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The suppression of voice freedom of expression in *Laut Bercerita* and *1984*: A comparative literary study

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Abstract: *Freedom of expression remains a controversial subject in both democratic and authoritarian societies, where the silencing of critical voices often occurs not through explicit bans, but through surveillance, intimidation, and the control of discourse and language. This study examines the portrayal of silencing and freedom of expression in Laut Bercerita by Leila S. Chudori and 1984 by George Orwell, using a comparative literature approach grounded in Michel Foucault's theories of power, discourse, and disciplinary surveillance. Employing a descriptive qualitative method combined with qualitative content analysis, the research analyzes the words, expressions, dialogues, and narratives in both novels that depict practices of silencing and the restriction of expression. The findings reveal that Laut Bercerita portrays silencing through direct, repressive power intimidation, abductions, torture, and the enforced disappearance of activists during Indonesia's Orde Baru whereas 1984 depicts it through disciplinary power, exercised via constant surveillance (telescreens and the Thought Police) and linguistic control through Newspeak, which structurally restricts the very possibility of critical thought. Despite their differing mechanisms physical repression versus psychological and linguistic control both novels demonstrate how power acts to curtail individuals' ability to speak, think, and freely express dissent.*

Keywords: *freedom of expression, silencing of speech, power and discours, foucauldian analysis*

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a constitutional state where the legal basis for state power and its institutions is governed by the rule of law. As a democratic constitutional state, its fundamental characteristic is citizen participation in every political decision. A democratic state upholds the freedom and autonomy of its citizens (Pratama et al., 2022). Freedom of expression is no longer in line with existing laws and regulations. Given the numerous issues surrounding the state which is said to reject arguments and be anti-criticism as well as the existence of practices that stifle freedom of opinion and expression, freedom of expression is regulated under the provisions of the Human Rights Act (Noak et al., 2024). Human rights govern aspects of civic life such as freedom of expression, the right to vote, freedom of the press, freedom of religion, and freedom from arbitrary treatment by the system, politics, and the law.

Expression and freedom of expression are vital aspects of life, as they enable everyone to voice opinions, critiques, and perspectives on reality. The exercise of

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freedom of expression is often the target of criticism, both in Indonesia and abroad. Recently, protests from various groups have emerged against government policies. A series of demonstrations, led by social activists, students, and intellectuals, have condemned several government policies, including restrictions on freedom of expression. In reality, freedom of expression remains elusive, and the silencing of voices continues. The controversy surrounding this silencing does not manifest overtly but can take the form of surveillance, intimidation, information control, the creation of a climate of fear, and the control of language and discourse.

Michel Foucault's view of power is closely tied to the issues of silencing and freedom of expression. The power Foucault refers to distinguishes between "pouvoir" (power), which is neutral in nature, and "la puissance" (power), which presupposes the existence of a ruling party over a ruled party. The essence of power is not repression, domination, or intimidation, but rather positive and constructive regulation and normalization—though these inevitably provoke resistance or opposition, which in turn leads to restrictions on the space for expression and acts of silencing (Kebung, 2017). The relationship between power and knowledge is interrelated and inseparable, making discourse one of the key spaces where power operates.

The relationship between power, discourse, and language holds strong relevance in literary works. A novel is a literary work resulting from the author's creativity, containing thoughts, ideas, concepts, and notions conveyed through the medium of language (Sabila, 2024). As a literary work, the novel reflects social phenomena and essentially serves as a social document depicting life and social reality (Sulistiyana, 2013). As a medium that represents the relationship between individuals and power through characters, dialogue, narrative, conflict, and the communication practices that occur among characters, literary works can reveal how power operates in individuals' lives and how individuals respond to, accept, negotiate, or resist that power.

Leila S. Chudori's novel *Laut Bercerita* and George Orwell's *1984* demonstrate that these novels address political issues, state violence, human rights violations, and the struggles of activists in confronting the regime. Leila S. Chudori's *Laut Bercerita* powerfully portrays these issues through the experiences of Biru Laut and the activists who confronted the authorities during the New Order era. The novel *Laut Bercerita* depicts experiences of activism, kidnapping, torture, enforced disappearances, the struggle to maintain a critical voice against the authorities, and the silencing of that voice through various ambushes.

