Cosmopolitan vs Sovereignist: Discursive Features of the Opposition in British and French Public Discourse

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ABSTRACT

The opposition between sovereignist/nationalist and cosmopolitan discourses is extremely ancient and keeps on heightening tensions in contemporary Europe and beyond. While a wide array of academic works concentrates nowadays on how nationalist and right-wing populist discourses are constructed and how they gain ground all over the world, a discursive study of cosmopolitanism is still lacking (Cicchelli 2016, 46). Willing to fill that gap, this paper proposes a focus on the discursive features of a cosmopolitan-inspired discourse deployed in British and French media in 2016–2019. Nevertheless, the study is not dealing with a cosmopolitan discourse separated from any circumstances of its emergence. By contrast, I am particularly interested in the modalities of its construction while facing an opposing discourse: for instance, a pro-Brexit and anti-cosmopolitan speech by Theresa May. It will be argued that this "conceptual conflict" targeting the notion of "citizen of the word" as discursively (un)acceptable is particularly suitable for a study of what it means nowadays to deploy a cosmopolitan discourse. The analysis of discursive features of such a conflict (including definition process, construction of addressees, motifs, metadiscourse and shared frameworks) is conducted in order to understand how these two discourses seek for legitimacy while their relationship is characterized by a significant power imbalance. The papers show that even though cosmopolitan discourses strive to de-legitimate sovereignist ones and expand the boundaries of "sayable" to the concept of "citizen of the world", they also exercise a form of self-censorship and remain dependent on these very boundaries they are trying to redefine.

Keywords: *cosmopolitanism, sovereignism, discursive conflict, counter-discourse, legitimacy.*

Transcription symbols:
/ – rising intonation
\ – falling intonation
(.) – pause
[] – overlapping phrase
(()) – non-verbal expression
* – proper noun

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INTRODUCTION

The back cover of a book dedicated to the issues of the contemporary European cosmopolitanism (Rouyer et al. (eds.) 2011), says: "it is often considered that cosmopolitanism is out of date. Isn't it, on the contrary, one of the possible reponses to the crisis which European Union are getting through in the beginning of the XXIst century?"[1]. In this article I will study how contemporary cosmopolitan[2] discourses are deployed in British and French media in order to critically respond to an anti-cosmopolitan, namely sovereignist[3] discourse by a politician. Such conflict, as I will suggest, is representative of a crucial discursive opposition in nowadays Europe as well as in many other parts of the world.

The cosmopolitan discourse has gained, in recent years, some attention of the public sphere, as the understanding of the global character of some contemporary issues (global terrorism, destruction of the environment, crisis of the reception of migrants) has urged the humanity to look for collective initiatives beyond the national boundaries. However, this discourse remains non-dominant as only few organisations and institutions openly represent it. Moreover, recent years have seen a new wave of sovereignist, nationalist, right-wing populist discourses challenge again and again the cosmopolitan idea associated with European institutions' power, "global elites", neoliberalism and the process of globalization (Jaffrelot 2019, 34–35). While calling into question this representation of cosmopolitan discourse as hegemonic, I will investigate how this discourse legitimizes itself as a possible response to the sovereignist rhetoric. To this end, I will draw my reflexion on the results of my current PhD project focused on a discursive conflict which engages a speech by the former British Prime Minister Theresa May and a hundred of cosmopolitan-inspired reactions from British and French media which critically responded to her message "If you believe you are a citizen of the world, you are a citizen of nowhere. You don't understand what the very word citizenship means". The main goals of this paper are to understand how a conflict between sovereignist and cosmopolitan discourses in contemporary European public sphere is discursively constructed and to analyze the means by which cosmopolitan discourse endorses the role of counter-discourse trying to de-legitimise sovereignist rhetoric and to restore its own legitimacy.

[1] Here and after the translation of French quotes and examples is mine.

[2] By "cosmopolitan", I understand discourse defending the idea of citizen engagement (at different levels, including local) for the humanity as a whole, and not only for a particular nation.

[3] By "(national-)sovereignist", I understand, following Lacroix (2002, 396), the idea that "the exercise of democratic autonomy cannot be dissociated from its historical national anchoring".

