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THE PHILOSOPHICAL MEANING OF PANDAWA LIMA IN WAYANG (AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF JAVANESE AND ISLAMIC CULTURE)

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Abstract

The Pandawa Lima, as an integral part of Javanese wayang (shadow puppetry), has undergone significant acculturation with the advent of Islamic influence in Java. This phenomenon reflects complex cultural dynamics worthy of deeper study. This research aims to analyze the philosophical meaning of the Pandawa Lima in the context of Javanese-Islamic cultural acculturation and examine its relevance in contemporary society. This study employs a qualitative approach with cultural hermeneutics analysis, supported by John W. Berry's acculturation theory, Clifford Geertz's hermeneutics, Yuri Lotman's cultural semiotics, and Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity. The analysis shows that the Pandawa Lima serves as a dynamic sign system in Javanese-Islamic culture, creating a unique third space where Javanese and Islamic values are harmoniously integrated. The Pandawa Lima characters represent a synthesis of values relevant to contemporary issues such as ethical leadership, conflict resolution, and social harmony. This acculturation process also offers a model for broader intercultural dialogue, demonstrating how different traditions can synergize without losing their essence.

Keywords: Pandawa Lima, Javanese-Islamic Acculturation, Wayang, Cultural Hermeneutics

INTRODUCTION

Wayang is an Indonesian cultural heritage that has been recognized by UNESCO as a Masterpiece of oral and intangible heritage of humanity. This art form has been an integral part of Javanese society for centuries, serving as a medium for conveying moral values, ethics, and life philosophies. Among the characters in Wayang, the Pandawa Lima have become central figures with profound philosophical meanings, not only in the context of Javanese culture but also from an Islamic perspective, which later entered and acculturated with the local culture (Liliweri, 2021).

The *Pandawa Lima*, consisting of Yudhistira, Bima, Arjuna, Nakula, and Sadewa, are not mere fictional characters in the epic Mahabharata. They are representations of noble values highly esteemed in Javanese society. Each Pandawa character possesses unique traits and roles that reflect important aspects of human life. However, with the advent of Islam in Java, an interesting process of cultural acculturation occurred, where Islamic values began to be integrated into the philosophical interpretation of wayang characters, including the *Pandawa Lima* (Abbas, Suparman, Suryanto, & Wafa, 2023).

The process of blending Javanese culture and Islam in Wayang creates a complex yet intriguing dynamic worthy of study. On one hand, it demonstrates the flexibility and openness of Javanese culture in accepting external influences. On the

other hand, this phenomenon also shows how Islam, as a newly arrived religion, was able to adapt and find ways to convey its teachings through a medium already familiar to the local community. The study of the philosophical meaning of *Pandawa Lima* in this context becomes crucial to understanding how two different value systems can synergize and mutually enrich each other.

Although research on *Pandawa Lima* exists, there remains a gap in understanding how the philosophical meanings of these characters have evolved and adapted in the context of the Javanese and Islamic cultural encounter. A more comprehensive analysis is needed to uncover the layers of meaning embedded in the *Pandawa Lima* characters, both from the perspective of Javanese tradition and within the framework of Islamic teachings. This study is expected to provide new insights into the philosophical richness of Indonesia's cultural heritage, while bridging the understanding between traditional values and religious teachings in the context of an evolving society (Restian, Regina, & Wijoyanto, 2022).

Therefore, in the study of wayang and the *Pandawa Lima* characters, there remains a gap in the comprehensive understanding of the philosophical meaning of *Pandawa Lima*, especially in the fusion of Javanese and Islamic cultures. Most previous research tends to focus on certain aspects, such as traditional Javanese values or Islamic interpretations, separately. Consequently, a thorough analysis of how these two

perspectives interact, influence each other, and form new understandings about *Pandawa Lima* has not yet been fully explored. This gap results in a lack of understanding of the complexity and richness of meaning contained in these wayang figures (Ruastiti, ST, Sudirga, Kar, & Yudarta, 2021).