The issue of silencing also appears in George Orwell's novel *1984*. The narrative constructs a dystopian society controlled by a government authority subsequently referred to as "Big Brother." It is depicted that in the world of Oceania, the Party not only monitors citizens' behavior through telescreens and the Thought Police but also seeks to control people's thoughts, language, information, and understanding of the past. One such tool is "Newspeak," a language designed to limit expressions and thoughts that contradict the Party's ideology.

Beyond power and discourse, language serves as a crucial aspect in demonstrating that silencing voices does not always involve depriving someone of the opportunity to speak. Silencing can take the form of controlling the language individuals use to express their experiences and thoughts. In *1984*, the reduction of vocabulary through Newspeak

is intended to eliminate the conceptual possibility of ideas that contradict the Party. Language functions not merely as a medium of communication, but as an instrument of power that shapes the boundaries of thought and expression. Meanwhile, in *Laut Bercerita* linguistic aspects are evident in the conversations among activists, which reveal solidarity, coordination, secrecy, hierarchy, as well as social inequality, pressure, and the imposition of information. The narrative and dialogue in the novel create a framework that presents power dynamics, resistance, and social conflict (Risqi, 2026).

The novels *Laut Bercerita* and *1984* share similarities and are ideal for analysis in comparative literary studies. Both novels address issues of power, the silencing of voices, and the narrowing of spaces for expression. *Laut Bercerita* presents a story of silencing through incidents of intimidation, violence, kidnapping, torture, and the disappearance of activists, while *1984* depicts silencing through a combination of surveillance, propaganda, information control, historical manipulation, language control, and thought control. These aspects provide an interesting analytical framework for identifying the similarities and differences in treatment between the novels *Laut Bercerita* and *1984*. Furthermore, through this analysis, the reasons for silencing and how discourse is controlled can be clearly described.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Power, Discourse, and the Silencing of Voices

Literary works are not merely a medium of entertainment or aesthetic expression and imaginative creation. Literary works can serve as depictions of social events or individual experiences in resisting power relations and oppression (Jamil et al., 2024). The portrayal of the silencing of voices in literary works is understood through the relationship between power, discourse, and the production of knowledge. Michel Foucault's perspective is relevant here because power does not operate solely through prohibitions or repressive actions but also through the production of discourse that determines what can be said, who has the authority to speak, and what knowledge is considered true. From this perspective, power is productive because it shapes behavior, knowledge, and the subjects situated within power relations. Foucault also explains that disciplinary power operates through surveillance and normalization (Kebung, 2017). The above ideas are relevant for examining the silencing of voices because silencing does not always take the form of a direct prohibition on speaking. Silencing can occur through control over discourse, surveillance, intimidation, the establishment of norms, and the instillation of fear, which leads individuals to self-censor their own expression. Thus, power is understood as a mechanism that both creates space for individuals to speak and defines the boundaries of acceptable expression.

The Silencing of Voices in "Laut Bercerita"

An analysis of Leila S. Chudori's novel, *Laut Bercerita*, examines the close connection between literary texts and issues of power, political repression, activism, and the silencing of voices. The silencing of student activists in the novel is analyzed through the lens of hegemony (Kholifah et al., 2025). This research demonstrates that the silencing of critical voices did not occur solely through repressive actions during the New Order era but continues to unfold within contemporary socio-political dynamics.

Furthermore, this novel serves as a cultural archive documenting the structured operation of state power, which employs surveillance, torture, and forced disappearances to silence critical discourse (Kusnaeni et al., 2026; Safitri et al., 2026).

These findings confirm that the silencing of the critical voices of the characters in *Laut Bercerita* is confronted by instruments of power that employ various mechanisms to restrict their freedom of movement and expression. This opens up a field of study that not only views silencing as an act of physical violence but also analyzes how power controls public discourse and creates an atmosphere of fear that triggers self-censorship. This study is grounded in Michel Foucault's theoretical framework regarding power relations, disciplinary surveillance, and the formation of dominant discourses. This study positions Biru Laut, along with his fellow activists, as a dynamic representation of power relations and the expression of critical voices. This analysis focuses on how a series of actions ranging from intimidation, intelligence surveillance, and abductions to torture and enforced disappearances constitute mechanisms of silencing, while also examining various forms of individual responses and resistance against this dominant power.

