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NEITHER WARRIORS NOR VICTIMS, THE WAUJA PEACEFULLY ORGANIZE TO DEFEND THEIR LAND

LEGACY OF ALTAMIRA

An idea is spreading in the rainforests of Central Brazil, perhaps even more rapidly than the fires of deforestation. The idea is that Indians as a group are politically powerful. Indians living in isolated rainforest villages throughout Amazonia are coming to think of themselves as sharing an identity as Indian people.

In February of 1989, the Kayapo and their allies staged an historic peaceful demonstration against a proposed hydroelectric project at Altamira, Brazil (Turner 1989a, 1989b, 1989c, 1990a, in press). The project, to be funded by the World Bank, would have flooded vast areas of Kayapo land and destroyed most of their rivers for fishing. Outraged that they had not even been consulted, the Kayapo organized themselves and mounted a spectacular media event in protest. Their campaign was so creative and well-executed that the ensuing international outcry caused the World Bank to withdraw its support for the dam project. success of this initiative at Altamira profoundly changed political reality and expectations for Indian people in Brazil and beyond. The stereotype of Indian as victim was broken.

One example of this legacy is the current effort of the Wauja ¹ of the Upper Xingu to reclaim peacefully, under Brazilian law, traditional fishing grounds and a sacred ceremonial site, Kamukuaka. Both are currently being invaded or occupied by ranchers and poachers.

BACKGROUND ON THE WAUJA

The Wauja are a community of about 200 relatively traditional Arawak-speaking Indians who live by fishing and swidden horticulture in the Xingu National Park in Northern Mato Grosso (see map, fig. 2). Although during the past generation their economy has become dependent on steel tools, fishhooks and other manufactured goods, their involvement in the cash economy is still minimal and sporadic, limited mainly to sale of handcrafts.

Figure 1. Wauja father and children sitting in the doorway of their home at dusk.

Like virtually all Indian people, during the early period of contact they suffered horrific population losses due to recurrent epidemics of introduced disease (Ireland 1988). Unlike most other Indians, however, much of their traditional land was reserved for them under law soon after regular contact began in the 1940s. ² Despite this measure of protection, an essential part of their traditional territory was left out of the park. This unprotected area includes fishing grounds, agricultural land, and most important, *Kamukuaka*, a sacred cavern and ceremonial ground beside a waterfall on the Batovi-Tamitatoala River. ³

When the Wauja first began to understand that only part of their traditional territory fell within park boundaries, they protested to the government Indian agency, FUNAI, that the excluded area was essential to their survival as Indian people. In response to the Wauja's most recent protests on the matter, FUNAI stated that a five-year study is needed before action can be taken.

INVASION OF WAUJA LANDS

The Wauja say that if nothing is done, in five years their ancestral land will be overrun and lost to them forever. Ranchers already occupy Kamukuaka, the most sacred Wauja ceremonial site, situated on the upper Batovi River. Atamai, political chief of the Wauja, describes it as an extraordinary place, a great stone house beside a waterfall. At the mouth of the cavern are rock

carvings made by ancestors of the Wauja, images of the parts of women that create life. The Wauja say the carvings have power to make living things increase and become abundant.⁴

In addition, the Wauja revere Kamukuaka as the dwelling place of spirits. These spirits are respectfully addressed as kin, and referred to in the Wauja language as inyākānāu, "those who teach." The spirits guide the elders, appearing to them in visions, helping them heal the sick and maintain harmony within the village. To honor these spirits, the Wauja and their neighbors the Bacairi have performed ceremonies at Kamukuaka for many generations. Wauja elders emphasize that their most sacred ceremony, kawika, was performed at that place, and can proudly list deceased relatives who played kawika flutes at Mayaya, brother of Atamal and Kamukuaka. ceremonial leader of the Wauja, once sought to

Figure 2. Xingu National Park as currently demarcated.

Enlargement shows (1) site of burned village, now rebuilt as Aldeia Ulupuene, (2) place where poachers shot at Wauja fishermen, and (3) new demarcation line now being surveyed by team of Indian volunteers. The Wauja's sacred site, Kamukuaka, will be reclaimed when park boundaries are moved 30-40 km south in second phase of redemarcation project.



express his attachment to Kamukuaka without reducing it to words. An accomplished musician, he softly sang the melody of the sacred flute ceremony, concluding, "therefore that land means everything to us."

