked their lives to carry on the appropriate materials, hunt edible animals, manufacture the right tools and processes to build and protect the *human house*, has become nothing more than a whisper. What to say about the *housewives*, the ones who gave their lives in childbirth, those who were able to turn those materials, game animals, tools and processes into a true *family home*, full of life, a sublime lighted house –in words of the Spanish poet Luis Rosales. *Man and woman he created them* (Gn 1:27) *to become One Flesh* (Gn 2:24) and *be fruitful and multiply* (Gn 1:28). What happened to that place where human beings show their innate *vulnerability*, share their mutual *dependency*, in order to pursue a true *autonomy* in this world? (Marcos & Bertolaso, 2018, pp. 35-56).

It is not our purpose to make hectic statements that leads us nowhere, much less to drown ourselves in frantic *nostalgias* for a past that is pretty much gone. Nevertheless, the time has come for us to fully face reality and take it on the chin: *the family home has change in a way that it seems difficult to fully grasp where it is headed*. To challenge a new reality that overshadows the true meaning of masculinity and femininity, husbandry and homemaking, fatherhood and motherhood, it is not an easy task to accomplish, although not impossible. As Jutta Burgraff (1952-2010) stated: “Our world would be a better place when both men and women display “harmoniously” their own masculinity and femininity” (Burggraf, 2004, p. 517). From this perspective, there are those who affirm that the task of rebuilding this world should be placed in women’s able hands (Sánchez, 2020): to their *great genius*, as S. John Paul II stated

³ Many examples of movies and Tv series for (and against) the natural family can be seen in: <https://www.familyandmedia.eu/> & <https://www.diamantesenserie.com/>.

many times (1988). To my understanding, the Polish Pope and Saint is right in his assertion, although there is more to it.

Surprisingly enough, S. John Paul II's recommendation is strongly supported by *contemporary feminism* (both radical and moderate). Even Pope Francis has brought new lights to the topic in his Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (2016): "If certain forms of feminism have arisen which we must consider inadequate, we must nonetheless see in the women's movement the working of the Spirit for a clearer recognition of the dignity and rights of women" (Francis, 2016, n. 54). From this perspective, a better understanding of the true meaning of *femininity* in correlation to the life of real *women* –all women– is most needed nowadays. Is there anything specific about being feminine? We may not find a short answer to such a radical question, but one can say –as Rafael Alvira has– that we miss it dearly: "It seems to me that our main problem today has nothing to do with atomic bombs, unemployment, or drugs. In my opinion, the most serious thing that is happening to us is the progressive diminishment of what is specifically (also traditionally) feminine, in a situation that is shaped –as Modernity itself– by the masculine cravings for power" (Alvira, 2001, p. 19). This is a bold claim, no doubt, that dares to suggest that women's strongest contribution to rebuild a culture that haemorrhages internally could also be the family home, the everlasting place for all that is feminine (but not exclusively). One can picture both Marx and Engels, as well as Mill and De Beauvoir, rolling in their graves out of dislike for such a statement (apparently Friedan adjusted her initial thesis in a new book *The Second Stage*, 1981). It is true: everything that takes place *in* the family home has become suspicious in the eye of postmodernism. The reason for this is simple: the family homes is *the place to come back to* (Alvira, 2000); it is the "space" where we make our stand to live in a particular "time", with people that share our *identity*.

Truly, the *family home* plays a crucial role as *the* singular "space" where the basic relationships between human beings first take root. Concerning conjugal love between man and woman –*ish-isha* (וִיֵן, וְיֵשָׁה) (cf. Wojtyła, 2008, pp. 57-87)–, they both become passionate witnesses of their true love that aims to be fertile in the life of newborns on earth (cf. Scola, 2005, p. 44). As Julián Marias affirms it: "I-man, I am towards a woman [...] I-woman, I am towards a man. The reference to the woman is inherent in me, and the reference to the man is inherent in her" (Marias, 1980, p. 151). When these two confront –conjurally– the many faces of contingency and catastrophe, the human lineage has grown and perpetuated their

existence. Perhaps this is the main reason why –according to Rodney Stark– many cultures have identified *marriage* not just as a mere civil institution, but one also accompanied by both ritual and religious meanings, underpinning what stands for the everlasting, the eternal and divine (cf. Stark, 1996, pp. 257-260; Zimmerman, 2008). In that sense, it can also be asserted that marriage, as an institution, becomes a true “anarchist” stronghold (Chesterton, 2009, p. 34), given the fact that has existed, in essence, prior to any modern material or social construction of every age, whether we talk about churches, cities, even democracies. This is true for periods of hardship and scarcity; in times of persecution, social and moral decline. Now, in *pandemic* times –COVID-19– perhaps more than ever in human history, each family home has to become what it is: *a practical and heroic affirmation of life itself*; a place where the human spirit can comfortably linger; a *Chestertonian act of rebellion* (Chesterton, 2011, p. 249) against all contemporary ideological and social attempts to end it.

