

## **The Issues of Social Realities and Social Relationships in Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album***

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**Abstract:** This article attempts to analyze the problem of integration of Indian immigrants in the British society, and this through Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album*. In these two novels, Kureishi mostly show the great difference between the social realities the Immigrants' native country and those of the host country, which make social relation and integration very difficult. And the problem of integration also raises the issue of racism which is one of the major obstacles to the social integration of Indian immigrants into English society. Some other obstacles are individualism remains a very serious problem for any Third World immigrant in the Western countries and the organization of the society into different social classes: the high class or the bourgeoisie, the middle class and the working class. This organization of the English society does not favor good relations between English people themselves; let alone between, the British and the immigrants.

**Keywords:** Social realities, Social relationship, Immigrants, Integration, Cultures, British society.

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**Résumé:** Cet article tente d'analyser le problème d'intégration des immigrants indiens dans la société britannique, et ce à travers les romans *The Buddha of Suburbia* et *The Black Album* de Hanif Kureishi. Dans ces deux romans, Kureishi montre surtout la grande différence entre les réalités sociales du pays d'origine des immigrants et celles du pays d'accueil, ce qui rend les relations sociales et l'intégration très difficiles. Et le problème d'intégration soulève également la question du racisme qui est l'un des principaux obstacles à l'intégration sociale des immigrants indiens dans la société anglaise. D'autres obstacles sont l'individualisme qui reste un problème très sérieux pour tout immigrant du tiers monde dans les pays occidentaux et l'organisation de la société en différentes classes sociales : la haute classe, la classe moyenne et la classe ouvrière. Cette organisation de la société anglaise ne favorise pas les bonnes relations entre les Anglais eux-mêmes, et encore moins entre les Anglais et les immigrants.

**Mots clés:** Réalités sociales, Relations sociales, Immigrants, Intégration, Cultures, Société britannique.

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### **Introduction**

Just after World War II, the need for independence became a common and major feeling among the colonized people in the British Colonies, whether in Asia or in Africa, though, it was a very tantalizing idea to promote. And that issue of accession to national sovereignty was a very long process to reach and not easy to be accepted by white colonizers. However, the colonizers finally but reluctantly admitted the idea of liberation of colonized people who thought that they were intellectually mature enough to be able to rule their countries by their own.

When national sovereignty was finally achieved, the native leaders started to be interested in financial success. This led to the quick development of dictatorship and corruption in almost all the colonized countries. Decolonized people also lack the necessary financial means to develop their countries, a situation caused by historical factors such as slavery but mostly by colonization. In fact, during colonial time, Third World people were ill-treated and physically exploited by their colonial masters who did not have any consideration towards them and saw them as uncivilized people or wild animals. Furthermore, they deprived them of their identity and freedom. To a large extent, the purpose of the colonial system was to teach people self-contempt.

So, post-colonial people were affected by their colonial backgrounds with their illusory ideas of freedom which led them to undertake journeys to the European "Eldorado" with as a consequence their cultural alienation and the loss of their own values and. Then, the West becomes the main object of the desire for the newly independent people, and that is the case of many Indians who moved to Great Britain in order to find their true identity, or to fulfill their dream of freedom. But, at first, people went to England to learn and after learning, they moved back to serve their native country, that is to say India as said Hanif Kureishi : "*Like Gandhi and Jinnah before him. Dad would return to India a qualified and polished English gentleman lawyer...*" (*The Buddha of*

*Suburbia*, P. 24.). Here Kureishi shows that at the very beginning, Indians went to England for a specific mission and once the mission was accomplished or reached, they made their way back to serve their own country, India. But, Hanif Kureishi also shows another aspect of Indian immigrants once in England, that is Indian immigrants' sexual orientation.

After reading *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album* we come to understand that the phenomenon of Immigration has become a real concern for Third World people as Immigrants most of the time lose their values because of futile desires or pleasures; they prefer sex to dignity. Kureishi's criticism or denunciation of this attitude cannot let us indifferent, and that is the first reason that justifies our choice of the topic of this study: "The Issues of Social Realities and Social Relationships in *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album*". The second reason is that, this topic raises other interesting issues such as the problem of social Integration, racism, family disruption etc. So, dealing with such a topic seems essential to us.