A HISTORICAL DISCURSIVE CONFLICT

Scholars interested in the relationship between sovereignist/nationalist and cosmopolitan ideologies seem to agree that this opposition is structural to a lot of political configurations in the past as well as nowadays. Brubaker (1997, 78–82) analyzes, for instance, the case of the French Revolution which was caracterised, in its first stage, by a cosmopolitan intention of welcoming those fighting for freedom all over the world, while in the second stage a clear border between French citizens and strangers has been made. In the same vein, Stolcke (1996) gives an example of the post-Second World War epoch. The period just after the end of the conflict goes in a more cosmopolitan direction: United Nations are founded and, during the Nuremberg process, justice is made to the war's criminals by an international community and not by each nation-state (Praat 2018). Nevertheless, starting from the seventies, European states are reached by nationalist tendancies in response to economic crisis and arrival of migrants. Hence, it is possible to argue with Turner (1994 [1990], 220) that "the contemporary world is structured by two contradictory social processes. On the one hand, there are powerfull pressures towards regional autonomy and localism and, on the other, there is a stronger notion of globalism and global political responsabilities".

At the same time, the sovereignist/nationalist and cosmopolitan discourses are extremely different when it comes to the influence they exercise on public discourse and its boundaries of "sayable". While sovereignist discourses are carried by political leaders, parties and movements, cosmopolitan ones remain non-dominant, even though some of its elements, such as rhetoric of diversity or tolerance are sometimes perceived as a sort of consensual discourse (Fridman and Ollivier 2004). Politically underrepresented because "unsayable": cosmopolitan discourse is regularly accused of being out of the boundaires of what can be publically said (characteristics such as "elitist", "idealistic", "angelic", "utopian" are used for this purpose). The problematic character of the term "cosmopolitan" also comes from its history, for example, the antisemitic campaigns in nazi Germany and stalinist Russia where the term was used to sigmatise and persecute Jewish people (Beck 2006, 12), especially intellectuals and, in the USSR case, citizens who carried a real or supposed pro-european, anti-sovietic vision (Nadjafov and Beloussova (eds.) 2005). Today, even though the category of "cosmopolitan" has a number of positive connotations (related to mobility, cultural diversity or learning languages), difficulties to carry cosmopolitan discourses and its different variations persist. For example, as shown by Jacquez (2015), the marginalized position of the discourse supporting undocumented migrants in France prevents it from constructing a strong critic of the dominant security-oriented discourse. Therefore, this counter-discourse frequently aligns on the dominant one in order to remain audible.

Taking into account this disbalance specific to the conflict in question, the interest of this paper is to investigate this historical opposition, still on the agenda today, from the discursive point of view that has rarely been adopted in studies dealing with cosmopolitanism. How do these opposing discourses, embodied, from one hand, by Theresa May's pro-Brexit speech and, from another hand, by a critical response to it from various media, renew this old discursive opposition in the context of contemporary European issues (Brexit, migrations)? How is the cosmopolitan discourse conceiving itself while facing its opponent? What discursive means are both sides using to gain legitimacy and de-legitimate the adversary discourse?

DISCOURSE AND COUNTER-DISCOURSE: A COMPLEX DYNAMIC

In this research, I adopt the point of view of those who argue that a counter-discourse is often likely to reuse some of the features of the "adversary" discourses. The very first reason for that is that discourses are never separate unities: a counter-discourse is such not by itself, but because it is facing a different discourse with a purpose of destroying its legitimacy and valuing its own one. Discourses are deployed within specific social configurations; they interact with each other and constantly transform. As Terdiman argues, "counter-discourses are the product of a theoretically unpredictable form of discursive labor and real transformation. No catalogue of them can ever be exhaustive" (1985, 77). From Terdiman's work through the Angenot's one (1989) to the very recent case studies in discourse analysis (Jacquez 2015, Marignier 2015, Serpereau 2015, among others), researchers have demonstrated that counter-discourses often tend to borrow some features and representations from the discourses they are opposed to. They can be both conditioned by hegemonical discursive "formations", so that "the social discourse analyst will not hasten to conclude that a rupture occurs every time he is confronted with expressly paradoxical or protesting statements. He will see what power of attraction hegemonic social discourse has to restrict the critical autonomy of [various counter-discourses]" (Angenot 1989, 19).