Language as an Instrument of Power in "1984"

The issue of silencing voices in George Orwell's novel *1984* is presented differently from that discussed in *Laut Bercerita*. While *Laut Bercerita* primarily depicts the silencing of voices through the concrete experiences of individuals facing violence and political oppression, *1984* demonstrates how power is exercised through surveillance, propaganda, manipulation of information, and control of language. Power is controlled in the novel *1984* through the use of Newspeak, a language designed by the Party to limit the possibility of thoughts that contradict the official ideology.

Language serves as the primary instrument of power control. The representation of citizens' compliance in the city of Dystopia is subject to the state's authority and linguistic oversight. Newspeak, or doublespeak, is used as a tool of totalitarian state power (Aslam et al., 2025). The use of language is intended to highlight the importance of psychological issues, government bureaucracy, and political correctness. The language system is positioned as a partner in truth, meaning that how individuals think is of great importance. The use of Newspeak turns what is bad into good and what is good into bad, meaning that human thought is manipulated (Aslam et al., 2025).

Freedom of Expression and Language Control

The relationship between language and freedom of expression is a crucial aspect. Restrictions on freedom of expression do not always involve formal bans on speech. As previously noted, language control can occur at a more fundamental level by limiting the linguistic tools available for expressing ideas. The novel *1984* depicts how extremely narrow the space for freedom of expression is even merely thinking about a plan in one's head becomes a prohibition and a violation. The Party in *1984* which is later discussed as the ruling government shreds human thoughts, manipulates them, and reassembles them into a new form, leaving no free space for expression and subjecting linguistic use to strict control (Aslam et al., 2025). In contrast to *Laut Bercerita*, the space for expression still exists but is severely limited. Activists and students can still engage in various forms of

propaganda and create spaces for discussion. Divisions arise when spaces for discussion and propaganda that oppose the regime are exposed.

Surveillance, Discipline, and Control over Individuals

Surveillance is a crucial system in constructing power relations and silencing voices. Disciplinary power operates through repeated observation, normalization, and the creation of conditions in which individuals feel they are under constant surveillance (Foucault, 1977). Individuals do not need to feel physically monitored at all times; the mere possibility of surveillance is sufficient to make them internalize control and adjust their behavior a concept central to the Panopticon model (Foucault, 1977).

This framework is highly relevant for analyzing the novel *1984*, which depicts a society under the grip of the Party's surveillance system through telescreens, the Thought Police, and other control mechanisms. Surveillance in the novel *1984* does not focus solely on visible physical actions but also seeks to penetrate individuals' thoughts (Ali et al., 2026). Meanwhile, surveillance in the novel *Laut Bercerita* manifests through repressive relations between activists and those in power (Safitri et al., 2026). Thus, these two novels can be compared to examine how surveillance can generate fear, discipline, and restrictions on expression. At the same time, they allow for a comparison between silencing through direct physical repression (*Laut Bercerita*, Chudori) and silencing through the internalization of surveillance and self-control (Orwell,1949)

A Comparative Literary Study of "Laut Bercerita" and "1984"

A comparative literary study of the novels *Laut Bercerita* and *1984* presents the stories of individuals confronting restrictive government power. This study focuses on the mechanisms of silencing that enable the authorities to control voices and freedom of expression. The comparison of the two works examines several aspects, including the nature of power, forms of silencing, control over discourse, the use of language as an instrument of power, and restrictions on expression. *Laut Bercerita* depicts silencing within the Indonesian sociopolitical context through the experiences of activists who face intimidation and repression, while *1984* portrays silencing in a dystopian world through total surveillance, propaganda, manipulation of information, and control over language.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach using the method of comparative literature. This method was chosen to analyze, describe, and interpret the data in depth without prioritizing statistical generalizations (Sugiyono, 2026). The comparative literature approach is used to compare two or more works from different cultural, linguistic, and social contexts. The subjects of this study are the novel *Laut Bercerita* by Leila S. Chudori and the novel *1984* by George Orwell. Meanwhile, the objects of analysis consist of words, phrases, dialogues, and narratives that describe the suppression of speech and freedom of expression in *Laut Bercerita* by Leila S. Chudori and *1984* by George Orwell. The research data consists of all text units including narration, dialogue, and descriptions of characters' behavior that depict the silencing of voices and freedom of expression. The data analysis technique employed in this study is

qualitative content analysis (QCA), utilizing Michel Foucault's critical discourse analysis framework.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

