

**UNDER NEO-COLONIALISM AND OTHERING: WEST PAPUAN CASE IN  
BONNIE ETHERINGTON'S *THE EARTH CRIES OUT***

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**ABSTRAK**

*During 1997-1998, West Papua, the most eastern part of Indonesia, is in the midst of collision between the Indonesian police and the Operasi Papua Merdeka resistance. This study aims to examine the calamity brought by the Neo-colonial power upon the land of West Papua and the forms of Othering done under the Indonesian rule as represented in Bonnie Etherington's *the Earth Cries Out* by deploying Kwame Nkrumah's Neo-colonialism to reveal the existing institution that exploits the West Papuan natural resources and Gayatri Spivak's Othering to unravel the desire of power of the Indonesian government over the West Papuan. The findings show that Neo-colonialism is represented by an international American mining company named Freeport, which has become the main beneficiary of the natural resources that lays underneath the West Papuan land, affecting the minor dividends received by Indonesian government and alienate the West Papuan from the richness of their own land. It is also found that the othering process was done by the Indonesian government through the assertion of power presented by Indonesian police stationed in the area, racist remarks by the Indonesian police, job position that favors non-West Papuan people, and a case of sexual harassment towards one West Papuan character in the novel. Moreover, there is an intersecting interest between the American mining company with the Indonesian government in the West Papuan land.*

**Kata Kunci:** Neo-colonialism, Othering, West Papua, Freeport, Indonesia.

**INTRODUCTION**

The number of allegations and studies that posits West Papua as a 'black-hole' for media coverage, especially human rights issues, are abundant. As recorded in Robie (2019) there has been a two-week media black out in West Papua done by Indonesia during the increasing tension of disintegration narrative and attempts to capture Veronica Koman, a human rights lawyer for West Papuan that has just been awarded the Sir Ronald Wilson Human Rights Lawyer while seeking for safety in Australia. With such criticism of freedom of press in West Papua, the publication of *the Earth Cries Out* written by Bonnie Etherington that depicts the situation in West Papua in the dawn of the 1998 monetary crisis and civil unrest could bring a story that has not been told before through mainstream media coverage. Moreover, the 1997-1998 timeline of the novel is taking place at the same year with the Biak Massacre in which a tribunal in University of Sydney

that was held in 2013 made a three point verdict that states: First, military and police forces attacked a peaceful demonstration, leading to ‘the deaths and injuries of scores of people and the detention of a further group of the demonstrators. Secondly, ‘a large number’ of people were killed by Indonesian security forces, while ‘some of the women and girls’ were raped and sexually mutilated. Thirdly, the Indonesian government has tried to ‘downplay the seriousness of the actions’ and has not commenced legal proceedings against any of those individuals responsible (Edwards, 2013, p. 220).

The dispute in West Papua could be traced by the earliest existence of a resistance group known as West Papua Freedom Organization or *Organisasi Papua merdeka* (OPM). Their claim of independence for West Papua lies on the argument that the integration with Indonesia was flawed due to the fact that the former Dutch colonizers had promised and prepared them to have their own independence since 1961 (IPAC, 2015, p.4). The alleged flawed integration begins when Indonesia announced the military action namely *Tri Komando Rakyat* or Trikora in 1961. With the signs of the Indonesian government to take side with the Soviet Union for reinforcing this campaign, the United States tried to intervene by appointing the U.S. diplomat Ellsworth Bunker to seek a political solution and avoid any military collision. This effort resulted in the New York agreement in which the Dutch agrees to transfer the power over West Papua to the United Nations Temporary Executive Authority or UNTEA in 1962. An important point to highlight in this agreement is that it affirms the eligibility for the West Papuan people to participate in the act of self-determination. This referendum would later be conducted by the Indonesian government under the assistance of the UNTEA. In 1963, the UNTEA administered the authority over West Papua to the Indonesian government to prepare the act of self-determination (Gault-Williams, 1987, p.32-35 & Easton et al, 2012, p.6-7). However, under Indonesia, the process of integration was faced by many military oppressions that occurred between the year of 1963-1969 which resulted in the death of over 30.000 West Papuan (Gault-Williams, 1987, p.34-35). Later on, only around 1.026 members of the population that are included in the consultative assembly that is able to vote on whether they would want to join the Indonesian republic or to become an independent nation (Easton et al, 2012, p.6-7). Another source from Asian Human Rights Commission noted that the population eligible to vote was only around 1.022 – 1.208. The voting was a unanimous decision to integrate to Indonesia (AHRC, 2013, p.3). As a result, the OPM was formed in 1965 as a pro-independence movement that struggle to pursue an independent West Papua nation, yet this movement is more of a decentralized resistance movement rather an integrated one (IPAC, 2016, p.2-3). Gault-Williams (1987) noted that the active members of the OPM are around 30.000 throughout the country. During the era of president Soeharto or known as New Order, the West Papua territory has been assigned the status of combat area or *Daerah Operasi Militer* (DOM) (Beddall, 2000).

