

**State-based curriculum making in a post colonial Zimbabwe: Making sense of Family,
Religious and Moral Education in a global context**

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Abstract

The teaching and learning of religion in most post-colonial states take place on an ambivalent and contested terrain, which has resulted in the amputation of religion from some schools and contexts. The new curriculum in Zimbabwe, as a state-making project that is arguably devoid of, or has covert policy networks, has resulted in religious curriculum resistance. In this paper, we juxtapose two questions: What are the challenges of the new religious curriculum, and how can the international practice of teaching religion be infused in the curriculum to address the contested terrain and to improve the policy network among religious players? The paper is couched in decoloniality theory, of which one of the agendas is to shift the geography of knowledge. Policy networks in religious circles can exorcise coloniality, which centred religion on a contested terrain within the mainstream curriculum practice. The paper argues that the teaching and learning of religion cannot be left to the state to control; instead, there should be endeavours for the policy network among religious players to be contextualised in relations that have respect for difference. There is a need to reconfigure religions, so that they face the lived realities of communities.

Key words: *State Making Curriculum, Decoloniality, Accommodation resistance, Best Practices, Religious Education*

“[s]ince we are all heirs of the story of conflict. Then we have to leave aside tired generalisations and seek to know one another, through this we can become the architects of a truly new order of cooperation” (Funk & Said, 2014, p. 25-26).

Introduction

The post 9/11 era ushered in new thinking about the teaching of religion in public schools; this thinking emphasises religious pluralism (Moulin, 2012:158). This event led to religion entering a contested terrain in most post-colonial states in Africa, with some states raising questions about religious pluralism in the curriculum. Zimbabwe, in an attempt to move from a Christocentred curriculum, in 2015 introduced a new subject, called **family, religious and moral education**

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(FAREME). As a state project, the assumptions motivating the introduction of this subject were that religious players would buy into the curriculum, as it represented a move from a Christocentred, to a multi-religion orientation. Contextual complexities, such as the existence of various religions, forced states to confront and accommodate (Moyo & Modiba, 2013, p. 371) religious diversity. However, even though the idea is noble, the new curriculum introduced new trajectories, making religion cause for concern. In searching for an answer to the question of the role of religion in the curriculum, we acknowledge that external pressures and internal demands – of competition between global needs and local identities for religious hegemony – complicate policy formulation (Moyo & Modiba, 2013). We agree with Sumner (2008), that religious education has always been subject to external pressures that seek to subordinate its practice.

The paper reconstructs the contestation of religion in schools, with the aim of determining how religions can coexist in the school curriculum. In doing so we contribute, as suggested by Motalvo and Querol (2000, p. 4), to the mitigation of “ethnic conflict [which] strains the bonds that sustain social fabric and are cited as the root of violence evident in looting, deaths, and other social pathologies”. The following sections give details on the new subject, FAREME.

The New Curriculum in Zimbabwe: Family, Religious and Moral Education

In 2017 Zimbabwe rolled out a new curriculum, which made changes to the study of religion, and infuses Islam, Hinduism, African and other religions. The new curriculum of religion improves the way the subject, called religious studies, used to be presented, which was Christocentric. Policy makers and curriculum planners attempted to limit the exclusionary approach of religious studies, and there was hope that the new curriculum would be neutral, non-hierarchical, and acceptable to religious organisations. Thus the philosophic underpinning of the FAREME is development of moral responsibility and behaviour, capacity for discipline, a sense of sound ethical norms, values and goals derived from multi religious perspective (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2015) However, brilliant as the idea may have appeared, the change elicited mixed reactions. Some religious players consider it to be a curriculum that reproduces “hierarchies, exclusions and inequalities” (Davies, 2011, p. 6) and is insensitive to the Christian faith, which has a huge following in Zimbabwe. The then Minister of Education Dokora was accused of introducing an anti-Christian curriculum, aiding the Muslim religion, and banning Christian activities in the schools such as Scripture Union (Katongomara, 2016), thus the new curriculum came against the

background of suspicion and a feeling of betrayal by the minister of education, which led people to demonstrate and consequently his removal as a minister. By feeling betrayed by the new curriculum, the Christian church exhibits what we can refer to as accommodation resistance, which is a failure to accept someone with a different religious view.