An analysis of Leila S. Chudori's novel *Laut Bercerita* and George Orwell's *1984* shows that both novels depict mechanisms for silencing voices and restricting freedom of expression, albeit in different forms. *Laut Bercerita* depicts a repressive and centralized state power, embodied by state forces during the New Order era that silenced the critical voices of activists such as Biru Laut through intimidation, kidnapping, torture, and forced disappearances (Kholifah et al., 2025; Kusnaeni et al., 2026). In contrast, *1984* depicts the totalitarian power of the Party and Big Brother which possesses a "productive" character in the Foucauldian sense silencing citizens not only through physical violence but also through constant surveillance via telescreens and the Thought Police, which force individuals to censor their own thoughts.

In terms of discourse and language control, both novels demonstrate how power determines what can be expressed in the public sphere, albeit through different strategies. In *Laut Bercerita*, language control is manifested through the suppression of student discussions and movements, while language serves as a strategy for survival and solidarity among activists. In *1984*, language control is carried out systematically through the manipulation of history and information, with "Newspeak" serving as the most prominent instrument of power to restrict language use and prevent the emergence of ideas that contradict the Party's ideology. Regarding restrictions on the space for expression, both novels depict a narrow scope for individuals to voice critical opinions. In *Laut Bercerita*, space for expression remains available albeit limited through secret but risky discussions, whereas in *1984*, this space is almost entirely closed off, with widespread surveillance extending even to individual thoughts (Aslam et al., 2025). Overall, these findings confirm that the silencing of voices in both novels follows two main patterns: on the one hand, silencing through physical repression, which dominates in *Laut Bercerita*; on the other hand, silencing through the internalization of surveillance and language control, which dominates in *1984*.

Discussion

Power, Discourse, and the Silencing of Voices

Narrative excerpts from *1984* and *Laut Bercerita* that illustrate the Party's control over the lives and thoughts of society are presented in the quotations below.

> "He who controls the past," says the Party's slogan, "controls the future; he who controls the present controls the past. But the past, though by its nature alterable, is never altered. Whatever is true now is true for all time." (Orwell,1949, p.63).

> "...what can we do to shake a regime that has stood so firmly for decades, with a very strong military foundation and supported by the middle and upper classes..." (Chudori, 2017, p.24)

Based on the quote from the novel *1984*, the idea is conveyed that whoever controls the narrative of the past essentially controls society's perception of the present and the future, even though historical truth itself is fluid and can be manipulated to serve the interests of those in power. This statement is not merely propaganda but a reflection of the mechanisms of power described by Foucault as the "productive relationship between power and knowledge," in which truth is not discovered objectively but is produced and determined by those in power through their control over discourse, history, and language. Meanwhile, the quote from *Laut Bercerita* indicates that power does not emerge as an isolated repressive institution, but rather as an interdependent relationship between military force and strong support from the upper middle class, thereby enabling the regime to survive despite constantly facing critical voices. In Foucauldian terms, this demonstrates that power is not only exercised from above through state institutions but is also reinforced by networks of social interests. Thus, resistance against a single center of power is insufficient unless the pillars of that center (the regime) are weakened. Meanwhile, power in *1984* is depicted as totalitarian and centered around Party figures and Big Brother.

> "Don't you see that the whole purpose of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? Eventually, we'll make thoughtcrime truly impossible, because there won't be any words to express it. Every necessary concept will be expressed by a single word, the meaning of which is strictly and rigidly defined, and all its ancillary meanings will be erased and forgotten." (Orwell,1949, p.95).