Similar to the historical record aforementioned, Bonnie Etherington’s *The Earth Cries Out* that was published back in 2017, provides a depiction of West Papua as the it follows the experience of Ruth Glass that stayed in Yuvut, a village located in the highlands of West Papua. Ruth along with her father and mother went all the way from Nelson, New Zealand to Yuvut as a form of atonement after the death of her younger sister, Julia. It was her father that thought it was best to go abroad and built a hospital that would eventually help the West Papuan to receive better medical help, disregarding the deteriorating marriage that would crumble even more. During the two years of her stay in

Yuvut, Ruth encounters Indonesian police that stays to capture insurgents that held meetings in one of the house in the village, how non-Papuan Indonesians view the local Papuans and how the Papuan perceive the Indonesians, stories of big killings, which happened in the past, and also the harsh reality that the West Papuan need to go through during the El-Nino draught that occurred in the midst of the economic crisis.

This study applies the Neo-colonialism theory coined by Kwame Nkrumah (1965) which posits that after the absent of direct colonialism, the United States rose as an imperial power that conducted a new form of indirect colonialism that centers its interest in extracting and exploiting resources from decolonized countries through economic mechanism that is represented by the Bretton Woods institutions of World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and also international American corporation. Spivak argues that neo-colonialism starts with monopoly industrial capitalism that expands their market through territorial imperialism to gain free labour, and so on. The moment post-industrial capitalism grows in two or three other countries, territorial control became too expensive, too old fashioned, making them no longer necessary. The imperial power that once belong to British empire is passed to the United states. In this form of colonialism focuses more on economic than territorial and it works like radiation, as put by Spivak *“you don't feel it happening and there's a sense of independence”* (Spivak, 1991, p.220-221).

Futhermore, the relations between Indonesian government and the West Papuan is to be analysed by employing the Othering theory coined by Gayatri Spivak in 1985. Othering describes the various ways in which colonial discourse produces its subjects (Ashcroft, 2007, p.156). The term othering refers to the process of how the imperial discourse creates its 'other.' In general term, 'other' is anyone who is separated from one's self. The creation of other is needed to define the notion of 'normal' and in locating one's position in the world. Othering includes; the subtle ways of worlding is by overwrite the colonized space; debasement the other by lowering their value, in doing so the colonizer puts label on the colonized; and lastly the separation of the native other and the 'our (colonial) government' by putting different treatment towards the colonized (Spivak, 1985 cited Ashcroft et al, 2000).

Similar previous studies has been made to analyse the othering process towards West Papuan in Anugrah (2019) which discover the flawed integration of West Papua to Indonesia that marks the start of colonial power, the increasing securitization in the area, and also the extraction of natural resources to serve the commercial interest of the Indonesian government. Aftab and Jamil (2015) found that neo-colonialism in fact had killing two birds with one stone. White men indirectly working on colonizing the mind of people. When the new globe order does not allow the direct rule therefore local bourgeoisie class plays the role of middleman in transferring the nation's wealth and resources to the ex-colonizers. This study takes the analysis further by focusing on the represented forms of Othering that the Indonesian government conducted to West Papuan in the novel and how the Neo-Colonial power of the American Mining Company, Freeport, made itself as the main beneficiary of the West Papuan natural resources. It also examines the intersecting interest between the Indonesian government and the Freeport mining company towards the natural resources that lies underneath the West Papuan earth.