The introduction of FAREME has seen many mission schools, such as those of the London Mission Society, withdrawing the curriculum from mainstream learning, because the curriculum is perceived as being anti-Christ. The perceived anti-Christ curriculum meant the need to configure new teaching methods, and eliminate confessional teaching styles and preacher like teachers. It further meant an appreciation of other religions as legitimate and deserve to be transmitted through the mainstream curriculum practices. This approach (multi-religious) lead to the withdrawal of FAREME in some schools. The withdrawal indicates the unpreparedness of some Christian churches to share the curriculum space with other religions in their own resources, including schools. It is this withdrawal, or accommodation resistance, that propels this paper to find alternatives that do not deprive learners of the right to learn about the religions of the other. To respond to this and other challenges, we refer to certain international practices that have reduced resistance to the teaching and learning of religion in schools. The following section discusses the theoretical framing of the paper, which is decoloniality.

Theoretical framing: Decoloniality

The paper is couched in decoloniality theory, which “offers a rich theoretical toolbox for exploring contemporary junctions of gender, religion, race and the question of representation” (Giraldo, 2016). Huerfano, Caballero and Rojas (2016, p. 78) state that decoloniality “challenges and reformulates the communicational scientific discourse by criticising the mediating power of Anglo-American hegemonic thinking, to obtain a native cultural paradigm”. The centre of decoloniality is the idea of “remaking the world such that enslaved, colonised and exploited peoples can regain their ontological density, voice, land, history, knowledge and power” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015, p. 23). It is a theory that re-emerges within a context of crisis of imagination, to offer liberation, freedom, development and a better future for all. The crisis is mainly “manifesting itself at the ideological, theoretical and epistemological levels” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015, p. 21). Through decoloniality, people engage in a search for better ways of theorising and explaining the meaning of religious liberation and freedom, as well as taking the struggles forward in

contemporary surmising (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015, p. 23). Furthermore, it is a “philosophy of liberation that entails the rehumanisation of the dehumanised and the courage to care and to love, to set afoot a new planetary human citizenship” (Mpfungu, 2017, p. 3). The struggle facing decolonial scholars is eliminating coloniality.

Coloniality is the residue of colonisation, which manifests through structures that seek to exclude, marginalise and dominate people of difference. It is evident in the organisation of power, of identity or humanity and humanism, and in the structures of knowledge; hence, the idea of coloniality of power, identity and knowledge (Zondi, 2015, p. 20). Coloniality,

“emerges from the contact points or the colonial encounter that articulates the modes of operation and appropriation of restructuring the world to give the same effect as colonialism did, and make way for modernity to be strengthened” (Sithole, 2014, p. 95).

Decoloniality, then, engages in a struggle to unmask coloniality wherever it is hidden, also in the teaching of religion. The major aims of decoloniality are to render coloniality visible by exposing both its rhetoric and reality (Sithole, 2014, p. 36). The struggle against coloniality is premised because, as suggested by Walsh (2002, p. 79), coloniality strives, “[t]hrough manipulation, co-optation, division, and control. In addition, coloniality is a key constraint and a site of struggle, because it hinders political progress towards authentic African humanity, social transformation and economic development (Kaunda, 2015, p. 76-77). In short, this theory is pertinent to this paper, because it enables religious scholars to re-emerge within a context of crisis (problems relating to religion education) of imagination, of liberation, freedom, development and the future (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015, p. 4), by creating policy networks that will champion inclusivity that will benefit all.

Trajectories of Family, Religious and Moral Education

This section addresses various trajectories that have characterised the teaching and learning of FAREME in the new curriculum.

Accommodation resistance

Zimbabwe has emerged from colonialism as a predominantly Christian society. Since 1980, Christians have enjoyed the lion’s share of the curriculum for the study of religion. The new

curriculum brought changes caused by incorporating religions such as Islam, Hinduism, African and other religions into the curriculum. The idea of religious education presents few difficulties when a society is unambiguous about its religion, or where the majority of the population claims formal allegiance to a particular religion (Singh, 1986, p. 231). Consequently, in Zimbabwe, the Christian population seems to have a say in what is taught and excluded from the curriculum for religion. The exclusion of some religions from the curriculum of FAREME is explained by Amoah and Bennett (2008, p. 8): “since colonial times, there have been perceptions that African religions are reduced to animism and ancestor worship”, an attitude, which, as argued by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2003, p. 182), has led to “contestation and compliance, fascination and repulsion”.