4. What God has Joined: About Motherhood

The family home also safeguards the intimate language of sexual love –in Karol Wojtyła’s terms– and its immeasurable power to procreate, that is, *to bring children to life and to educate them* (Hurtado, 2014, pp. 58-63). Truly, the *conjugal bond* thrives in a domestic environment that treasures the prevailing principles of human upbringing. This is a challenging task, no doubt, because every new child that is brought into existence comes with an exclusive *responsibility*, unique and unpredictable, with all its qualities and challenges (cf. Chesterton, 2006, p. 77). Married life, therefore, must safeguard this radical power that is exclusive to its essence. Men and women, entrusted by the Creator with a shared dignity, become bearers of exclusive gifts, intrinsic to their masculine and feminine nature. They are both different in their way they exercise these qualities, but complementary towards their union: *an entity that exceeds the mere sum of its parts*. But at the same time, married life establishes the foundations for building other relationships of economic, social, and political nature, given its contractual dimension, that is, a *bond between a husband and a housewife* who agreed to give themselves to each other as a *gift*, pledging to care for their relationship, accompanied with a singular responsible openness to the new lives that may come along from their union (Wojtyła, 2008, p. 55).

For this purpose, the founding conjugal bond must be guaranteed at all cost. Otherwise, the efforts of husbands and housewives to formally become *una caro* (one flesh) become economically and politically worthless. The so-called “free associations” (legal or not) based on sentiment or convenience (a-sexual or not) can be understood from a mere legal framework. However, they tend to reserve their individual resources and future expectations in case their relationship (and the responsibilities involved) do not fully consolidate. Therefore, our contemporary society must be reminded of the promise that *marital indissolubility* entails in itself. The later becomes a solid motivator to develop logical criteria for objective negotiations in the face of expected failures, radical differences, or habitual contingencies that may appear between the couples in the course of married life. Experience confirms –as Kevin Andrews explains (cf. Andrews, 2012, ch. 1)– that unfulfilled promises in this area operate like a fissure that suddenly appears in the foundations of a large building, expanding over time to the point of collapsing the entire construction.

At the same time, married life entails the establishment of a second bond: *the filial relationship between the married couple and their offspring*. The institution of marriage holds the honour of bringing two families together in a promise that becomes the life of grandchildren, praising and perpetuating kinship in time and space. More broadly, it also embodies the ordinary solution to the common problem of *dependency* between man and women, the young and mature. Each *communio personarum* –as S. John Paul II explains⁴– has to assume the economic, educational and intimate challenges implicated in the care for the infant, the needy, and the convalescent: who will be in charge of managing the goods obtained out of productive labour among those who are not fit to take care of themselves? In the natural order of things, this effort has been entrusted to the immense network of kinship relationships, clearly exalted in the phrase that every marriage vows before God and the community: *for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health*.

By pronouncing this vow, the *paternal* and *maternal* functions (sometimes known as “roles”) are called to stage, with the purpose of educating, healing and protecting their own children, so that they

⁴ “Marido y mujer, en esa etapa de crecimiento en humanidad, como personas adultas, capaces de transmitir la vida; la busca también el hijo que de ella recibe la vida, insertándose como hombre entre sus padres, desde el primer instante de su concepción” (Wojtyła, 2003a, pp. 227-269).

too aspire to care and nurture their own families one day. This journey would be impossible without the irreplaceable support, wisdom and love of their *elders*: a living proof that our past is real, and our future possible. Altogether, whether called “natural” or “traditional”, the matrimonial family, settled in a home, has one primary purpose: *to procreate and educate children that freely aspire to become parents* (Pérez-Soba, 2007, pp. 85-86). To accept these functions, entrusted from generation to generation, means to see each child as a *cultural vase* to be filled with the love of his parents, grandparents, uncles, cousins and friends, aiming to expand these familiar love to the *broader tribe* and, hopefully, to the next generations. This *cultural chain* should stand strong to teach children the responsibility to be assumed when the time comes for them to engender their offspring.

Finally, married life also establishes a third bond: *between family homes and the context of the broader community they inhabit*. As stated before, the procreative power entrusted to the matrimonial family becomes the promise of new member for every society. However, their humanization is a matter of debate in our current political settlement. Parents also need to be reminded of how important their contribution is, as fathers and mothers, to the happiness of their children. The temptation to coldly entrust the education of our children to other instances of institutional care must be put into question. Why? Being a *son* implies the potentiality to acquire enough maturity and freely become a responsible parent, a husband or a housewife, that yearns above all else to work hard (professionally if needed) to make a living for his own family and the immediate surroundings. It would be desirable that children raised like this will grow up healthy, intelligent (not just academically), hard-working and, above all else, honest, open to cooperation, anywhere and anytime. They will also acquire the practical knowledge and skills with a strong sense of community, being less prone to violence, abuse and self-destructive behaviours.