## METHODOLOGY

Deploying Kwame Nkrumah concept of Neo-colonialism, which elaborated with supporting views from Bret Benjamin (2007) regarding to the United States and their influence of expanding capitalism through Bretton Woods institution and also referring to the 1998 financial crisis, and Gayatri Spivak's concept of Othering to understand the process of Othering of the West Papuan people, this study applies descriptive analytic method to examine the Neo-colonialism and Othering that happened in West Papua as depicted in the novel written by Bonnie Etherington *The Earth Cries Out* (2017).

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### NEO-COLONIALISM IN WEST PAPUA

The representation of Neo-Colonialism power has been stated by Kwame Nkrumah (1965) in certain specific names, one of it is an international corporation from the new superpowers. Here Nkrumah posits that the United States as new superpower becomes the replacement of the previously ruling British Empire. Benjamin (2007) also explicitly explain the route of the United States rose to power. The European nations were left in crumbles after the end of the second World War, in order to repair and build back their destroyed infrastructures and economy, the existence of an international fund was needed. The United States was the only nation with a stable currency and still held enough financial preserves to fulfil the needs of the European nations. Unsurprisingly, after the creation of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, the United States hold 35% of it shares, making them an important and decisive decision maker due to the basis of the aforementioned institutions with one dollar one vote. The existence of the neo-colonial power will put the united states as the main beneficiary.

*The Earth Cries Out* (2017) noted that there is an existing American mining company in West Papua and other depiction of the highly guarded mining areas:

*Kuli's uncle, Tarius, remembered the explosions at the tailing pipes from when he was a boy. He remembered what happened afterwards, too. How the army came, and the people ran, and there were bodies in the dirt. In the mountain where the mine is there are bodies, too, from mudslides and collapsed waste dumps. At least, at least (Tarius used to say) their bodies are buried. They are covered from the light. On the golf courses, built for the mine's foreign workers, men wear crisp shirts and can retreat into air-conditioned rooms to drink imported beers. Insufficient data, said the environmental impact studies. More research over time is needed to fully understand the effect of the mine and its tailings on the river and the landscapes around it. Incorrect data, said the mine's American owners from their Arizona offices as they filed their lawsuits. They published photos of smiling women holding their children against backgrounds of deep green, no scars. (Etherington, p.96)*

The passage above shows several important points. First, it enables us to affirm that the mine located in the mountain is owned by American owners. Second, the military was located around the mines that made people ran and resulting in dead bodies, we could safely assume that the mine receive protection from the military.

It is evident that there is an American mine existing in West Papua during between 1997-1998 which the novel took place. The Freeport mining company had their license granted by President Soeharto in 1967, although back then the Indonesian have not allow any mining foreign mining company to extract resources and the West Papuan have not decide wether they would join Indonesia or to become independent (Leith, 2002, p.72).

Prior to the entrance of Freeport there are several other companies that tried to entered the place, but Freeport become a single power in the land.

*Its history is one of invasions and divisions. Everyone hungry for a piece of 'Java's Kitchen'. Take some sandalwood here, some oil there, and don't forget the gold and copper. Dad told me about the big invasions (the Dutch, the explorers, the Americans and Japanese and Australians in the Second World War, the missionaries, the miners, the Indonesian Army). He told me about the man called Suharto in Java, and how he once was a general who took power in the middle of the night. It was Suharto who was President in 1969, when Indonesia officially grew by over 162,000 square miles, thanks to Papua (Etherington, 2017, p.18).*

The characteristic of becoming a monopoly in trading suits with the character of neo-colonialism. Nkrumah (1965) posits that monopolies in trading are also practiced by the imperial power. 90 per cent of the world ocean shipping is controlled by the imperialist countries. They control shipping rates and, between 1951 and 1961, they increased them some five times in a total rise of about 60 per cent. Annual freight expenses spent by Asia, Africa and Latin America totals in an estimated of \$1,600 million. As for insurance payments alone in 1961 the amount remains unfavorable for Asia, Africa and Latin America of some additional \$370 million (Nkrumah, 1965, p.244). The evidence that supports the monopoly characteristics of the neo-colonial power also suits the characteristics hold by Freeport. In 1988, Freeport found another mining site known as Grasberg. The exploration of other mining site has been done by multiple corporations, yet later the Indonesian government only grant the permit to Freeport alone. Even between the incorporation with Indonesia under the name PT Freeport Indonesia, the Freeport-McMoran is still the monopoly power that holds 90% of the shares while the Indonesian government receive approximately 10%. The eventual worth of Grasberg was around \$54 until \$80 billion. It became the biggest tax payer to the country from 1975 until 1986 and the total amount of the dividend paid by freeport had reached \$10 billion in 1999.