After Christianity had enjoyed the lion’s share of the old curriculum, the inclusion of other religions in the subject led to what we term accommodation resistance: Christians fail to accept that other religions have right to be part of curriculum space. Accommodation resistance often results in withdrawal from curriculum practices in protest of inclusion of other religions, which are perceived to pose a threat. The removal of religion from London Mission Society schools, such as Inyathi Mission, Tennyson Hlabangani High and Dombodema High School, represent signs of accommodation resistance. However, it should be noted that this is not peculiar to Zimbabwe, many countries especially in the Islamic countries, where arguable tolerance of other religions (Bustamam-ahmad & Jory, 2011). To this end, there is need to create an environment of religious co-existence without a treat of withdrawal or causing violence against the religious other.

In the view of decoloniality scholars, such withdrawal recreates coloniality, which draws a line between the privileged and the dispossessed (Sithole, 2014, p. 64). This problem, of exclusion of the other and resistance to cooperation, is “historically connected to colonisation, to subordinate and negate ‘other’ frames, ‘other’ knowledge, ‘other’ subjects and thinkers” (Walsh 2007, p. 224). Once other religions fight for space, tension and withdrawal become the order of the day. In essence, the Christian religion wants to occupy the curriculum space undisturbed, despite the fact that some learners subscribe to other religions.

As Lander (2002) points out, accommodation resistance amounts to “knowledges of abyssal epistemology of others being reduced to myths and superstition”. Decolonial thinking, which does not call for monolithic thinking or demand encapsulation in particularity – to the contrary – calls for universal thinking (Kaunda, 2015, p. 77). Thus, we agree with Sithole (2014), that decoloniality

takes the stance of dismantling social injustices, and pushes for radical transformation and the construction of a new society. In short, we problematise resistance to and association with other religions, because decoloniality, as suggested by Grosfoguel (2007, p. 21), is “opposed any form of fundamentalist epistemic project but argues for pluriversality of epistemologies”.

Lack of qualified teachers

One of the trajectories that continues to haunt postcolonial states is their reluctance to invest in the education of teachers of religion. Commenting on this challenge, Matemba (2011, p. 85) argues that the “law says religion must be taught but the very same law does not give any provision for the training of teacher specialists in the subject”. In the case of Zimbabwe, there is only one institution training secondary-level teachers that offers religion as a major subject, Mutare Teachers’ College. The other colleges that train secondary-level teachers, such as Hillside Teachers College and Belvedere Teachers College, have extricated the religious curriculum, for reasons that are not clear. Thus, few teachers can obtain the necessary training, even though the majority of school learners are supposed to do the subject. Consequently, as a means to bridge the gap, some schools have sourced the services of committed believers whom they entrust with the teaching and learning of religion. In such a milieu, it is very difficult, or even impossible, for teachers to avoid emphasising their own religion, (mis)presenting other religions, and creating stereotypes (Cush, 2007: 220). Furthermore, teachers who perform poorly in teaching other subjects have been relieved of their duties, and reassigned to focus on religion, which is considered less rigorous and demanding than other subjects in the secondary school curriculum. This strategy has reduced the value of the study of religion, and has created the impression that it is a field that is not taken seriously. Commenting on the lack of teacher education, Schwartz (2006, p. 450) states that,

“curriculum writers, with all good intentions, have compiled volumes of well-conceived educational action plans, choosing specific materials and activities for their pre-conceived target, curriculum receivers, students, only to find that the curriculum users, teachers, are not prepared for the innovations”.