In sum, each matrimonial marriage stands for the renewal of its own community through the promise of procreation and the subsequent humanization of the new members of society. Perhaps this is the reason why every healthy society that aspires to remain as such has to invest enough time and resources to celebrate each “passing ceremony” (baptisms, first communions, weddings, for example) according to age and sex, at each stage of the infant’s maturity. In the Christian tradition, marriage itself as a *sacrament*: a clear

symbol of this need to maintain the unity of the community, through the grace of God (cf. Wojtyla, 2003b, pp. 101-127).

5. Conclusion

The image of the husband-father and the housewife-mother who pledge *eternal love* to each other, in the presence of God and the rest of humanity, who establish a *family home* of their own, represents the cultural *last stand* for true unity and diversity, freedom and equality, love and responsibility. Beginning in the family home, this pair of “true adventurers” (in the words of Charles Péguy)⁵ are daring to transform the world from the inside-out through simple acts of kindness and love, which would normally take place in their daily life. Their children would be the first witnesses of the creative strength of their bond (marital, procreative, communal), as well as its clear interdependence with the rest of society. However, if the bond is weakened by their failures, or becomes politicized and subordinated to ideologies that declare themselves contrary to its nature, social pathologies –violence, avarice, promiscuity– become the norm (cf. Andrews & Hurtado, 2020, pp. 127-139). This is how the State claims its apparent “right” to become, in practice, the new *patriarch*, and Democracy its *religion*, an emergent disorder that appears to be ready to expand its control even further, in *Orwellian* ways, as we are clearly seeing in our current pandemic crisis.

Meanwhile, one must accept that the family home cannot be erected automatically, by accident, or by the good deeds of the Smithian “invisible hand”. Up until very recent times, most people enjoyed the privilege of having “a place to comeback to” thanks to the tireless efforts of husband fathers, but mostly the self-giving care of homemaking mothers. They both made a true *stand for the home*, and for everything that is worth living. The reason for this is because the essence of a matrimonial family necessarily implies knowing how to nurture the particular space that inhabits. If a family inhabits a home, that means they have to own it, cultivate it. At the same time, that also means that they, as a family, become “inhabited” by every experience –good or bad– that takes place there. In this regard, every homemaking mother has had the lead over husband fathers for one simple reason: *a mother is a living home*.

⁵ “There is only one adventurer in the world, as can be seen very clearly in the modern world, the father of a family. Even the most desperate adventurers are nothing compared with him. Everything in the modern world, even and perhaps most of all contempt, is organized against that fool, that imprudent, daring fool” (Péguy, 1932, p. 108).

If one embraces biblical wisdom, the woman is truly “the mother of the living” (*Gen 3:20*). Analogically, we can also say that the mother is the *home of the living*. The womb is our first home, where every living person made his/her first stand to live, starting with childbirth, and moving forward. To my understanding, the family home is no different. Being back home is, or should be, like being back into our mother’s womb (and into our father’s heart). As Julián Marías states: “being a woman consists of self-retreating –not very acceptable nowadays–, in order to open up to reality in a welcoming-hospitable way: from the child that is housed inside her body to the outside world transformed through her sensibility into a “home” (Marías, 1980, p. 170).

The feminine wisdom inherent in homemaking implies the receptivity that is needed to accept reality in its fullness, ours and that of others. Julián Marías identifies this dynamic as *knowing how to install oneself* in a specific way within the world of human beings, particularly in the world of men (Marías, 1980, p. 172). However, men have not yet managed to install themselves in the world of women or, in the words of Alice von Hildebrand, in the authentic *privilege of being a woman*. A divine and eternal privilege that men can only aspire to grasp from the outside, through her, since the woman is really touched by God at the moment of conception, at the moment of becoming a mother. She also has the privilege of touching her husband and children in her own intimate space, both physical and metaphysical (cf. Von Hildebrand, 2019, ch. 1).

I believe the time has come for this feminine privilege, from a domestic perspective, to be brought to the public plaza again, in conjunction with the new interdisciplinary research such as Antonio Argandoña’s recently edited work: *The Home: Multidisciplinary Reflections* (2018), and –teaming up with Mohamed G. Adbelmonem– *People, Care and The Work in the Home* (2020). Only then would we be able to honour S. John Paul II brilliant message stated in his famous apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (1981) in relation to women’s role in society: “The true advancement of women requires that clear recognition be given to the value of their maternal and family role, by comparison with all other public roles and all other professions. Furthermore, these roles and professions should be harmoniously combined if we wish the evolution of society and culture to be truly and fully human” (John Paul II, 1981, n. 23). The “world” built by women, the *family home*, should be considered of the highest value, worthy of being set as the maximum parameter of economic, social and cultural restoration. Renouncing it –Julián Marías

affirms– implies to accept, implicitly, that the world built by men is essentially superior, but it is not so (Marías, 1980, p. 175).

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