In Wauja oral tradition, Kamukuaka has existed since the beginning of the world, before men were created. Chief Atamai says his late father took his children there before he died, and told them the sacred story linked to that place, of how the Sun dwelt in the great stone house when he still walked the earth in human form. Atamai himself has seen the gaping hole in the side of the cavern where, according to the ancestors, the Sun tried to tear the house apart in those ancient times.

Now the ranchers keep the Wauja out. The ancient ceremonies cannot be performed, and young people know Kamukuaka only through the stories of their elders. Even worse, the Wauja say, is the desecration the ranchers have brought:

They have turned Kamukuaka into a cattle pasture. There used to be giant trees all around the stone cavern, right up to the

waterfall, but the ranchers have ripped them all out, leaving the earth bare and pitiful. They graze cattle there now. Our ceremonial ground is covered with stinking cattle droppings. The whiteman has covered the dust of our ancestors with shit.

The loss of Kamukuaka has had economic consequences for the Wauja as well, since the area along the Batovi near Kamukuaka is the only source for certain essential raw materials, including ceramic pigments, medicinal plants, and shells used in trade.

But Kamukuaka is not the only area where outsiders are invading the Wauja's ancestral land. In 1988 and again in 1989, Atamai complained to government officials that poachers were penetrating deep into Wauja territory to take commercial quantities of fish, destined for sale in Brazilian towns along the upper Batovi river. The poachers enter Wauja waters in boats filled with heavily-armed men, and transport the fish to small trucks waiting at designated locations outside Wauja territory (Cruz 1988, 1989).

Figure 3. Wauja elders summon forest spirits to a feast of fish and unleavened bread spread out before them. In return, the spirits are enjoined to assist the recovery of a sick person whose family has sponsored the ceremony.



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Wauja attempts to keep poachers out have led to violent confrontations, in which poachers have shot at Wauja fishermen without provocation (Ireland 1989a, 1989b, 1990). Because of poachers, ordinary overnight fishing trips have suddenly become dangerous. Parents now discourage their adolescent boys from going on fishing trips unless accompanied by an elder who can be trusted to handle a threatening situation.

In addition to physical danger of armed invaders, the sheer loss of fish is a serious problem, since the Wauja depend on fish for most of the protein in their diet. The areas currently being invaded by poachers are some of the best traditional fishing grounds. Generations of Wauja have relied on these areas to provide the large numbers of fish needed for ceremonial feasts. As a result of the continuing depredation by poachers, the Wauja say these areas are becoming fished out. Poaching therefore threatens traditional Wauja economy, based in large part on communal sharing and ceremonial redistribution as opposed to private profit and accumulated wealth.

WAUJA ORGANIZE TO RECLAIM THEIR LAND

The incident in early 1989, when the chief and other elders were shot at by poachers, was a turning point for the Wauja. That summer they decided the government would not defend their land and resources, and that they would have to do it themselves. They built a new village, Aldeia Batovi, within the Park but near the area where the poachers and ranchers were penetrating. Gardens were cleared and planted, three large traditional houses were built, and several families took up permanent residence there, maintaining contact with the main village at Lake Piyulaga by radio.

In June of 1990, this new village was burned to the ground by an employee of a local rancher. The three houses were lost, along with all they contained: tools, stores of food, and medical Responding to letters of protest from supplies. abroad, the Brazilian government tried to minimize this incident, alleging the ranchers merely torched a makeshift campsite the Wauja had used overnight and abandoned. This is not the case. temporary Wauja campsite has first-year gardens; the village was inhabited. Confrontation was avoided only because the occupants were away attending a ceremony at the main village during the attack.5

The Brazilian government insists these incidents were not violent, even though shots were fired and houses burned. The Wauja do not agree. They

Figure 4. Traditional house under construction.

consider themselves under attack, and blame the escalating violence on faulty demarcation of their territory years ago, when the Xingu National Park was created. To correct the situation, the Wauja say park boundaries must be moved south a distance of 30-40 kilometers, to include critical parts of their traditional territory. The area of land is not large, but it is crucial to the Wauja and to peace in the region. Though it forms the outer margin of their territory, it is at the center of their traditions and their identity as Indian people.