This work is divided into three parts: part I focuses on the difference between the social realities of the Immigrants' native country and those of the host country: part II centers on Immigrants' loss of Indian values and part III analyzes immigrants' sexual orientation.

## **I. Difference of Social Realities**

### **a. Social Relationships between Indian Immigrants and the host people**

Indian social realities are different from English social realities, and this difference has a great impact on the social relationships between Indian Immigrants and the host English people. In India people live in community whereas in England people are mostly individualists. In *The Buddha of Suburbia* and in *The Black Album*, Hanif Kureishi lays the emphasis on this important difference. In both novels the author shows, through the different characters, that the first problem Indian Immigrants face in the host country is the problem of social relationships, simply because Asian people like African people are not used to living in individualism, but rather they are used to living together in community.

So, the issue of individualism remains a very serious problem for any Third World immigrant in the Western countries and it remains also the most difficult problem for their settlement in the West. In the Western World, the social relationships between people are not very warm as for example in Asia and in Africa. English people like all Western people do not generally give much interest to construct relations between themselves, let alone between them and Asian and African Immigrants. But this does not mean that these people have no culture of hospitality or are racist or wicked; it is simply because hospitality is not a priority in their life. Another factor that can justify individualism as their social reality is the fact that, in the Western society people are not always in social needs as in the Third World countries. Moreover, they do not often have much time to waste, as each individual has his or her own concerns and nothing in life is for free, that is to say whatever a human being may need, requires money in return, otherwise there is nothing for free. In this respect, the Indian immigrant named Changez in *The Buddha of Suburbia* calls the English social realities: "The capitalism of the feelings where no one cares another person" (*The Buddha of Suburbia*, P.18). In this quotation Changez rightly refers to the whole Western society, even though he hints at the English society in which he is living.

In the West, particularly in England, there are other factors which restrain a lot the relationships between the immigrants and the white people. Among those factors we can mention the organization of the society into different social classes: the high class, the middle class and the working class. This organization of the English society cannot favor good and relevant relationships between Indian immigrants and their hosts, that is to say white English people because of the gaps which exist between English people themselves. In fact, the problem of class in the English society has brought about a certain lack of consideration between white English people themselves let alone between a white English and an Indian or a Third World immigrant, particularly a black immigrant.

The issue of the social relationships between Immigrants and the English people also raises the problem of social integration; that is why we cannot talk about social relationships without raising the issue of Immigrants' social integration in the host country. But, the problem of integration also raises the issue of racism. In fact, racism is one of the major problems of social integration of Indian immigrants in the English society. In Third World countries, Western people do not have any problem of integration; just because people live in community and there is no class problem. But, white people do not often hide their racism in public. This is clearly illustrated by this quotation from *The Buddha of Suburbia*: "why has our Eva brought this brown Indian here?" (*The Buddha of Suburbia*, P.17). Here the author wants to make readers understand that racism has an undeniable impact on immigrants' relationships with white English people; here the action takes place in a public party where, a white man sees the couple of Haroon an Indian and Eva an English woman. In this novel, English people do not have any consideration for Indian immigrants, or there are only relationships based on personal interests; this shows that Western countries are capitalist societies. In both novels, *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album*, Hanif Kureishi shows that the relationships between English people and Indian immigrants are

mostly relations of interests

Throughout his novels, Kureishi shows that white English racism does not spare Indian immigrants' children in terms of relationships. For instance, in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, the protagonist, Karim Amir was born to an Indian father and an English mother. Karim stands in the novel as the encounter between the Asian and English communities; he argues that the odd mixture of continents and blood makes him restless. And even in *The Black Album*, Indian immigrants' children cannot escape from racism, though, some of them, for example, Shahid and Chili, behave like English boys of their age because they sometimes face racism.