The lack of training of teachers of religion indicates what the Zimbabwean government values as valid knowledge for transmission, and supports Bernstein’s (1970, p. 47) observation that, “how a

society selects, clarifies, distributes, transmits and evaluates the educational knowledge it considers to be public, reflects both the distribution of power and the principle of social control". This approach by the government clearly shows the multitude of forces involved in subjection and exclusion in so far as knowledge is concerned (Sithole, 2014, p. 69). The argument here is that religious knowledge has been rendered unimportant by the state; thus, there is no need to invest in the education of teachers who are to teach religion. This conclusion brings about not only questions about the legitimacy of knowledge and knowledge production; it also shows that subalternised subjects are regarded as incapable of conceptualising their own realities (Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 13). Countries, such as the United States of America, who ignored or undermined the need for religious knowledge, have come to regret it, because the consequences of failing to invest in religion are far reaching – more serious than the consequences of investing in religion. After experiencing the detrimental effects of ignoring religion, in the years following 9/11 there was an unprecedented interest in and commitment to religious education in the school curriculum of the United States (Moulin, 2012, p. 158). It will be unfortunate if Zimbabwe, and other countries facing a similar conundrum, wait to invest in religion until traumas caused by religion, including loss of life or other misfortune, become visible. We argue this way, because we are cognisant that religion as social institution can produce both good and evil; thus, channelling energy to teacher education will result in competent teachers who can help learners refine their religious commitment in light of human rights, respect for the constitution, and love for a religion. The continued use of unqualified teachers for religion compromises the quality of the subject, and means teachers concentrate on what they are interested in, thereby, creating religious hegemony manifested in coloniality. In short, by using a decoloniality lens, we question the control of knowledge in teacher education, and challenge the very foundation of the rules of the game, which is the training of educators (Sithole, 2014).

Failure to accept diversity

The challenge that still exists among religious players is a failure to accept the religious other, whether intra-religion or inter-religion, making it difficult for religious players to map the best curriculum. Febbe (2014, p. 437), buttressing the foregoing argument, believes that the "situation is worsened by religious leaders who teach that compromise between religions is forbidden", thus

making issues of religious and pluralism sensitive focal points in contemporary debates. Often, religious rhetoric attempts to,

“caricature and trivialise the religious beliefs and practices of our fellow citizens, especially if they happen to be from a religious, racial, or ethnic community that is different from their own” (Garelle, 2002, p. 52).

Considering the curriculum space in a multi-religion society, such a view may be “misleading thinking [which is] more dangerous in the world of ordinary life because it may result in fundamentalism and religious conflicts” (Gwaravanda, Masitera, & Muzambi, 2013, p. 243). Thus, we argue for decoloniality, because it is against a fundamentalist mentality, which can create a re-Westernised mentality of dominance (Mignolo, 2011).

Some religious personnel have rejected the new curriculum, which includes references to all religions, as anti-God. Their attitude implies that many post-colonial states, including Zimbabwe, continue to struggle to accept people of different religions and this lack of acceptance can be extended to race, tribe, nationality and other characteristics. In relation to religion, this trajectory emanates from the “claim [that some religions] possess knowledge of the absolute truth concerning matters of morality and perceive dissenting perspectives as threats to eternal salvation” (Powell & Clarke, 2012, p. 15). While this attitude may be valid for religious discourses conducted within churches, shrines, or mosques, it may not be true within a classroom space, where the goal is not conversion, but religious literacy, which has the intention to provide learners with knowledge of the religions of others. This knowledge could contribute to peaceful resolution of differences, and coexistence, and could reduce prejudice. A curriculum that reflects various religions represents a major step towards learning about the religious other, where all religious players, through the lens of decoloniality, can have a fair share of curriculum packages, in addition to promoting unity in diversity. However, not everyone holds this view. We are of the view that, for Zimbabwe to succeed in promoting unity in diversity, teacher education is crucial for producing impartial teachers who have an adequate understanding of their role in the curriculum space.

Having cited the challenges facing FAREME in the curriculum space in Zimbabwe, we turn our attention to the international arena, to determine how the problem of religion in a multi-religion society is addressed by the curriculum. This will enable us to argue that some international

practices can be incorporated to the Zimbabwe religious curriculum conundrum to address the above-mentioned trajectories.

Situating Family, Religious and Moral Education in a Global Space: Britain and Malawi

In this section, we focus on two international practices that have shaped the teaching of religion. The main aim of this section is to provide information about the best practices of teaching religion, so as to avoid the withdrawal of other religious players in protest of the curriculum. The first case relates to the United Kingdom, and the other to Malawi.