The Wauja have already rebuilt their burned village and renamed it Aldeia Ulupuene. To maintain an increased presence in the area, they are adding an airstrip at the site of the attack. Soon after their village was burned, the Wauja asked the government to survey the land officially outside the park, in order to have it included in the park and thereby protected. Officials replied that they lacked funds for such a project. In response, the Wauja, together with members of other indigenous communities, decided to survey the land themselves.

In August, a volunteer force of about fifty men drawn from Kayapo, Kajabi, Suya, Trumai, Yawalapiti and Wauia communities assembled at the burned village site to survey the land. This in itself is a major achievement by the Wauja, and a credit to the volunteers. In the first half of this century, some of these communities fought pitched battles against each other, and in several well-remembered instances. inflicted heavy casualties and took women and children captive. Thus the men in this volunteer group are working close beside traditional enemies of their father and That they all are united in a grandfathers. common purpose bespeaks their determination to protect their shared future as Indian people.

The volunteers have begun clearing surveying



sightlines and building the airstrip. The project is expected to take three to six months, depending on support from outside sources. Since the new village is six days journey from the main village by dugout canoe, the Wauja need motorboats to transport men and supplies, as well as food to feed the volunteers.

The Rainforest Foundation, founded in 1988 by Kayapo chief Ropni and rock musician Sting to support Indian-initiated efforts to protect the rainforest, has taken on the Wauja project as a top priority. Olympio Serra, formerly director of the Xingu National Park, now working on the Rainforest Foundation's Brazilian board, Fundação Mata Virgem, reports that 4,000 liters of gasoline and food for the volunteers were shipped to the Wauja the first week of October. These supplies should enable the Wauja to finish the job before the heavy rains arrive in December.

José Carlos Libânio at the Nucleus for Indigenous Rights (NDI) in Brasilia, explains that surveying the area is an important step in protecting it for Indian people under Brazilian law. He says the Wauja's legal case, currently under

preparation, stands to set a legal precedent on behalf of all Brazilian Indians. To expand the Xingu Park boundaries, the Wauja's lawyers must challenge an administrative decree that currently prohibits alteration to existing boundaries of indigenous reserves. This decree works against Indians, denying them redress against boundary decisions made without their knowledge or consent.⁶

Libânio says the Wauja case is strong, and he expects them to win it. However, it will take at least a year for the case to proceed through the Brazilian courts. During that time, the Wauja will need support from the international community. A public information and letter-writing campaign is currently being organized to help create a climate of opinion in Brazil favorable to a just resolution of the Wauja's legal case.

IMPORTANCE OF THE WAUJA CASE

Although all Amazonian Indians are facing serious threats to their survival (Hemming 1987, Price 1989, Maybury-Lewis 1989, Pinto 1989, Taylor 1988) the Wauja's case is crucial in several

Figure 5. Fishermen pull a net through Lake Piyulaga in preparation for kwarup, a ceremony in memory of those especially cherished by the community, whether chiefs or children.



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respects. First, their legal case stands to set a major precedent on behalf of all Brazilian Indians. If the Wauja win the right to reclaim traditional territory under law, all Brazilian Indians benefit.

Second, the Wauja campaign for non-violent, legal reclamation of territory is setting an historical precedent as well. The Wauja have never attacked or killed Brazilian settlers. If they are successful in reclaiming their territory through entirely non-violent means, it will be a landmark victory for both Indian rights and rainforest conservation.

Third, the Wauja's case presents a unique opportunity simply because they stand a good chance of winning. The Yanomami situation (CCPY 1989a, 1989b) is currently receiving worldwide attention; Survival International rightly calls it one of the great humanitarian campaigns of the late twentieth century. Both in numbers of people affected, and in severity of human rights violations, the Yanomami case outwelghs the Wauja case. But the Yanomami campaign faces great odds, and will be very difficult to win. The gold miners are organized and determined; the political

situation is complex and entrenched. The suffering of the Yanomami is so intense and unrelenting that it is a public relations problem to maintain enough optimism to keep the international community actively involved.