In addition, there is a gap in the relevance and application of the philosophical values of *Pandawa Lima* in the context of modern society. While studies discussing the traditional meanings of these characters exist, few explore how these values are interpreted and applied in facing contemporary challenges. This creates a distance between the rich cultural heritage and the realities of current societal life. As a result, the potential of *Pandawa Lima* as a source of inspiration and moral guidance in addressing modern issues such as leadership, ethics, and social harmony has not been fully realized. This gap demonstrates the need for a more integrative and contextual approach to studying the philosophical meaning of *Pandawa Lima*, not only bridging Javanese and Islamic traditions but also connecting them to the dynamics of contemporary society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This research offers novelty compared to previous studies in several important aspects. *First*, the integrative approach used combines Javanese and Islamic cultural perspectives more deeply and is more balanced, differing from previous research such as (Sudardi, 2015), which focused on Javanese spirituality

in wayang, or (Woodward, 2004) research emphasized Islamic influence in Javanese performing arts.

Second, this study develops a new analytical model that views *Pandawa Lima* not only as individual entities but also as a unified symbol representing broader philosophical concepts. This contrasts with Purwadi's (2018) approach in "Leadership Values of *Pandawa Lima*," which tends to analyze Pandawa characters separately (Mukhlisin, 2021). Another innovative aspect lies in the effort to contextualize the philosophical meaning of *Pandawa Lima* in contemporary reality, going beyond the historical and traditional focus as done by Sumukti (2016) in his study of wayang symbolism in modern Javanese society (Setiawan, 2019).

The theoretical foundation used in this research is the cultural acculturation theory developed by John W. Berry (1997) and the cultural hermeneutics theory of Clifford Geertz (1973). Berry's acculturation theory provides a framework for understanding how elements of Javanese and Islamic cultures interact, adapt, and form new syntheses in the context of wayang, particularly in the philosophical interpretation of *Pandawa Lima*. Berry identifies four acculturation strategies: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization, which can be applied to analyze how Islamic values are integrated into the narrative and symbolism of *Pandawa Lima* without losing the essence of Javanese culture (Mustopa, 2021). Meanwhile, Geertz's cultural hermeneutics approach offers a "thick

description" method that allows researchers to explore layers of meaning in cultural symbols, including wayang characters, by considering the historical, social, and religious contexts surrounding them (Riady, 2021).

Additionally, this study adopts the cultural semiotics theory of Yuri Lotman (1990) to analyze *Pandawa Lima* as a sign system in Javanese-Islamic culture (Siddiq & Salama, 2019). Lotman's theory of the semiosphere helps in understanding how new meanings emerge from the interaction between various cultural sign systems and between Javanese tradition and Islamic teachings. This approach is strengthened by the concept of "cultural hybridity" introduced by Homi Bhabha (1994), which emphasizes that the encounter between two cultures does not always result in the domination of one over the other but can create a unique and productive third space (Riyanto, 2017). The combination of these theories provides a solid foundation for exploring the complexity of the philosophical meaning of *Pandawa Lima* as a product of the encounter between Javanese and Islamic cultures, while allowing for a more nuanced analysis of its relevance and application in contemporary contexts.

Based on the background and theoretical foundation presented, there are two research questions for this study. First, how does the acculturation process between Javanese and Islamic cultures shape and influence the philosophical meaning of *Pandawa Lima*, and to what extent is the synthesis of these

two cultures reflected in the interpretation of Pandawa characters? Second, how can the relevance and application of the philosophical values of *Pandawa Lima*, which have undergone Javanese-Islamic cultural acculturation, be interpreted and applied in the context of contemporary society, particularly in addressing issues such as leadership, ethics, and social harmony?

These two research questions encompass both historical-cultural and contemporary aspects, allowing the research to explore not only the process of forming the philosophical meaning of *Pandawa Lima* through the fusion of Javanese and Islamic cultures but also its relevance in the modern context. This formulation also opens opportunities for in-depth analysis using the theories mentioned in the theoretical foundation, such as Berry's acculturation theory, Geertz's cultural hermeneutics, Lotman's cultural semiotics, and Bhabha's concept of hybridity.

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative method with a library research approach (Sugiyono, 2013). This method is chosen as it is suitable for analyzing and interpreting texts, documents, and literature related to *Pandawa Lima*, Wayang, Javanese culture, and Islam. Library research allows researchers to delve into the profound philosophical meanings of various relevant written sources (Zed, 2008). The research stages begin with data collection, where relevant sources are identified, including ancient manuscripts about Wayang, Islamic texts, and current

academic literature. Data is collected from libraries, digital archives, and online databases, then categorized based on relevance and credibility.