Consequently, Indian immigrants' children are victims of their identity, for example Karim younger brother, Amar changed his name into Allie as this sounds more English but he did that, just to flee racist acts. Finally, both children find themselves as not belonging to any of the two communities. And both brothers have not constructed any sincere relations with the English boys of their age and even with English people in general. So, this situation of integration remains without any solution; children became lost between the two communities because of their hybridity. There is almost a similar situation with the two brothers, Chili and Shahid Hassan, the protagonists of *The Black Album*; though they are not born to an English mother, for they also face racist acts, despite the fact that they received almost English education.

### **b. Social constraints**

The difference of social realities between the Indian and English societies is the major obstacle of immigrants' integration in Great Britain as it appears in both novels. During their very first days in a Western country Immigrants became lost in the integration process; just because Indian social realities differ from the English ones. That is why Immigrants became lost in their new social environment. The Eastern social reality cannot be combined with Western one. And even, traditional values are not combinable. In terms of civilization, Europeans think that other peoples have no advanced civilization, and Third World peoples are barbarians, they are sometime likened to wild animals. That is the main factor that makes Third World Immigrants get socially lost. White people consider other peoples as inferior and this represents a real obstacle to immigrants' social integration in the West. Racism remains a very constraining factor in Indian Immigrants' social integration. Another constraining factor is the individualism of white community. This makes many Immigrants lose their real identities, because it seems to them to be a burden on their heads. And it is interesting in this respect, to notice the difficulties Third World immigrants face, and which make most of them become disoriented from their initial objective. If we take the example of *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Kureishi portrays two young Indian men Haroon and Anwar. They leave India and their families behind in order to explore new horizons, as both of them are guided by their hope to get fame and recognition. If Anwar has left his native country to make his fortune in Great Britain and return home; his friend Haroon is expected, at least according to his family's plans, to return to India as a qualified polished English gentleman lawyer. But, unfortunately the English society denies them all opportunities, as the former (Anwar) becomes a mere shopkeeper and his friend Haroon is engaged in the civil service as a clerk, for he leaves his studies because of the difficulty to cover his school fees; as shown by the following passage: "Unlike them, Dad was sent to England by his family to be educated; like Gandhi and Jinnah before him, Dad would return to India a qualified and polished English gentleman lawyer and an accomplished ballroom dancer." (*The Buddha of Suburbia*, P. 24)

Throughout the above passage, Kureishi makes us understand that Haroon has left his country full of dream of social success when he returns to his country, but the English social realities have constrained him to leave his studies. This situation leaves him with deep grief. The Western social realities have much impact on the Asians particularly Indian immigrants and even on their children. In terms of education, both in *The Buddha of Suburbia* and in *The Black Album*, Indian immigrants couples have in a large part fail the education of their children for several reason: first, because they do not have the means to put them in better education conditions and they have not received any better traditional education, what we can perceptible through their behaviors; second, in England, children are not under many restrictions as they are in India and third, the English society is a society of liberties unlike the Indian society. India like other Third World countries is not a liberal society like Great Britain where people live with liberal ideas. However, Immigrants' children in both novels are often too liberal, not that they are impolite but, just because the society in which they have grown up is complex and they are also the encounter between the East and the West. So, this encounter seems to be a constraint for parents to their children education. They are victims of two social realities, that of India and that of England. And if we take the example of Karim Amir in *The Buddha of Suburbia* who argues clearly that it his hybrid situation which has made him restless. Otherwise, Karim laments his conditions.

## II. The Loss of the Indian values

### a. The cultural aspects

The English social realities impact greatly on many Immigrants' cultures. Cultures like religion are very sensitive issues; and in terms of social relationships these issues remain very crucial in Immigrants' settlement especially Indian community in Britain. This phenomenon of the loss of Immigrants' cultures remains the same in all the European countries. That is why in Kureishi's two novels, the issue of cultures is the cause of the instability of relationships between Asian immigrants in general and Indian immigrants in particular and the host British people. In *The Black Album* we can take the examples of the relation between the protagonists Shahid and his lover, the college lecturer named Deedee Osgood.