> "We are free to discuss anyone's books whether the works of Laclau or Ben Anderson, or even Pramoedya's novels which will breathe the air of freedom here." Followed by: "The arrests of activists for possessing a number of banned books, including works by Pramoedya Ananta Toer… still haunt us." (Chudori, 2017, p.16)

Linked to the previous quote, the first quote shows that control over discourse in *1984* is not limited to banning certain topics of conversation but targets the structure of language itself. By restricting vocabulary and strictly locking down the meanings of words through Newspeak, the Party sought to eliminate the conceptual possibility of ideas emerging that contradicted its ideology, so that criminal thought was no longer something that needed to be monitored, but from a structural perspective something that was simply unthinkable. Within a Foucauldian framework, power operates productively, not merely repressively, because the Party not only prohibits discourses of resistance but also redefines the boundaries of language that determine what individuals can and cannot say, think, or even imagine.

The second quote a statement made by Kinan highlights the striking contrast between spaces for free debate and those strictly controlled by the regime. The freedom to discuss the ideas of Laclau, Ben Anderson, or the works of Pramoedya Ananta Toer is only possible abroad, whereas in Indonesia, merely possessing such books is grounds for criminalization and the arrest of activists. This demonstrates that the regime's control over discourse is not limited to what can be said directly but also extends to texts

and readings as sources of ideas. Through a Foucauldian lens, the banning of certain books reveals how power operates through the production and restriction of knowledge, with intellectual works capable of fostering critical awareness becoming targets of surveillance and repression. This differs from the control of discourse in *1984*, which involves the internal manipulation of language and history.

> "The Party tells you to reject the evidence that your eyes and ears perceive. That is their final and most essential command." ." (Orwell,1949, p.147).
> "Thoughtcrime is not a matter of life and death: thoughtcrime IS death."
> Accompanied by an entry from Winston's diary: "To the future or to the past, to a time when thought was free...". (Orwell,1949, p.50).

> "About seven people, one by one, were interrogated, slapped, doused with water, and stripped naked" (Chudori, 2017, p.25).
> "As soon as I tried to open my mouth again, a spiked shoe stomped down on my mouth." ... "The electric shock felt like it was holding everything back in my throat" (Chudori, 2017, p.57).

The two quotes above highlight two extreme sides of the suppression of free speech. In *1984*, the Party's order to Winston to reject the evidence provided by his own senses with the Party's assertion that "criminal thought IS death" shows that the suppression targets the individual's epistemology and conscience, forcing the individual to abandon their own perceptions and reasoning in favor of the Party's truth. Through the stories in Winston's diary where he expresses his longing for "the days of free thought" he engages in a form of silent resistance against mental oppression. In contrast, in *Laut Bercerita* the silencing of voices is explicitly depicted through violence inflicted on the body ranging from interrogations and slaps to waterboarding, body searches, and electric shock torture where the body becomes the direct arena in which voices are silenced by pain and trauma.

A Foucauldian analysis reveals that these two forms of silencing represent two distinct regimes of power: disciplinary power, which operates through the control of thought and truth in *1984*, and classical repressive power, which operates through direct violence against the body in the novel *Laut Bercerita*. This comparison underscores that, although their targets and methods differ, epistemic and physical silencing both aim to destroy the individual's capacity for self-expression and critical thinking.

Freedom of Expression and Control of Language

Narrative excerpts from *1984* and *Laut Bercerita* in this section reveal how authoritarian regimes condition spaces for expression while manipulating the instrument of language to stifle society's critical faculties.

> "Suppressing your feelings, controlling your facial expressions, doing what everyone else is doing these are instinctive reactions." (Orwell,1949, p.30).
> "The Party tells you to reject the evidence that your eyes and ears take in. That is their final and most essential command." (Orwell,1949, p.147).

> "Since this haunted house is hidden, we'll be safe. It seems those flies would have a hard time finding this village. We're free to discuss anyone's books whether works by Laclau or Ben Anderson, or even Pramoedya's novels which will breathe the air of freedom here." (*Chudori, 2017, p.16)*
> "The New Order," said the Poet, "has become an absolute monarchy. We cannot help but do something even through literature, theater, or other art forms." (*Chudori, 2017, p.83)*