The next stage is data processing and analysis. In this stage, researchers critically read and note important information from the collected sources, organize data based on main themes, and perform coding to facilitate analysis. Data analysis is conducted by applying Berry's acculturation theory, Geertz's cultural hermeneutics approach, Lotman's cultural semiotics theory, and Bhabha's concept of hybridity. This process allows researchers to analyze the process of Javanese and Islamic cultural fusion in the interpretation of *Pandawa Lima*, interpret symbolic meanings, analyze *Pandawa Lima* as a sign system, and understand new spaces of meaning that emerge from cultural encounters (Adlini, Dinda, Yulinda, Chotimah, & Merliyana, 2022).

The final stage is interpretation and synthesis. The analysis results are integrated to answer the research questions, formulate new findings about the philosophical meaning of *Pandawa Lima* in the context of Javanese-Islamic acculturation, and explore the relevance and application of these philosophical values in contemporary contexts. Through these stages, library research on the philosophical meaning of *Pandawa Lima* can be conducted systematically and comprehensively, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the fusion of Javanese and Islamic cultures and its relevance in contemporary contexts.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. FINDING

The philosophical meaning of Pendawa Lima in puppetry represents a complex reflection of the integration between noble Javanese cultural values and Islamic teachings. Each Pandawa character carries deep symbolism that represents various aspects of human life. Yudhistira reflects the nature of honesty (shiddiq) and wisdom of a leader, while Bima symbolizes strength and steadfastness (istiqomah) in holding principles. Arjuna depicts inner and outer perfection that aligns with the concept of ihsan, while Nakula and Sadewa represent loyalty, honesty, and intelligence in carrying out trust.

In the context of controlling desires, each Pandawa character has a symbolic role related to Islamic teachings. Yudhistira is associated with *mutmainah* (peace of soul), Bima with *amarah* which when controlled becomes a source of spiritual strength, Arjuna with *sufiah* (compassion), while Nakula and Sadewa are related to *supiah* and *lawwamah* desires. This concept of desire control aligns with Islamic teachings about character building and self-control.

The synthesis of universal values in the story of Pendawa Lima shows a perfect harmonization between Javanese local wisdom and Islamic teachings. These

characters are not only symbols of leadership and morality but also provide comprehensive guidelines for living in society. The values contained within them include balanced spiritual, social, and personal aspects.

In the contemporary era, the relevance of Pandawa Lima values remains very strong as a moral guide and character formation. These figures become ideal role models in facing various modern challenges, including moral degradation and identity crisis. Through a deep understanding of the philosophical meaning of Pandawa Lima, society can gain valuable lessons about the balance between traditional and religious values, as well as their application in contemporary contexts.

2. DISCUSSION

The Concept of *Pandawa Lima*

Pandawa Lima is a term referring to five brothers who are the main characters in the epic story of the Mahabharata. The name "Pandawa" derives from "Pandu," their father, thus, Pandawa means "sons of Pandu". These five brothers are renowned for their bravery, wisdom, and loyalty to truth and justice. They have become symbols of the struggle against injustice and oppression in Hindu mythology (Arif, 2020).

According to Effendi (1977), the first and oldest of the *Pandawa Limas* is Yudhistira. He is known as a wise king

who upholds truth. Yudhistira possesses a calm and patient nature, and is highly skilled in strategy. The second character is Bima, or Werkudara, known for his extraordinary physical strength. Bima is portrayed as a brave and loyal figure, wielding his signature weapon, a club named Rujakpolo. Arjuna is the third character of the *Pandawa Lima*. He is renowned as the greatest archer and possesses a handsome face. Arjuna is famous for his wisdom and is Krishna's favorite disciple. The last two characters are the twins, Nakula and Sadewa. Nakula is known for his expertise in medicine and his skill with the sword, while Sadewa is recognized for his intelligence in astronomy and war strategy (Effendi, 1977).