Although a huge amount of dollars could be extracted from the mines, the West Papuan does not receive any adequate benefit. Ruth depicts West Papuan land, which was still lacking in infrastructure and also with lack of medical supplies and infrastructure that is shown by their reliant on foreigners.

*Everything was further away in the village, because there were no finished roads, no vehicles. Then I would count how long it took to get to the river on foot from our house (one hour in dry weather), and how many miniature mudslides and rock falls I must navigate around because the path there was dirt, like all the paths in this place" (Etherington, p. 29-30, 2017).*

*We became chicken owners. They were gifts from people who came to the house to greet Dad and ask Mum for Band-Aids and medicines because it was common knowledge that being foreign meant you had these things. (Etherington, p.42, 2017).*

*No one read the pamphlets about sicknesses. Susumina's grandmother used them to start her cooking fire, and the woman who lived in the hut next door used hers to block a leak in the thatch of her roof. In my father's mind, the scabies mites still crawled over children's skin, dysentery still had its foothold, malaria was a thing that could possibly be banished by the sacrifice of a pig. AIDS was a mystery. (Etherington, p.39, 2017).*

The indication that the novel provided in the lack of medical supplies and awareness is true. A study from Yale Law School (Brundige, King, Vahali, Vladeck, & Yuan, 2004) suggested that during the mid 1980's, the West Papuan are facing severe risk of diseases and malnutrition. In 1984, infant mortality rate is around 60% and the life expectancy among West Papuan only reaches 30 – 31 years. The spread of AIDS among West Papuan became increasingly high during the 1990's, 40 percent of the AIDS cases in Indonesia are located in West Papua while the region only represent less than one percent of the Indonesia population. Other study included in the paper also suggest that the increasing rate of HIV and AIDS in West Papua occurred due to an existing systemic discrimination of government-sponsored AIDS education intervention program towards ethnic Papuan.

The provision of medical help was nowhere to be found in Yuvut, so when one of the village boy got shot during an accident that involves some Papuan men threw spears at the Bupati that visited the village for campaign, the mother of the boy could only rely on Ruth's family that is going to fly to the town at the shore.

*Four men came up, carrying a stretcher made from rice sacks. On it lay the boy who was shot. The policeman by the shed stood up. The boy's mother came running behind the men, calling to the pilot to take her child out of Yuvut to the hospital on the coast where he might be saved. The pilot looked at us. My parents nodded. (Etherington, 2017, p.223).*

Ruth's father shows a concern relating to the girls in West Papua who are very prone in catching HIV. The originating place of where they can catch the virus remain unclear as described by the father. Even their attempt to build awareness of the diseases by spreading pamphlets and building up hospitals still make the father powerless to overcome this outbreak.

*Sadly, that's what happens to many of them, said my father. These village girls. They get knocked up, or catch HIV from someone at one of their dances.*

*It can't be just that. Are you going to do anything about it?*

*What could I do, sweetheart? Can you put on some more toast for me? (Etherington, 2017, p.205)*

The two cases above had shown that there is no benefit of neo-colonialism being brought to the villagers. All the revenue that the West Papuan earth has given to the Freeport would only be distributed to them and a minor part for the Indonesian government. The West Papuan need to face the severity of health issues alone.

A comparative was made by Leith (2002) of the lifestyle of the West Papuan in indigenous life and after Freeport arrived: Although the life is dangerous and difficult, but before the company arrive, everybody had a job, a home, land, and most importantly strong, spiritual culture as a point of reference. The negative effects began to appear within the concession as the social fabric of Papuan life disintegrates. Unemployment, lawlessness, AIDS, drug abuse, and social, spiritual, and economic dislocation are evident (Leith, 2002, p.88). The forms of discrimination as described above would bridge this discussion to the issues of Othering put into the West Papuan.