The lack of real relationships does not allow Immigrants to live correctly their traditional values. In *The Buddha of Suburbia*, that is the case of the relationships between Haroon and Eva Kay; this marriage is constructed on interest because it helps Haroon organize his yoga sessions which are attended by more and more people. And if we consider Haroon's first marriage with Margaret whom Haroon has left with his one son Allie (Amar) for Eva, we see that his act was caused by the frequent disputes between him and his Indian friend Anwar, because Anwar always complains that Haroon has dropped his tradition for English values. Anwar says that Haroon has been seduced by the English society. For Anwar the fact that Haroon abandoned his first wife did not reflect the Indian traditional values, and hence he qualifies his friend as a seduced man: Anwar, interrupted, stabling at Dad with his roll-up. "You bloody Chinese fool..." How are you reading rubbish...? Anwar raised his eyes to heaven and looked at mum, who sat there bored. They both had sympathy for Dad, and loved him, but these moods love was mixed with pity... (*The Buddha of Suburbia*, P. 27).

In this passage, Kureishi shows that Anwar is against his friend Haroon, because he thinks Haroon reads English books to understand English people ways of life, and that through his reading of English books he has become assimilated and that assimilation is nothing but a loss of Indian values. And it is because of his eagerness to live like English people that he has left his first wife, the mother of his two children. He has left Margaret for Eva without any acceptable reasons in terms of Indian cultural values. And in doing so Haroon has renounced the fundamental principles of Indian cultural values. He has lost his dignity.

So, in both novels *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album* Kureishi denounces the loss of values of Indian immigrants. This is illustrated through the characters of both novels as in the case of Haroon; in *The Black Album*, the most illustrating case of the loss of values is the one of Shahid and Chili's father who feels no shame to introduce his lovers to his sons and to go as far as teaching them how to fuck a woman; and he even, one day, went to London with Chili to visit his lovers. "Chili would drive Papa up to London for the evening. Only God knew what turn their terrible pleasures took, from which Shahid was excluded." (*The Black Album*, P.156).

In this quotation, we see that the father is the one that contributes to the loss of traditional values of his own children. But, what is odd is that Immigrants' children do not have any cultural values at all and we can consent that children are the big victims in Immigrants' loss of cultural values; they are rejected by both communities, they cannot integrate none of these two communities because they stand in between two different cultures; that is to say they are the encounter of two different worlds, the East and the West. That is why in *The Buddha of suburbia*, Karim goes as far as saying that the odd mixture of continents and blood has made him restless. So, Karim represents bad images from the beginning to the end of the novel.

My name is Karim Amir, and I am Englishman born and bred, almost. I am often considered to be funny kind of Englishman, a new bred as it were, having emerged from two old histories. But Englishman I am (though not proud of it), from the South London suburbs and going... (Page1, *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Kureishi)

In this passage, Hanif Kureishi shows through Karim's words that the fact that he is in English society does not make him be entirely an Englishman which he explains when he says that he often be considered as a funny Englishman. Culturally, Karim feels lost.

### b. The Religious aspects

Generally in the West, many Third World immigrants lose their religious values, just because of the Western social realities they face in their everyday life. They are not always able to combine their own values with those of the host country without being lost in the process. The loss of values brings about many consequences in the Immigrants' own lives as far as their family lives are concerned. Immigrants often forget their parents they left in their native countries.

Indeed, Hanif Kureishi as himself a result of the encounter between the East and the West has soon understood the negative consequences the issue of immigration has in terms of religious aspects; that is why, like other Third World writers, he writes to help Third World people understand this burning phenomenon. In *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album*, Kureishi puts the emphasis on this phenomenon of the Immigrants'

loss of values once in the Western World. In *The Buddha of Suburbia*, he portrays two Indian immigrants, Anwar and Haroon who get married and have children and live in England; their children have English ways of life as they have certainly shared with white English boys of their age the same public education. Their Immigrants' children, according to their fathers' traditional values are Buddhists; whereas English society has its own social realities that is a society of liberties where the individual is free to live as he or she wants, except for disturbing public order or destroying public properties. However, the Immigrants' children, Karim, Allie (Amar), Jamila etc. have adopted the English white children's ways of life, and finally they have almost lost their religious values as Karim, Jamila and even their cousin, Changez have become sexually obsessed. This phenomenon of the loss of Immigrants' religious values in *The Buddha of Suburbia* has impacted a lot the children mentalities and this is expressed throughout their behaviors.