These five Pandawa characters play crucial roles in the Mahabharata story, especially in the great Bharatayudha war against their cousins, the Kurawa. Each possesses unique strengths and skills that complement each other, making them a formidable and unbeatable team (Pendit, 2003). The story of *Pandawa Lima* has not only become an important part of Hindu mythology but has also influenced various aspects of Indonesian culture, particularly in performing arts such as wayang kulit (shadow puppetry) and wayang orang (human puppet theater).

Elements of Javanese Culture and Islam in *Pandawa Lima*

Pandawa Lima, as part of the Mahabharata story, is fundamentally rooted in Hindu mythology. However, in its development in Java, this story underwent an interesting acculturation with elements of Javanese culture and Islam. This process occurred alongside the introduction of Islam to Java and the growth of Islamic kingdoms. Javanese saints and poets cleverly adapted the *Pandawa Lima* story, incorporating Islamic values without losing the essence of the original narrative (Marsaid, 2016).

In the Javanese-Islamic perspective, *Pandawa Lima* is often interpreted as a symbol of the five pillars of Islam. Yudhistira, known for his wisdom and honesty, is associated with the shahada. Bima, strong and resolute, is linked to prayer (salat). Arjuna, intelligent and skilled, is associated with almsgiving (zakat). Nakula, handsome and healthy, is analogous to fasting, while Sadewa, loyal and devoted, is linked to the pilgrimage (hajj). This interpretation became an effective means of dakwah, introducing Islamic concepts through characters already widely known to Javanese society (Effendi, 1977).

Furthermore, Javanese cultural values such as harmony, respect, and balance are also reflected in the characters and behaviors of *Pandawa Lima*. The concept of self-reflection and strong self-control in Javanese culture is evident in Yudhistira's consistently wise attitude and Arjuna's ability to control his desires. Bima, with his extraordinary strength,

becomes a symbol of protection and courage aligned with Javanese chivalric values. Meanwhile, Nakula and Sadewa's loyalty to their brothers reflects the family values highly upheld in Javanese society (Nuraisyah & Hudaidah, 2021).

This acculturation is visible in wayang kulit performances, where the *Pandawa Lima* story is often used as a medium to convey moral and spiritual teachings aligned with Islamic and Javanese values. The dalang, as the storyteller, often inserts messages of virtue and wisdom sourced from the Quran and Hadith, as well as Javanese local wisdom (Purwadi, 2007). Thus, *Pandawa Lima* becomes a perfect example of how Javanese culture and Islam can synergize, creating a narrative rich in meaning and relevant to Javanese society that has embraced Islam without losing its cultural roots.

The Philosophical Meaning of the *Pandawa Lima* in Javanese-Islamic Acculturation

The acculturation process between Javanese and Islamic cultures in shaping and influencing the philosophical meaning of the *Pandawa Lima* in wayang (shadow puppetry) is an interesting example of complex cultural dynamics. Referring to John W. Berry's (1997) theory of cultural acculturation, this process can be seen as a form of integration where elements of the original culture (Javanese) are maintained while adopting elements from the new culture (Islam) (Abimanyu, 2021). In the context of the *Pandawa*

Lima, we see how Islamic values and concepts are integrated into existing narratives and characters without losing the essence of the original story.

Clifford Geertz (1973), in his cultural hermeneutics theory, emphasizes the importance of interpreting cultural symbols to understand the meanings contained within them. In the case of the *Pandawa Lima*, the reinterpretation of these characters through an Islamic lens provides a new layer of complex meaning. For example, the interpretation of Yudhistira as a symbol of the shahada not only maintains his character as an honest and wise figure in Javanese tradition but also adds an Islamic spiritual dimension that emphasizes the importance of testimony of faith (Prasojo & Arifin, 2022).

The synthesis of Javanese and Islamic cultures in the interpretation of the Pandawa characters is reflected in various aspects. Bima, known for his physical strength in Javanese tradition, is also seen from the Javanese-Islamic perspective as representing the strength of faith and steadfastness in worship (prayer) (Abbas, Alhabsi, & Assalam, 2024). Arjuna, while maintaining the image of an intelligent and skilled knight, is also interpreted as a symbol of generosity and social concern (zakat) in Islam. This interpretation shows how two different value systems can be harmonized to create a rich narrative relevant to Javanese society that has embraced Islam (Nasif, 2018).