## OTHERING

The focus of Othering is the way in which imperial discourses created its other. The first is the assertion of power made by the Indonesian government towards the West Papuan people. Secondly, the forms of debasing the West Papuan as having less value than the Indonesian. Thirdly, is the form of discrimination of not giving equal work opportunities. The following passage will give a depiction of the first two points above:

*The government in Jakarta sent policemen to Yuvut, long before we arrived there because there were stories about how the villagers plotted freedom from the Indonesians in their huts, how they did things the government called terrorism. At first I thought the policemen must be from Yuvut too. But over time I saw that none of the policemen sent for anti-terrorism reasons were from there. Susumina and her friends called them and other people from other Indonesian islands 'straight-hairs' because their hair was straight, while Yuvut and other Papuan people had curly hair. Some (not all) of the straight-haired Indonesians called the Papuans things, too — things that were nasty and about the darkness of Papuan skins against the lighter Indonesian skins. We are not Indonesian, said Susumina when I asked her about this. And I tugged at my own hair, in between curly and straight, and squirmed in my own lighter skin (Etherington, 2017, p.65).*

The existence of policemen in Yuvut in itself is already a form of inscribing their power. Mapping villages as places that are commonly used for freedom movement by villagers is one of the ways of othering process known as worlding. It is similar to the example brought by Spivak where British colonial will march around the countryside to 'consolidate the self of Eurpoe' (Spivak, 1985, cited in Ashcroft, 2007). The Indonesian government sent policemen with distinct characteristics from local Papuan to consolidate the self of Indonesia as the Other while producing the Papuan as the mastered other. Furthermore, Indonesia also assert trauma into the West Papuan people in forms of big killings that will make them not forget who the master is.

*From a long time ago, when the Indonesian Army first came, the villagers had memories sunk inside them, in between the ulcers in their stomachs and the malaria in their livers. Memories of arrows against guns. Memories of huts burning quick as grass, families nailed inside. They had stories of airstrip massacres (Etherington, 2017, p.69).*

Secondly, the act of debasing made by Indonesian police, describing the West Papuan as 'terrorist', 'dogs', 'glue-sniffing terrorist', and remarks towards their skin.

*The people of Yuvut had heard from other villagers, whom the government called terrorists as well, or 'rebel insurgents', that army helicopters painted with the Red Cross came because there was no food. When the villagers, mostly women and children, went out to*

*receive the rice rations they thought the helicopter carried, the soldiers opened fire. Because they never were the Red Cross. (Etherington, 2017, p.69)*

*things that were nasty and about the darkness of Papuan skins against the lighter Indonesian skins (Etherington, 2017, p.65).*

*They liked to creep up behind us and pull our ears and hair; called me foreigner and the others dogs, scum, glue-sniffing terrorists or guerrillas who could never win. (Etherington, 2017, p.110)*

The remarks of the Indonesian military and from non-Papuan ethnic Indonesian affirm the presentation of the colonial self as having the higher value rather than the West Papuan. They do not necessarily provide any argument or explanation in why the Papuan are worse in terms of value as Indonesian, but the purpose of inscribing the colonial discourse of making the Papuan as other has been fulfilled by the remarks that separate them from the Indonesian self. Moreover, the success has been fully reaching by the supposedly other to affirm that they are separated from the Other. The awareness of this can be seen by Susumina not considering herself as Indonesian and she is separated from them by calling the Indonesian as straight-hairs.

*Susumina and her friends called them and other people from other Indonesian islands 'straight-hairs' because their hair was straight, while Yuvut and other Papuan people had curly hair ... We are not Indonesian, said Susumina when I asked her about this. (Etherington, 2017, p.65)*

Susumina specifically appoint the Indonesian as a separated self with the characteristics of lighter skin and straight hair. Although those characteristics also exists in Ruth, Susumina never called her as straight hair because the existence of Ruth is not as a master, but as a friend.

*My hair was mostly straight even though I twisted it at night when it was wet. Susumina and Yacob and the ladies down by the pasar did not call me straight-hair, though. (Etherington, 2017, p.110)*

This form of debasing towards the West Papuan is manifested in medical discrimination. In the Baliem Valley, administrators at family planning and maternal and child health clinics hold separate sessions for Papuan members of the Dani tribe and Indonesian migrants because “the Dani are dirty and women won’t want to use the same examining table as a Dani (Brundige, King, Vahali, Vladeck, & Yuan, 2004, p. 35). This made access for medical help for the ethnic Papuan to be harder.