There are also the same consequences in terms of loss of religious values in *The Black Album*: Through this novel there are some children of Indian Immigrants who do not behave according Moslem traditions. But, these children have inherited this from their late father during his lifetime and on which they have added the English liberties. The protagonist and his brother do not care about Moslem faith as the following passage shows it: "Shahid could feel Hat listening in the darkness. Surely, brother, there must be more to living than swallowing one old book? What men and women do, and the things they make, must be more interesting than anything that God is supposed to do." (*The Black Album*, P. 272)

Throughout this passage, the protagonist Shahid believes much more in what human creature does than in anything God is supposed to do. In this passage one can understand that Shahid is completely seduced by science and books till minimizing God's power and religion. And, here what is more interesting is that Shahid looks like an atheist, as he has not any religious preference. He believes in science and books, because if we follow all his interventions in terms of discussions about Moslem faith and its different prescriptions with other Indian children who are fervent believers: "Chad said we have journeyed beyond sensation, to a spiritual and controlled conception of life. We regard others on the basis of respect, Not thinking what we can use for others, which is what we doing right Here now". (*The Black Album*, P. 128)

Through this passage Hanif Kureishi shows that Shahid's friends believe in their fathers' religion and they are fervent believers, as we can see in Chad's words. In *The Buddha of Suburbia* as in *The Black Album*, Kureishi shows that immigrants were victims of English liberties.

### **III. The Immigrants Sexual Relations**

#### **a. Sexuality in married couples**

Sexuality in Immigrants' married couples remains a serious problem in Immigrants' settlement in the West. Hanif Kureishi, like many Third World writers, has also dealt with this phenomenon in his writings as we can notice it throughout his *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album*. In these two novels, the author deals with Indian Immigrants who live in English society with their respective families. In *The Buddha of Suburbia*, for instance, there are married couples, but among them there are Western couples and non-Western couples who are settled according to religious and moral standards, but most of them are established in a quite informal way depending on circumstances and people short-lived feelings. Almost all Indian unions have been constructed according to Indian traditions; these are the couple of Anwar and princess Jeeta, the couple of Changez and Jamila. The other couple is the one of Haroon and Margaret but it does not last as Haroon has formed another couple with another English woman called Eva Kay with whom he spends the rest of his life.

Remarkably, the strangest couple is that of Changez and Jamila; it stands from an arranged marriage between two young people who had never met before, their difficulty to live together perhaps signifies Kureishi's pessimism about the difficult encounter of the East and the West. Their union remains a blank marriage up to the end of the novel, even though Jamila has given birth to a child, but from another man, which Changez always condemns hoping to come to term with his wife (Jamila). Changez and his wife do not have sex together, whereas his wife Jamila has sex with other men. That situation affected her husband's life, as he turns himself into sexuality with other women and finally their marriage ends up unsteady as the two of them are unfaithful to one another. So, through this couple the author wants to explain that Changez and Jamila do not have the same education, because Jamila was born and has grown up in England, whereas her husband, Changez was born and spent his childhood in India; so they have not received the same education. England and India belong to two different worlds therefore social realities differ too, and are difficult to combine. Another couple which has almost the same problem is that of Haroon and his first English wife Margaret, the mother of his two sons. This couple is constructed by persons of two different communities and different civilizations, as Haroon is an Indian and his wife Margaret is an English woman. But in this couple the problem was not unfaithfulness, as we can notice in the novel that the woman was a very devoted to her husband though she is a white woman with the liberties this society gives to women. In this couple the Indian husband is the cause of their divorce. Besides,

it is not really a divorce if we may say so, but it is a separation because it is Haroon who left Margaret for another English woman, Eva in order to free himself from numerous constraints his Indian community imposes on him and to devote his life on spirituality.

Haroon's attitude that consists in leaving his wife for Eva can be understood as a strategy that he has used to live in peace his spirituality and his eagerness to live like the English people. That is why in this novel sex or marriage can be seen as means of social integration.