This acculturation process also reflects the flexibility and openness of Javanese culture in adopting and adapting external influences. In line with Berry's theory, Javanese society did not completely abandon their cultural heritage, nor did they reject new elements from Islam. Instead, they successfully created a unique synthesis where Islamic values were integrated into the existing cultural framework (Fitria, 2023). This is evident in how concepts such as harmony, respect, and balance in Javanese culture find their parallels with Islamic teachings about brotherhood, respect for others, and life balance.

However, it is important to note that this acculturation process is neither uniform nor without challenges. Referring to Geertz's perspective on the complexity of cultural interpretation, we can see that the meanings attached to the *Pandawa Lima* characters in Javanese-Islamic culture can vary depending on the interpreter and their audience. Some groups may emphasize the Javanese aspects, while others lean more towards Islamic interpretations. This diversity of interpretations reflects the ongoing dynamics in the process of cultural acculturation, where meanings and values are continuously negotiated and reinterpreted over time, creating a rich and complex cultural tapestry (Aizid, 2015).

In Geertz's theory of "thick description," he emphasizes the importance of understanding culture not just from the surface but also through deeper layers of meaning. In the

case of the *Pandawa Lima*, "thick description" allows us to see that the Javanese-Islamic interpretation of these characters is not merely a replacement of one set of values with another, but rather a complex process where new meanings are woven into the fabric of existing narratives. For example, the concept of chivalry in the Pandawa is not only maintained but also enriched with Islamic piety values, creating an ideal leadership model that combines physical strength, wisdom, and spiritual devotion (Hakim, 2022).

Furthermore, the acculturation process also reflects what Berry refers to as "psychological acculturation," where changes occur not only at the level of collective culture but also at the individual level. In the context of the *Pandawa Lima*, this is evident in how Javanese individuals interpret and internalize the values embodied in these characters. A Javanese individual who has embraced Islam might see Yudhistira not only as a symbol of honesty in Javanese tradition but also as a model of steadfast faith in Islam. This process demonstrates how cultural acculturation can shape complex hybrid identities, where elements from two different traditions not only coexist but also enrich each other and form new understandings of self and world.

Philosophical Values of *Pandawa Lima* in Javanese-Islamic Acculturation

The philosophical values of the Pandawa Lima that have undergone Javanese-Islamic cultural acculturation hold

significant relevance in contemporary society. Through the lens of Yuri Lotman's (1990) cultural semiotics theory, the *Pandawa Lima* can be viewed as a complex sign system in Javanese-Islamic culture. Each Pandawa character not only represents certain values but also functions as a cultural text that can be "read" and interpreted in various contexts (Muhammad, 2021). For example, Yudhistira as a symbol of honesty and wisdom can be reinterpreted in the context of modern leadership, where integrity and ethical decision-making are crucial.

In addressing contemporary leadership issues, the *Pandawa Lima* characters offer a holistic model. Yudhistira teaches the importance of integrity and wisdom, Bima represents steadfastness and courage in facing challenges; Arjuna portrays the balance between intelligence and skill; and Nakula and Sadewa demonstrate the values of cooperation and loyalty. The synthesis of Javanese and Islamic values in the interpretation of these characters creates a leadership model that is not only pragmatically effective but also rooted in strong spirituality and ethics (Abbas, Fathurrohman, Astoko, & Suparman, 2024). In the context of Indonesia's plural society, such a leadership model can bridge various differences and create social harmony (Roziqin, 2020).

Homi Bhabha's (1994) concept of "cultural hybridity" is useful in understanding how the values of the *Pandawa Lima*

can be applied in contemporary contexts. Bhabha emphasizes that the meeting of two cultures can create a unique and productive third space. In the case of the *Pandawa Lima*, Javanese-Islamic acculturation has created new interpretations that are neither fully Javanese nor fully Islamic, but rather a unique synthesis. For instance, the concepts of social justice in Islam and harmony in Javanese culture meet in Arjuna's character, creating a model of social ethics relevant to contemporary society by combining social obligation with personal balance (Shumar, 2010).