Starting from this point, I will address my research questions by working on a corpus which represents a discursive conflict space. It is constituted by a speech given by Theresa May the 5th of October 2016 during the Conservative party conference in Birmingham and critical cosmopolitan-inspired reactions to this speech from various British and French media, both general and specialized, national and regional, with and without paper version, as well as blogs, podcasts and broadcasted debates. Two points deserve to be explained here: the reason why the corpus items come from two different countries, and the heterogeneity of the corpus. First, it seems to me that a discursive conflict (or, as I call it, a "conceptual conflict", since the tension concerns the concept "citizen of the world" used by

May) is rarely limited by national borders. A debate "born" in Britain can affect other communities, as it is the case here. Since French public sphere has also reacted to the May's speech (as representative of a network of sovereignist discourses), I chose to include French media productions in my corpus in order to compare the way in which the concept of citizenship is discussed in two European countries divided by Brexit and in regard with linguistic differences between "citizenship" and "citoyenneté" (this comparative aspect, however, will not be addressed here due to editorial limits). As to the heterogeneity of the corpus in terms of sources and genres, it reflects my vision of a public debate which rarely affects just one media segment or one discursive genre. In order to reflect the diversity of speakers, political orientations, positions and sources, I chose to work on both widely read/listened media and those reaching a restricted and/or specific public.

My approach is based on the principles of the French discourse analysis (as presented in Maldidier 1990 who gathered texts by Pêcheux, and in Maingueneau 1995, 2014) and conceptual approach to discourse from Critical Discourse Analysis (Krzyżanowski 2016) and social discourse analysis (Angenot 1989). While being considerably different, these approaches perceive discourse as a social practice involved into power relationships (Wodak and Meyer 2016, 6) and as a space characterized by both interactions and struggles (Koselleck 1979, 133; Krzyżanowski 2016, 312). Indeed, these different approaches give a crucial importance to inter-textual and inter-discursive links (Caimotto and Raus 2017, 171) and, specifically, to the circulation of concepts. Both focuses allow to the analyst to access ideological influences, interconnexions and dependencies of discourses issued from various enunciative positions and social places. As Auboussier and Ramoneda (2015, 11) put it, specifically in regard with a type of research objet that is similar to mine, "discourse and counter-discourse circulate and confront each other in a space that exists through both understanding and conflict".

Within this general framework, I specifically follow the idea, formulated by Krzyżanowski (2016), of the "inscreasingly conceptual nature of [public] discourse". That leads me to pay attention to how political concepts are constructed and discussed within discursive conflicts and how it can inform us about the status of various discourses and its transformations ("shifts") within the public sphere. Hence, I deal with the opposition between a sovereignist and a cosmopolitan discourse as a "conceptual conflict". I define it as a public debate about a political (in the largest sense of the term) concept, namely about the way it is used and defined by someone (often a well-known political figure, a party, an intellectual, etc.) and its acceptability within the public discourse of a community. This conception of my research object allows me to treat public debates not only as local conflicts, but as manifestations of larger, deeper oppositions between several discourses, of their struggles for legitimacy and of transformations of their status within communities.

In order to understand how this discursive conflict has been manifested by a debate between Theresa May and actors of the public sphere (journalists, scholars, bloggers, etc.), I will firstly pay attention to the way in which both sides position themselves (through ethos, nomination, definition sentences, motifs). The notion of metadiscourse will help me to analyze how the concept of "citizen of the world/citizen of nowhere", the nutshell of the "conceptual conflict", is assumed or not by the participants and how they try to resignify the Theresa May's sentence. Secondly, I will study the conflict as a space where some representations are (often unconsciously) shared by both the discourse and the counter-discourse, feed in certain cases by common beliefs or "collective prediscursive frameworks" (Paveau 2006). I will conclude by summarizing the ways in which cosmopolitan-inspired discourses are looking for a wider legitimacy by designing themselves as a response to the sovereignist discourses.

THERESA MAY'S SPEECH: TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF "CITIZENSHIP"

Few months after the Brexit vote took place and soon after having became British Prime minister, Theresa May delivered a speech at the Conservative party conference, known for a polemic definition of the "citizen of the world" notion which has been formulated there. I will now highlight some discursive features of this speech which make it the target of cosmopolitan counter-reaction that has followed.