The Wauja case, on the other hand, is relatively straightforward and easy to win. A win for the Wauja will help the Yanomami as well, because success attracts optimism and support. The Yanomami situation seems almost hopeless, and this is a great part of the problem. If the Wauja create a well-publicized victory for indigenous rights in Brazil, the cause of the Yanomami and other Brazilian Indians will be advanced, just as the Wauja's own cause was advanced by the Kayapo victory at Altamira.

WAUJA PERSPECTIVES ON THEIR SITUATION

It is difficult to convey to members of an international community that is increasingly mobile and secular how the Wauja, and other people in traditional small-scale societies, are connected

Figure 6. In the shade of the mens' house, a village elder portions out spicy fish stew onto fresh manioc bread. Everyone present will receive a share, whether they fished that day or not. to their ancestral lands not only by economic necessity, but by far deeper bonds. The Wauja's



land provides far more than food, tools, and shelter. It is the dwelling place of the spirits who guide them, the birthplace of their children, and the resting place of their ancestors. It is the sacred landscape of all their poetry, stories, songs, and prayers; it is their one place upon the earth. Everything needed for human life, everything sacred and precious, flows from that land. If this land is ripped away from the Wauja, if they lose it, they lose their future as Indian people, and they keenly appreciate this.

And yet, equally important to their identity as Wauja is their rejection of war and violence as behavior befitting honorable men. The Wauja have seen that the Kayapo's warrior image has served them well in their dealings with the military elite that has so long dominated Brazilian politics. And while the Wauja greatly respect the Kayapo's determination to survive on their own terms, the confrontational tactics of the Kayapo are antithetical to Wauja notions of honor and dignity.

As provocations by invaders become increasingly violent, the Wauja say they soon will be forced to respond in kind, and even perhaps, to kill (Ireland 1989a, 1989b). This is their dilemma. If the Wauja renounce violence and refuse to confront the invaders, they may lose their ancestral land, and with it their way of life. But if in order to keep the land, they become violent and brutal men, who trade in fear and solve problems by killing, they will no longer be Wauja, and will inhabit the land of their ancestors as strangers.

The Wauja's view of warfare and violence as morally degrading is revealed in their story of creation. The passage condensed here describes how the Sun gave defining attributes to each tribe of man:

The Sun offers a rifle to the ancestor of the Wauja, but the Wauja merely turns it over in his hands, not knowing how to use it. The Sun takes the rifle from the Wauja and offers it to the ancestor of the warlike Indians who live to the north of the Wauja. This Indian is also baffled by the rifle, and so the Sun takes it away again and this time hands it to the ancestor of the whiteman.

The whiteman immediately lifts the rifle to his shoulder and fires it successfully, thus laying claim to the superior technology that would be his. The Sun then gave hardwood bows to the Indians, with which they were well satisfied.

Figure 7. A communal fishing party returns with a respectable catch.

Next the Sun passed around a gourd dipper from which each man was asked to drink. The ancestor of the Wauja approached, but found to his horror that the dipper was filled to the brim with blood. He refused to touch it, but when the warlike Indian was offered the dipper, he readily drank from it. When the Sun finally offered the dipper of blood to the whiteman, he drank it down greedily in great gulps.

That is why the whiteman and the warlike Indian tribes are so violent today; even in ancient times, they were thirsty for the taste of blood. To the Wauja, however, the Sun gave a dipper of manioc porridge. And that is why the Wauja drink manioc porridge today, and why they are not a brutal and violent people.

Yet while this story expresses some of the Wauja's attitudes toward violence, it no longer can be said to reflect their view of other Indian people, for this has changed dramatically in the last decade.

In 1980, the Wauja divided human beings into three categories: putaka, denoting the peaceful



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tribes of the Upper Xingu; muteitsi, glossing roughly as "enemy Indian" or "wild Indian," and referring to warlike tribes, including the Kayapo; and kajaipa, referring to non-Indians. There was no cover term for Indian people. Upper Xingu Indians (putaka) and warlike enemy Indians (muteitsi) could not be subsumed under one linguistic category simply because they were not the same kind of human being. Muteitsi and their way of life viewed with scorn; Wauja parents scolded unruly children by saying that only muteitsi would marry them when they grew up. In 1980 the Wauja used the term muteitsi exclusively as an epithet, and never in the presence of a member of that class.