The case of the United Kingdom

Britain is one of the nations that has experienced an influx of people with a variety of religious orientations, making it a cosmopolitan society. To cater for multiracial and religious orientation, the study of religion had to change, in light of the multi-religious and multicultural needs of society. To regulate the teaching and learning of religion, a body was formed at the local level,

“composed of professional bodies, for example, representing teachers or advisers; faith communities varying from the Anglicans to the Zoroastrians; new religious movements such as the Pagan Federation and non-religious organisations such as the British Humanist Association; and several interfaith networks and centres” (Chatter, Fuller & Routledge, 2014, p. 257).

“[The] breadth of the RE[religious education] council’s membership (over 60 national bodies of various religions and faiths), representing professional religious educators and national organisations of religion and belief, gives RS [give explanation for RS] wide currency. The extensive consultation about draft versions of this framework means the document provides a widely supported platform for RE which can encourage a coherent range of RE syllabus” (Religious Education Council of England and Wales, 2013, p. 9).

The networking of religious players forms a hybridity of religious ideas, through consensus, with the intention of improving learning and teaching of religion in schools.

As a strategy to eliminate religious contestation, Britain decentralised the religious curriculum. Every city has a locally agreed-upon syllabus, to which religious leaders give their input on what

should be taught in their area. As a result, the syllabus differs from one city to another, depending on what has been agreed upon locally. Jackson (2013, p. 5) states that,

“syllabuses for RE in community schools in England are drafted at a local level by an Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) which includes four committees: representatives of teachers; the Church of England; other denominations and religions; and local authority representatives. In such cases, RE dilutes the power of one religion through the involvement of various religious groups throughout the curriculum process”.

The case of Malawi

Malawi is one of the countries that emerged as a British colonial victim. Just like other British colonies, Malawi’s religious curriculum remained Christocentric until 2001. This Christocentric curriculum was contested by the religious other, and as compromise for a difficult situation, the government resolved to offer both multi-faith religious education and historical Bible knowledge on the school curriculum (Matemba, 2011). The dual-mode religious education curriculum policy change was introduced in Malawi in 2001 to replace a multi-faith religious education curriculum (O’Dala, 2001; Salanjira, 2003). Given the nature of the dual curriculum, religious instruction is mandatory in public primary schools and is available as an elective in public secondary schools (International Religious Freedom Report, 2015). To implement this, it means that some schools, the religious curriculum is a Christian-oriented ‘Bible knowledge’ course, while in others, it is an interfaith ‘moral and religious education’ course drawing from the Christian, Islamic, Hindu, and Bahai faiths.

In addition to introducing a dual curriculum to mitigate the pressure of the Christocentric curriculum, the Malawian government went further, to establish an Interfaith Public Affairs Committee, composed of leaders of the principal religious groups, to mediate a discussion between representatives of different faiths (International Religious Freedom Report, 2015, p. 4). This committee, comprised of various religious representatives, addresses religion-related challenges as they arise, and enhances the policy network among various players to ensure effective policy planning and execution devoid of coloniality. This approach helps to limit state control of religious matters. In short, Malawi’s solution offers two aspects that could aid the ambivalence of the

situation in Zimbabwe, which are, the need for a dual curriculum, and formulation of a committee that represents the interests of various religious players.

What can be done with FAREME? Learning from best practices

To respond to this question, we focus on three aspects that can mitigate ambivalence about religion in the Zimbabwean curriculum space. The first solution is a multi-religion syllabus.

Multi religion syllabus

A multi-religion syllabus means that the curriculum at the level of the secondary school should not have only one religious subject, but several, and that learners should be at liberty to choose which religion to study – as in the cases of Britain and Malawi, where the problems caused by multiple religions was addressed by offering various curricula. The role of the state is to develop insight into ways the clusters of actors, each with different interests and stakes, can contribute to shaping policy (Moyo & Modiba, 2013, p. 382) that ensures everyone’s religious needs are met. If the Christian community, or other religions, need a religious curriculum that is exclusively applicable to them, then, in the spirit of responding to their social and religious needs, a curriculum must cater for their needs. This could mean different subjects, such as Christian religion, Islam religion and Hindu religion.