The addressee of the speech is double. First, May positively addresses "ordinary working-class people", valorized in the speech and depicted as suffering from inequalities. Second, she negatively addresses "elites": "the well-off", "the rich", "the powerful", by threatening them and preventing them from doing harm to the "people". These two categories are radically opposed, as it typically the case in what is called "populist discourse" (Wodak and Krzyżanowski 2017). Such an opposition can be noticed from the following sentence where the contrast between "to stand up for" ("the weak") and "to stand up to" ("the strong") allows no middle shades:

> (1) and it's what i'm in this for (…) to stand up for the weak and stand up to the strong (…) and to put the power of government squarely at the service of ordinary working-class people

Furthermore, both "people" and "elites" are here designated with "deshumanized" categories including a definite article and a nominalized adjective ("the weak", "the strong"). I should however precise that an overall analysis showed that such a way of designation is mostly used to refer to the "elites" than to the "people".

While the actor "people" is associated with the nation, "elites" is synonym for globalization and European hegemony, the end of which is celebrated in the

speech: “the authority of *eu law in this country ended forever”, concludes May. Just before it she depicts the new Brexit border between United Kingdom and European Union embodied by the corresponding institutions:

> (2) TM: and let’s be clear about what is going to happen (.) article *fifty/ triggered no later than the end of march\ (.) a *great *repeal *bill to get rid of the *european *communities *act/ introduced in the next *parliamentary session\ (.) our laws made not in *brussels/ but in *westminster\ (.) [our jud-]
> Public: [((applause))]
> TM: our judges sitting not in *luxembourg/ but in courts across the land\

By addressing (“you”) those two categories of population, “people” and “elite”, May also frequently use the same type of syntactic structure, namely [if x y]:

> (3) if you can’t afford to get onto the property ladder (.) or your child is stuck in a bad school it doesn’t feel like it’s working for you
> (4) because if you’re well-off and comfortable (.) *britain is a different country and these concerns are not your concerns

Such a parallelism allows her to draw once more on a contrast between the poor condition of “working-class people” and the priveleges of the “elite”. This structure is particularly important for my analysis because the sentence about “citizens of the world” follows it too:

> (5) but if you believe you’re a citizen of the world/ you’re a citizen of nowhere\ you don’t understand what the very word citizenship means

We though understand that the category “citizen of the world” as assimilated to the “privileged elite” as Theresa May openly blames it within the same type of structure. Both parts of the sentence are crucial. The first one draws its rhetorical effect on the parallelism which creates intensity (Romero 2017) by opposing “citizen of the world” and “citizen of nowhere”. The second one represents a symbolically powerful metalinguistic commentary which deprives those who call themselves “citizens of the world” of their understanding of the concept of “citizenship”. The overall sentence can be analyzed as a “commentary on reality hiding” (Paveau 2013, 132) which Theresa May uses to exercise control on the sense of the concept of “citizen” which appears to be crucial in the context of Brexit. She then defines it in a more explicit way by introducing the notion of “spirit of citizenship”:

> (6) but we also value something else (…) the spirit of citizenship (.) that spirit that means you respect the bonds and obligations/ that make our society work\ that means a commitment to the men and women who live

> around you, who work for you (…) who buy the goods and services you sell (…) that spirit that means recognising the social contract that says you train up local young people before you take on cheap labour (…) from overseas (...) that spirit (…) that means you do as others do and pay your fair share of tax

The "spirit of citizenship" implies a classic understanding of allegiance in terms of rights and duties ("you respect the bonds and obligations"), and the boundaries of this allegiance are clearly determined: by saying "citizenship", Theresa May only implies "national citizenship". This one, in its turn, is based on a distinction between members and non-members of the community, the former being referred to as human beings ("local young people"), while the latter are "objectivized" and "functionalized" (Van Leeuwen 1996): "cheap labor from overseas". Moreover, the national citizenship in May's definition implies a preference for one's compatriots rather than for non-members of the national community ("you train up local young people before you take on cheap labour (.) from overseas").

The fact that May's speech abunds in definitions, commentaries about the relationship between things and words (as in the "citizen of the world" example) and other metalinguistic features determines the overall character of the debate which I characterized above as "conceptual conflict": it is about opposing two system of values by discussing words which name it. That being said, I will move on to the ways in which the cosmopolitan counter-discourses have reacted to this speech seeking to legitimate other manners of talking about one's citizenship, different from the national one.