By 1989, however, a dramatic conceptual shift had occurred. The Wauja had begun referring to themselves with pride as *muteitsi*, meaning "Indian people." For the first time, the Wauja had a cover term that recognized all Indian people as a group. The warlike tribes were no longer "our enemies" (apalunaun), but instead "our brothers" (apawanaun).

The meaning of *muteitsi* had not been broadened; it had been radically changed. I never again heard the term used as a epithet or a marker that divided Indians from each other. Instead, it had become a unifying term, and a label of pride.

In past generations, Wauja Intermarried with *muteitsi* only as the dreaded consequence of being taken captive in warfare. That is no longer so. The first voluntary intermarriage recently occurred when the daughter of the Wauja chief married a Kayapo in a match approved by both families.

Yet despite this willingness to accept culturally distinct groups as fully human and even as brothers with shared Indian identity, the Wauja see no need to imitate them or adopt their cultural values. The Wauja now accept the Kayapo, but they still renounce violence as a way of life. Far from viewing physical aggression with awe and admiration, they see it as pathetic and a mark of failed leadership. The Wauja term for warrior or soldier, peyeteki yekeho, can be translated as "a man whose greatest talent is losing his

Figure 8. Village elder dances with his little kinswomen, who grasp the fringes of his straw skirt as he leads them. For the duration of the dance, his body is inhabited by the spirit of the kagapa, a bait fish. Performing the ceremony attracts fish to the waters surrounding the village. self-control."

The Wauja value their traditions and moral



perspective on the world as much as they value the land of their ancestors. And so their statements to the outside world take the form not of boasting or angry threats, but of carefully reasoned moral arguments. In September 1989, Chief Atamai, seated in the central plaza in the company of the assemble elders, tried to convey these concerns in a filmed interview: 7

When that whiteman shot at us with his rifle it offended me more than I can say. What if his bullet had killed me? My daughters, my little ones, would be left without me. They would grieve as only children can. They would suffer without their father. Why does the whiteman presume to make orphans of my children? Why does the whiteman seek to kill us?

Does he think Indians do not have families? Perhaps he thinks that Indians do not have children. As he is, so are we. We are men! Doesn't he know that? Out thoughts, our desires, our lives, they are as his own! What we carry within our bellies, what is in our hearts, is the same. Can't he see that?

We are not different. That is why we do not wish to kill the whiteman. We know that whitemen have children, just as we do ourselves. If we kill the fathers, we cause the children to suffer. Killing makes misery, and that is why we do not undertake it lightly.

I bear you no ill will, I say. I have no quarrel with you, whiteman. We are Wauja; we not a brutal and violent people. But — don't grab for yourself the land of our grandfathers. That is OURS.

Look, imagine what would happen if we decided to invade land belonging to some rancher, some whiteman. He would not just let us have it! Of course he would defend it with everything he had. He would fight, he would shoot us, he would kill us. Should we, then, be any different? Should we value our land any less than the whiteman values his? This is our land, and we SHALL defend it.

To keep this land, I would kill. These are not empty words.

We'll summon the Kayapo. They have told me I can count on them. "If the ranchers invade your land," they said, "don't hesitate to call on us. Come to us from your village, and we will hear you. We will smash the houses of those bastards! We will wipe them out! They are our enemies." So say the Kayapo. "Don't take pity on those ranchers. They are your mortal enemies."

"All right," I said, "when it comes to that, we'll make war on them together."

But if they leave us in peace, if they don't invade us, there will be no trouble. They too, are our brothers, after all.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Information. Get on our mailing list. We'll send you updates on the Wauja and information on films, publications, and campus speaking tours by Amazonian leaders.

Letter campaign. During the next year, Amazon Network is coordinating international support for the Wauja while their legal case is in the courts. Send us your address if you want to write government officials in support of the Wauja.

Classroom materials. We have films, study guides, taped radio broadcasts, and other educational material prepared for college classroom use. All profits go to the Wauja.

Contact Amazon Network, 10009 Blue Coat Drive, Fairfax, VA 22030; (703) 273-xxxx.

NOTES

Sources and Acknowledgements. This paper is based on information obtained in the Wauja village of Piyulaga, as well as in conversation with Wauja visiting the United States, and telephoning me from Brazil.