Third is the unequal economic opportunities gained by the West Papuan. Many people working in West Papua was not those of Papuan people, rather they were Indonesians coming from other islands.

*there were the children who came from the coast or from other Indonesian islands, the ones we called straight-haired, whose fathers worked on the hospital, in the school, in the new government offices that lined the top of the airstrip: they never did mean to stay in Yuvut (Etherington, 2017, p.110).*

In factual, the Freeport company did make West Papuan as the minority in the workers composition. In 1982, Freeport employed 452 expatriates, 1,859 Indonesians, and only 200 Papuans. The Papuans were hired as unskilled laborers and forced to live on the outskirts of the site in illegal squatter settlements (Leith, 2002, p.26).

## INTERSECTING INTEREST

The neo-colonialism done by the American that is represented by the mining company, Freeport, and the othering process of the Indonesian government towards West Papuan are not two issues that stands independently. In fact, it is a mutual relationship between the two.

The act of othering made by the Indonesian authorities was based to the interest to protect the Freeport company. The entrance of Freeport was not an initiative by the Freeport, rather it was a step taken by Soeharto since he need international help. Forbes Wilson said that Indonesia might be under the pressure of Washington to accept this deal, but the Indonesian Professor Dr Mohammad Sadli believed the otherwise. The generals was trying secure international connections. With the influence of freeport with Washington, accepting the contract will make their goal to be feasible (Leith, 2002, p.72).

The Freeport company also has been paying millions of dollars for the Indonesian military protection (Leith, 2002 & Brundige, King, Vahali, Vladeck, & Yuan, 2004).

*I heard the pilot yell out over the engine. Down below, he said, there were inland beaches of white sand over black rocks, and underneath your feet the endless echo of underground caves whose entrances could never be reached. I knew from other pilots that there were places where oil seeped out of the earth, fields of natural gas that might burn for decades. There were mountains that rose high in fog, and were marked off for the military, where civilians could never go. All this was supposed to be below me, but what I could see were trees, cracks in mountain peaks, and that haze of dust and smoke that poured from the mountains and ate its way through the lowland plains all the way to the sea (Etherington, 2017, p.167).*

The interest to become the beneficiary of the resources in West Papua is indeed dominated by the American company, yet Indonesia here still receive the benefit from the dividend that is shared with them. Moreover, the Indonesian government is also committed to protect the existence of the American company by increasing the military presence. Both the Indonesian government and the American mining company, Freeport, have been showing an synonymous interest to keep the natural resources of the West Papuan land for themselves, the slight difference is the share of profit that is gained by the two parties.

## CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that the United States neo-colonialism power in West Papua is represented by the mining company, Freeport. The characteristic of neo-colonialism to monopolize the trading can be seen by the number of shares that the Freeport hold is 90 percent while the Indonesians were left with 10 percent and the West Papuan is left by none. The impact of neo-colonialism root from its position as the single beneficiary and only interested to extract resources. The West Papuan people still live in an

underdeveloped infrastructure, lack of medical institutions, and a severe health problem related to AIDS and HIV along with the high mortality rate and low life expectancy.

Further harms are made by the Indonesian government through the Othering process that includes the assertion of power by stationing Indonesian policemen around the village area and the big killings that were done in the past that made the West Papuan unable to forget the events. The debasing that manifest in discrimination of the darker skin color of the West Papuan also brought a real problem which is discrimination in receiving medical service in hospitals. Lastly, the unequal economic opportunities in which the foreigner and the non-Papuan ethnic Indonesian receive more jobs in available places.

It will later be clear that the Indonesian government had enable the Freeport company to enter in the first place, but furtherly the American mining company had build up a mutual connection towards the Indonesian military by keeping supplying them with millions of dollar for their service in protecting the mining site.

There are still many concept that can be challenged here such as on whether the neo-colonialism that occur in West Papua is actually an act of traditional colonialism or the way that the characters and Indonesian treat foreigner such as Ruth Glass and their family as different or to idolize Western football players as a form of a desire to become the foreigners. A criticism of portrayal of the writer in emphasizing on the fault of Indonesia rather than the mining company should also take place.

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