Both excerpts from these novels address the limited scope of freedom of expression amid the ever-present surveillance that is part of the individual's survival instinct, albeit in different ways. In *1984*, freedom of expression is reduced to its most intimate form. Individuals are forced to control their facial expressions and deny the truths perceived by their own senses in order to conform to the Party's will. In contrast, in *Laut Bercerita*, freedom of expression has a limited space, but one that is hidden like a "haunted house," beyond the reach of the authorities, while in the public sphere, the Poet's statement that the New Order has become an "absolute monarchy" affirms that literature, theater, and the arts are no longer capable of serving as significant vehicles for criticizing the regime. Within the framework of this comparative study, this distinction reveals that the suppression of freedom of expression in the novel *1984* is total and internal, even permeating the subconscious and individual perception, whereas in *Laut Bercerita*, this suppression is spatial and structural, resulting in the narrowing of the physical and symbolic spaces where critical expression can still exist. The fundamental similarity between these two quotations lies in the way power whether totalitarian or authoritarian seeks to deprive individuals of the possibility of freely expressing the truth or critical opinions.

> "We destroy many words hundreds of them every day. We are cutting up language, slicing it down to the bone." (Orwell,1949, p.92).
> "Don't you see that the whole purpose of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? Eventually we'll make thoughtcrime literally impossible, since there won't be any words to express it." (Orwell,1949, p.95).

> "Because the arrests of activists still hang over Yogyakarta, carrying photocopies of Pramoedya Ananta Toer's books is like carrying a bomb: we'll be seen as dangerous and traitors to the nation." (*Chudori, 2017, p.20)*
> "They wanted to find evidence that Kinan and her friends were the 'masterminds' behind the demonstration (the word 'mastermind' has taken on a negative connotation over the past 10 years because it no longer refers to the art of wayang puppetry)." (*Chudori, 2017, p.92)*

The quotes above show that in both of these novels, control over language functions as an instrument of power aimed at limiting the space for critical thinking, although their functions differ. In the novel *1984*, language control is carried out systematically and deliberately through the restriction and elimination of words one by

one as part of the Newspeak control project, with the explicit goal of limiting the scope of thought to the point where "criminal thoughts" become impossible to realize, due to the lack of vocabulary to express them; language is thus structurally reduced by the state as a planned mechanism of ideological control. On the other hand, in *Laut Bercerita*.

Language control does not occur through formal manipulation of vocabulary, but rather through shifts in the meaning of words within public discourse due to political pressure, such as the word "dalang," which lost its cultural meaning related to the art of wayang and became a negative label used to brand activists as criminals, as well as the interpretation of Pramoedya Ananta Toer's works, which were equated with acts of carrying bombs because they were stigmatized as symbols of danger and treason.

Through Foucault's framework, these two events demonstrate that power not only prohibits certain discourses but also reorganizes the meaning of language itself, and the meaning of a single word can be inverted to align with the regime's interests. The difference lies in the Newspeak of *1984*, which represents top-down linguistic control. Meanwhile, the shift in the meanings of words in *Laut Bercerita* occurs more organically, as a consequence of the political stigmatization of cultural and intellectual symbols.

CONCLUSION

A comparative study of Leila S. Chudori's novel *Laut Bercerita* and George Orwell's *1984* reveals that silencing and the restriction of freedom of expression are mechanisms of power that operate in various forms but share the same goal: to silence critical voices. Drawing on Michel Foucault's work on the relationship between power, discourse, and disciplinary surveillance, this study demonstrates that *Laut Bercerita* depicts silencing through physical violence and direct repression including intimidation, abductions, torture, and forced disappearances against activists under the New Order regime. In the novel *1984*, the depiction of disciplinary and internal forms of silencing is implemented through total surveillance using telescreens and the Thought Police, as well as through linguistic control via Newspeak, which systematically restricts the space for thought, even extending into the individual's subconscious. Linguistically, both novels demonstrate that language is not merely a tool for communication but also an instrument of power. In *1984*, this manifests as formal and deliberate manipulation of vocabulary, whereas in *Laut Bercerita*, it is expressed through an organic shift in the meanings of words resulting from political stigmatization. This comparison underscores that *Laut Bercerita* represents spatial-structural oppression repressive in the classical sense, targeting the body or inflicting torture while *1984* represents total and internal, disciplinary oppression, targeting the mind. Both works demonstrate how authoritarian and totalitarian powers constantly strive to strip individuals of their ability to express themselves, think, and speak honestly and freely.

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