In *The Black Album* Kureishi puts sexual orientation among other raised themes. So, in this novel the married couple whose sexuality can be taken as an example is the couple of the parents of Chili and Shahid; just because in this couple one comes to discover that the father turned into sexuality with other women and what is odd is that he made his own son know that. And that is why, his elder son, Chili, though he got married to Zulma, follows his father's steps by making sex with other women. In effect, Chili's sexual relations with other women is not to get a better settlement in English society, like Haroon in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, but Chili's sexuality is just due to the lack of good education and as he has been badly influenced by his father as we can noticed it in this passage:

Chili would drive Papa up to London for the evening. Only God knew. What turn their terrible pleasures took, from which Shahid was excluded. But he was aware, through tipoo, of wager they'd taken with each other, the subject of which was Love in uniform". The winner would be the first to fuck a nurse, traffic warden... (*The black Album*, P. 157)

In this passage, son and father are both married and the son drives his father to London to spend the evening with other women. This attitude lets the readers understand that in *The Black Album*, men are unfaithful in married couples. In the West, Third World Immigrants deceive their wives for their own interests. And this phenomenon remains a very a serious matter to which Third World people have to be cautious. In the same respect, the Ghanaian woman writer, Amma Darko, in her *Beyond the Horizon*, deals with two Ghanaian male immigrants, named respectively, Akobi and Ossey, who once in Germany married German wives. These Ghanaian immigrants moved their wives from Ghana to Germany; once in Germany they deceive them and put them into prostitution and pocket the money.

#### **b. The Sexual Orientation of the immigrants Children**

The sexual orientation of the Immigrants' children in the West is a serious issue. That is why, in both novels, Kureishi deals with it to draw people's attention. Immigrants' children get involved in sexuality, because this is the consequence of the encounter of two different peoples from different continents. Indian immigrants' children sexual orientation can be seen through both novels as a loss of values, as these children live between two societies. But this loss of traditional values can be also as the consequence of the lack of consideration of immigrants, and in this way their sexual orientation can be seen as a refuge, which can help them escape from racial acts or forget their difficult living conditions. Indeed, Immigrants' children sexual orientation can also be due to the English liberties. If we take the example of Shahid and Chili in *The Black Album*, we see that these boys have been bred into English ways, that is to say their behaviors are different from other immigrants' children. Consequently, they get into sexuality; and as it is shown in the novel, Shahid became the lover of his lecturer, Deedee Osgood with whom he permanently has sex. But the lecturer is also his closer friend as both of them have the same passions which are books and sex, as it is illustrated by this passage:

She came back, turned off the light and slipped into bed next to him. Heads together, they still gave little occasional giggles, cackles, but physical sensations were mercifully replacing their hilarity. This was what sex was for. (*The Black Album*, P. 211)

In this passage, the author shows that Shahid and his lover have the same passions which are sex and books or science. As for his brother Chili, he also gets into sexuality and drugs. Chili becomes addicted like his friend Strapper who is a street-kid. These two friends spend much of their time in bars.

In the same respect, in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Karim's sexual orientation has no limits; he frequently has sex with Jamila who is married to Changez. Jamila is the daughter of Anwar and Anwar is a friend of Haroon, Karim's father and Changez is Jamila's cousin. Karim has also sex with English women such as, Eleanor, Helen etc. Jamila has a baby with another man named, Simon instead of her husband, Changez; he too has sex affairs with other women. So, immigrants' children sexual orientation remains a relevant phenomenon.

### **Conclusion**

Throughout, Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album*, Indian immigrants' social realities and social relationships remain very relevant themes of study, for they engender many other themes such as, integration, identity, racism, hybridity, sexual orientation etc. So, it is very important to recognize that Hanif Kureishi is very committed to help people, but especially the Third World people, to open widely their eyes and understand the consequences of immigration.

Thus, it is necessary to know and understand the reasons of his commitment that has led him to write about such a question. In fact, Hanif Kureishi, like Karim Amir, the protagonist of *The Buddha of Suburbia*, was born in England to an Indian father and an English mother. Throughout, *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album* readers come to understand his vision of the immigration of Third World people in the Western World.

So, knowing a little about his background can help better understand clearly his literary works and his willingness to shed light on immigration to the West so as to better help Third World peoples be careful about this phenomenon.

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