In the context of ethics and social harmony, the values of the *Pandawa Lima* can be applied to address various modern challenges. The strong concept of brotherhood among the Pandawa, despite their differences in character and abilities, can serve as a model for managing diversity in multicultural societies. This aligns with Bhabha's concept of identity negotiation in hybrid spaces, where differences are not seen as threats but as sources of strength. In dealing with social conflicts, the Pandawa approach that combines wisdom (Yudhistira), strength (Bima), and diplomatic intelligence (Arjuna) can inspire comprehensive conflict resolution (Pradipa, Syafitri, & Nasruddin, 2024).

Furthermore, referring to Lotman's theory, the *Pandawa Lima* as a sign system is not static but continuously evolving alongside changes in socio-cultural contexts. In the era of digitalization and globalization, the values represented by the

Pandawa Lima can be reinterpreted to face new challenges. For instance, Arjuna's archery skills can be analogized with the importance of precision and focus in an era of information overload. Nakula and Sadewa's abilities in medicine and astronomy can be linked to the importance of scientific and technological innovation in sustainable development. Thus, the *Pandawa Lima* has not only become a cultural heritage but also a dynamic sign system that remains relevant in addressing the complexities of the modern world, creating a hybrid space that combines traditional wisdom with contemporary needs (Lumenta, 2023).

From Lotman's semiotic perspective, the *Pandawa Lima* can also be seen as a cultural "text" functioning as a "meaning generator" in Javanese-Islamic society. This process creates what Lotman calls a "semiosphere," a semiotic space where various cultural signs and codes interact. In this context, contemporary interpretations of the *Pandawa Lima* not only reflect traditional values but also actively create new meanings relevant to the challenges of the times. For example, the concept of "knighthood" represented by the Pandawa can be reinterpreted in the context of modern social and environmental activism, where courage and commitment to truth are manifested in the struggle for social justice and environmental preservation (Talani, Kamuli, & Juniarti, 2023).

Bhabha's concept of the "third space" in the context of the *Pandawa Lima* also opens opportunities for broader intercultural dialogue. The Javanese-Islamic synthesis embodied in the interpretation of the *Pandawa Lima* can serve as a model for how different traditions can dialogue and create shared narratives without losing their uniqueness. In an increasingly connected yet conflict-prone global society, this model offers an approach to building cross-cultural understanding. The *Pandawa Lima*, with the complexity of meanings and values it contains, can function as a conceptual bridge, enabling individuals and communities from different backgrounds to find common ground and create shared narratives about humanity, ethics, and social harmony that transcend traditional boundaries of culture and religion.

CONCLUSION

The study of the philosophical meaning of the *Pandawa Lima* in Wayang, especially in the context of Javanese and Islamic cultural acculturation, demonstrates the complexity and richness of Indonesia's cultural heritage. Through an analysis combining John W. Berry's acculturation theory, Clifford Geertz's cultural hermeneutics, Yuri Lotman's cultural semiotics, and Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity, we can see how the *Pandawa Lima* functions as a dynamic sign system and meaning generator in Javanese-Islamic society.

The acculturation process between Javanese and Islamic cultures has created new interpretations of the *Pandawa Lima* characters, which not only maintain traditional Javanese values but also integrate Islamic teachings. The result of this process is the creation of a unique "third space," where both traditions do not dominate each other but rather mutually enrich, creating a complex and multidimensional narrative.

The relevance of the *Pandawa Lima* in contemporary contexts lies in their ability to be continually reinterpreted when facing modern challenges. Values such as ethical leadership, social harmony, and personal-social balance embodied in the *Pandawa Lima* characters offer valuable insights into addressing contemporary issues such as leadership crises, social conflicts, and environmental degradation.

Furthermore, this study shows that the *Pandawa Lima*, as a product of cultural acculturation, can serve as a model for broader intercultural dialogue. In an era of globalization and increasing inter-group tensions, understanding the process of acculturation and cultural hybridity reflected in the *Pandawa Lima* can provide inspiration for building bridges of understanding and creating shared narratives that transcend traditional boundaries of culture and religion.

Thus, the philosophical meaning of the *Pandawa Lima* is not only relevant as a cultural heritage but also as a source of wisdom that can be continuously interpreted and applied in facing the complexities of the modern world, offering ethical

and moral guidance rooted in tradition yet remaining flexible and adaptive to the changing times.

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