COSMOPOLITAN COUNTER-REACTIONS: SEEKING TO EXPAND THE BOUNDARIES OF "SAYABLE"

First of all, these counter-reactions constructs a certain representation of the current political situation, characterized by a regain of right-wing populist and nationalist tendencies all over the world:

> (7) We live in uncertain times. In Europe, populism has been making striking electoral gains through parties such as Germany's Alternative fur Deutschland, Italy's Lega Nord, Hungary's Jobbik and France's Rassemblement National (previously Front National). These successes seem to be part of a global renaissance in popular nationalism, promoted by figures such as Putin in Russia, Erdogan in Turkey, Modi in India, Duterte in the Philippines, Abe in Japan, and Bolsonaro in Brazil. (Hodder_Geographical_01/12/2018)

Such descriptions frequently aggregate political leaders' or parties' names creating an effect of massiveness, supporting the worried attitude which underlies the texts.

The situation itself is generally described as “unstable” or “uncertain”. The May’s sentence appears thereupon not as an isolated fact, but as a part of a tendency which (re)gains ground, as representative of a larger set of discourses. As such, her speech and the British government rhetoric as the whole are contingent upon metadiscursive transformations used to denounce its anticosmopolitan attitude and to resignify terms and definitions mobilized there. By doing so, the speakers seek to keep on using words (and ideas) which May has excluded from the sphere of sayable, namely the “global citizenship”, “the citizen of the world”, etc. Participants try to resignify it by assuming the supposedly offensive term of “citizen of nowhere” while defining themselves as citizens of the world/of Europe:

> (8) Quand elle nous a appelés des « citoyens de nulle part », cela m’a rendu encore plus fier d’être un citoyen de nulle part parce que je me sens un citoyen de l’Europe (Rédaction_Londres_18/07/2019)
>
> When she called us “citizens of nowhere”, it made me even prouder to be a citizen of nowhere because I feel like a citizen of Europe.

The speakers also engage in a “conflict of definitions” (Doury et Micheli 2016) by discarding the supposed May’s definition of citizenship and formulating their own one following a typical structure [X is not *a* but *b*]:

> (9) Citizenship is not a question of what passport we hold; it is an idea of who we are as human beings, a question of what we can do, and what we should. (Alexander_Positive news_07/10/2016)

Finally, the establishement of a cosmopolitan discursive position needs specific motifs, namely syntactically and lexically more or less stabilized structures, typical for a genre/type of discourse. The most frequent one is a motif “of multiple identities”, used for a self- or other-presentation of “citizens of the world”:

> (10) I don’t see my geographical identities as mutually exclusive. I am Greek and British and a Londoner and Mykonian and European. I am not a “citizen of nowhere”, but of many places. (Andreou_inews_20/11/2018)

This motif is characterized by the use of a presentational structure with the verb “to be” (“I am”, “she is”, etc.) and the accumulation of adjectives of territorial belonging, mixing different scales (“Greek”, “Londoner”, “Mykonian”, “European”). The discursive conflict is also represented here by making the opposed discourse visible in a dialogical way (“I don’t see my geographical identities as mutually exclusive”).

I have hitherto shown the conflictual dimension of the opposition “sovereignist vs cosmopolitan discourses”. This final part will, by contrast, be dedicated to the common ground of these two discourses, even though they may

seem perfectly antagonistic. As I have previously explained, it has been shown that "media counter-discourses are seldom, from formal, editorial or procedural points of view, so different from the hegemonic discourses they criticize" (Serpereau 2015, *s.p.*). Hence, it is crucial to identify elements shared by both discourses in order to discuss the way in which the cosmopolitan discourses try to gain more legitimacy.