I resided in the Wauja village during eighteen months in 1980-82, and another month in 1989. In 1990, Tupanumaka Wauja, son of a prominent Wauja elder, lived with my family for six months as we toured Native American communities in the United States.

Information on the current status of the Wauja land reclamation project has been obtained in telephone conversations with Atamai Wauja and his Acervo ISA

son Kanaiyu in Brasilia, as well through the invaluable cooperation of the following: Larry Cox and Mary Daly, Rainforest Foundation International; José Carlos Libânio, Núcleo de Direitos Indígenas; Angela Papiani, União das Nações Indígenas; Luis Carlos Pinagé and Olympio Serra, Fundação Mata Virgem; Megaron Txucarramãe, FUNAI. Jennifer Stuart, a Brazilian anthropologist active on behalf of the Wauja, has also greatly contributed to the flow of information to the United States during the current Wauja land crisis.

On behalf of the Wauja, I also wish to thank the thousands of people — college students and faculty, conservation activists, human rights advocates, Native Americans, and others from every background — who have already written letters and signed petitions supporting Wauja efforts to defend their land and way of life.

- 1. The Wauja are commonly referred to by outsiders as the Aurá or Waurá. These names are incorrect, resulting from mispronunciation. The Wauja wish to be known by their true name for themsleves, which is spelled Wauja, and pronounced WOW-sha.
- 2. That the Wauja and their Upper Xingu neighbors still occupy the land of their fathers and grandfathers is largely thanks to the efforts of the Claudio and Orlando Villas Boas, who helped create the Xingu National Park in the 1950s. For history of the Xingu Park in the context of national Indian policy in Brazil, see Davis 1977:47-61.
- 3. The term translated here as sacred is *kakaiyapai*, spoken with great emphasis. It glosses generally as "dear, of utmost value, something not to be lost." In the context of ceremonial performance, *kakayapai* takes on the added meaning of something precious and irreplaceable handed down from the ancestors, and deriving its value from religious belief.

The Wauja have no term that translates literally as "sacred" or "holy", but bilingual Wauja say the Portuguese term sagrado translates into Wauja as kakaiyapai, in the sense of "something of utmost value."

4. Brazilian anthropologist Marcelo Óppido-Fiorini reports a cave beside a waterfall, also containing images of female generative power, as a site held sacred by the Wasuhsu, a Nambiquara people. Fiorini says similar sites are held sacred by the Sararé, the Alãtesu, the Hahãintesu, the Mamaindé, and the Negaroté.

In 1987, Fiorini submitted to FUNAI an

extensively documented proposal to protect this sacred site as a reserve, but nothing was done. Soon after, in the fall of 1988, the Nambiquara still undetermined destroyed а amount of agricultural machinery (reports vary between \$15,000 and \$60,000 damage) that in their view was desecrating their sacred site. FUNAI is now said to be reconsidering Fiorini's proposal. We can all help the Wasuhsu. Those interested in writing letters to Brazilian officials in support of this project should contact Amazon Network, 10009 Blue Coat Drive, Fairfax, Virginia 22030.

- 5. According to some reports, one Wauja family did not attend the ceremony and discovered the burned village upon returning in late afternoon from a family fishing trip. Exact circumstances of the fire remain to be determined when I return to the field.
- 6. According to the government, the intent of the decree is to protect Indians by preventing any attempt to reduce Indian lands already demarcated. In practice, however, the decree does not work this way.

To site just one example, in 1989 the government was able to get around this decree and reduce the territory of the Uru-Eu-Wau-Wau of the Guaporé Valley in Rondônia. It did this by simply nullifying the existing demarcation of their territory and subsequently issuing a new demarcation granting them a fraction of what they had before.

The boundaries could not be altered, but it was easy enough simply to nullify them and start over. Only the President of the Republic has the power to do this; Indians cannot. And because of the decree that allegedly protects them, Indians are blocked from seeking redress under law when their territory is taken from them in this way. A victory for the Wauja would end this unjust situation.

7. This passage has been condensed from the recorded transcript. For a copy of the full text of Atamai's remarks write Amazon Network, 10009 Blue Coat Drive, Fairfax, Virginia 22030.



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