While several syllabuses can go a long way to redress religious conflict in the curriculum, we are of the view that such an approach can have detrimental effects in the long run. Learners could be deprived of religious knowledge of the other, which is essential for coexistence and acceptance of difference. Decoloniality claims this separation will create religious hegemony and coloniality, and that teachers and school administrators will influence the syllabus according to their religious convictions. We submit that it is essential that learners acquire knowledge of the religious other. Feinberg (2014, p. 403-404) concurs, saying that,

“religion can be seen as a part of the human experience and as a way for students to understand their own traditions and those of others with intention of cultivating co-existence”.

Under this pretext, we agree with Yusuf (2013, p. 229),

“Seeds of peaceful co-existence and religious tolerance should be planted early in the hearts of children at the basic level of education in order to raise a new generation of peace loving citizens of this great country”.

Informed by decoloniality theory, learning about various religions “is a good weapon of promoting national unity, development and socio-cultural integration” (Awojobi, 2015, p. 10). In short, ambivalence in relation to religion in the curriculum space can be addressed through a multi-religion syllabus in the secondary school. We express reservations about this solution, especially because it can impede learners and deprive them of understanding the religious other, which is needed for coexistence. Decoloniality confirms our suggestion, because, as suggested by Mignolo (2011), it presents itself as an option and opens up a way of thinking that delinks from the chronologies of new epistemologies and religious paradigms.

Training of teachers of religion

Any success regarding curriculum implementation is dependent on the preparedness of teachers to execute the packages. Over the years, Zimbabwe has reduced its investment in the training of teachers of religion, leaving the subject in the hands of personnel who, though committed, are not always qualified to be teachers of religion. Given the sensitive nature of religion in contemporary society, it is inevitable that the government would decide not to invest in teacher education. The necessity of religious teacher education is echoed by Schwartz (2006, p. 449), who states that,

“teachers are the filters through which the mandated curriculum passes. Their understanding of it, and their enthusiasm, or boredom, with various aspects of it, colours its nature”.

Professional training and professional development of teachers is key to achieving satisfaction relating to the quality of teaching and competency of students (Boudersa, 2016). In short, we agree that effective teachers require appropriate support and training (Burns & Shadoian-Gersing, 2010), which will make the teaching and learning of religion in Zimbabwean schools and elsewhere more effective.

Religious boards to oversee the curriculum

Religious boards, such as those of Britain and Malawi, will serve as points of consensus, where various actors can agree to disagree and can help communities to make their voices heard (Nicolai, 2009). Polinska (2011, p. 398) suggests that dialogue is guided by,

“open-mindedness, curiosity, and cognitive complexity which are valuable experiences that promote non-judgmental attitudes towards practitioners of other religions which make transformative learning possible”.

The religious board, according to Kasomo (2010, p. 24), “eliminates any suspicions and misunderstanding” and “unreasonable prejudices” (Gwaravanda *et al.*, 2014: 243). To achieve this, Kooiman (1993, p. 1) believes that government’s role should shift, “towards a sharing of tasks and responsibilities; towards doing things together instead of doing them alone”. Consequently, through a decoloniality lens, religious body players move beyond the love of wisdom and their religion, to promoting approaches that encourage love under impossible conditions (Mpofu, 2017) and, in this sense, we find a way of thinking, doing and imagining a better future [together](Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015, p. 46). As Walsh (2008, p. 61) argues, the use of boards to govern religious matters on behalf of the state creates “epistemologically spaces that offer a possibility where other religions are acknowledged”.

Conclusion

This paper discusses the trajectories of religion in the mainstream curriculum. We point out that Zimbabwe’s new curriculum, while attempting to replace a Christocentric religious studies subject, created new challenges, which has led to some schools deciding to cease offering the subject. The paper also explores the way international practices in the teaching and learning of religion can assist to circumvent the challenge of religion in a post-colonial state, such as Zimbabwe. We argue that, to promote effective teaching of multiple religions, it is essential to train teachers of religion. We state that policy networking by players in the field of religion is crucial for creating an atmosphere that promotes peace and accepts people of different religions. In conclusion, religious issues cannot be left to the state to solve; instead, a network of players in religion is critical for proposing a curriculum that will benefit all religions, learners, and society at large

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