The most common shared representation is the representation of cultural/ national/ethnic homogeneity as normal and of heterogeneity as irregular or exceptional. I have already shown that Theresa May's discourse tend to normalize the national homogeneity by distinguishing nationals and strangers, immigrants, "labor from overseas". But such a preference for the homogeneity is also proper to some cosmopolitan counter-discourses. In the following example, the constant use of the preposition "mais" ("but") makes us understand that the mixted identity needs to be specifically marked, while a culturally homogeneous individual or family are perceived as those "by default":

> (11) Michael Lommatzsch est gallois, mais il vit en France à Montabard, près d'Argentan […]
>
> « Je suis Britannique, mais ma mère était flamande, d'Anvers. Quant à mon arrière-grand-père paternel, c'était un immigré allemand ce qui explique mon patronyme ». (Anonymous_Actu.fr_26/03/2019)
>
> Michael Lommatzsch is Welsh, but he lives in France in Montabard, near Argentan […]
>
> "I'm British, but my mother was Flemish, from Antwerp. As for my paternal great-grandfather, he was a German immigrant, which explains my family name".

Both self-and other-presentation[4] in this excerpt of the article underlines the fact that the interviewee does not have the same nationality that his close relatives ("Je suis Britannique, mais ma mère était flamande") and that he lives in other country that those of his birth ("Michael Lommatzsch est gallois, mais il vit en France"). The use of the conjunction "mais" in argumentative function aims to break a certain argumentative direction that readers are supposed (by the journalist) to take. Indeed, the journalist presupposes that his public, after reading the first part ("Michael Lommatzsch is Welsh" or "I'm British"), will conclude that M.L. lives in Wales (or at least in the United Kingdom) and that his mother is British. I call this presupposition, following Paveau, "pre-discursive": it is a collective cognitive framework which has an "instructional role" in the process of discourse production and discourse interpretation (Paveau 2006, 14). We can see that the journalist shares (and, believes that the readers share it too) the belief of cultural and ethnic homogeneity of individuals and families because she/he seeks to "anticipate" what is supposed to be a "logic" interpretation by the readers.

[4] By the journalist and then by the interviewee himself, as far as we can suppose that the journalist reports his speech *texto*, which is uncertain.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study of the features of a conceptual conflict between an example of sovereignist and cosmopolitan discourses should be seen, as I argued in the beginning, as a key for further understanding of modalities of this conflict in contemporary public discourse. Indeed, even though the counter-reactions primarily target the May's sentence about citizens of the world, her speech and overall discourse are regularly put into a wider discursive "landscape". This landscape is composed of discourses, depicted by the speakers as dangerous (right-wing populist, nationalist, sovereignist etc.) since they restrain the identity, citizenship and political participation to the national borders. The cosmopolitan counter-discourse hence specifically targets this array of discourses, the debate going beyond the May's sentence taken as an excuse. On this basis, the conflict can be resumed by a following scheme. Theresa May exercises control and ajustement of the sense of the concept "citizen (of the world)" and relegates it to the realm of irreasonable and false in regard to a supposed "reality" of what citizenship is. In their turn, the participants constructing counter-reactions try to put in use and to legitimate the concept in question and, at the same time, de-legitimate the May's vision. They legitimate the concept of "citizen of the world" by personally assuming it and so by taking it out from the domain of "unsayable". As to the de-legitimation of the May's discourse, they do so by assimilating it to a set of discourses which are, in their turn, considered as "unsayable" (by the speakers themselves or due to a wider consensus, *e.g.* the antisemitic one).

Despite this polarization in terms of values and representations of what can be publically said, vehiculated by each of the two discourses, they also share some "prediscursive" beliefs. One of these frameworks is the representation of cultural homogeneity as normative, "unmarked", neutral and heterogeneity as "marked", exceptional. This shared representation has been identified, within the cosmopolitan counter-discourses, as being part of the self- and other-presentation of "citizens of the world", often within the motif of multiple identity (of an individual, a family, a group). This motif being one of the most explicitely asserted features of the cosmopolitan counter-discourses, a contradiction appears sometimes between what the speakers want their discourses to be and what they really are. Indeed, the counter-discourses remain, at some point, dependent on the opposing ones. While asserting a cosmopolitan argument which could be formulated as "every individual has a multiple identity and is not assigned by nature to just one of them", the counter-discourses exercise a form of self-censorship by making visible the lack of coherence that a heterogenious identity is supposed to represent. To sum up this reflexion, the actual transformations of the cosmopolitan discourses within its opposition to the sovereignist ones seem to inform us about difficulties, which still persist in the public discourse, to talk and hear about cosmopolitan ideas.

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