

Jewish immigration to Chile during World War II and the untold story of Samuel del Campo

Inmigración judía a Chile durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial y la historia no contada de Samuel del Campo

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Abstract

The migration of Jews towards South America was not a new phenomenon of the XX century, but rather a continuation of the Jewish diaspora. After the independence from the Portuguese and Spanish crowns, the newly founded States in South America witnessed various immigration flows over the next centuries. During the II World War, the South American nations, although overlooked as long-distanced countries that had no inherence in the war, is yet one of the most significant refugee destinations. The case of Chile within the region is indeed particularly interesting.

Within the context of World War II, this article shall explore the evolution of Jewish immigration to Chile, emphasizing those periods before and during the war. In this sense, the shifting Chilean immigration policy between 1933 and 1937, 1938 and 1941 and finally between 1941 and 1944 will be highlighted. The research question shall address how the host community in Chile and the Jewish immigrant community accomplished to interact with each other, amidst the government's policies at the time; as well as the contributions from the Jewish population. For this historical and sociological analysis, academic written sources, as well as video and written testimonies from Jewish migrants in Chile shall be used as the main sources of information.

Key words: jews, Chile, integration, immigration policies, testimony

Resumen

La migración de judíos hacia América del Sur no fue un fenómeno nuevo del siglo XX, sino una continuación de la diáspora judía. Después de la independencia de las coronas portuguesa y española, los Estados recién fundados en América del Sur fueron testigos de varios flujos de inmigración durante los siglos siguientes. Durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial, las naciones sudamericanas, aunque se las pasa por alto como países distantes que no tuvieron herencia en la guerra, es uno de los destinos de refugiados más importantes. El caso de Chile dentro de la región es particularmente interesante.

En el contexto de la Segunda Guerra Mundial, este artículo explorará la evolución de la inmigración judía a Chile, enfatizando aquellos períodos antes y durante la guerra. En este sentido, se destacará la cambiante política migratoria chilena entre 1933 y 1937, 1938 y 1941 y finalmente entre 1941 y 1944. La pregunta de investigación abordará cómo la comunidad de acogida en Chile y la comunidad de inmigrantes judíos lograron interactuar entre sí, en medio de las políticas del gobierno en ese momento; así como las contribuciones de la población judía. Para este análisis histórico y sociológico, se utilizarán como principales fuentes de información fuentes académicas escritas, así como videos y testimonios escritos de judíos migrantes en Chile.

Palabras clave: judíos, Chile, integración, políticas migratorias, testimonio

1. Jewish immigration and the Chilean migration policy under President Arturo Alessandri Palma, (1933-1937)

Chile has been a refuge for Jewish migrants for hundreds of years before the II World War. Until the beginning of the XX century, approximately 4.000 Jews lived in the country, especially thanks to the open-borders policy during the second half of the XIX century. During this period, the government encouraged immigration towards the country, especially from those industry laborers whose work would stimulate the country's economic development. At the time, the Jewish community in Chile was mainly Ashkenazi, most of whom originated from Russia, Poland and Romania; as well as Sephardic Jews from Macedonia, Thessaloniki (Greece), Turkey and Northern Africa (Brahm & Montes, 2013).

Nevertheless, after the 1929 Great Depression, the government decided to restrict its migration policy, being Chile one of the most affected countries by the crisis. Given the potential high rates of unemployment, and under the presumption that foreign laborers would compete for jobs with local laborers, immigration towards the country was utterly restricted. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs gave the consuls abroad discretionary powers, so that they would have the authority to select which and how many migrants could travel to Chile, according to their professional profile; in other words, whether or not that person could contribute to Chile's economic development and progress (Brahm & Montes, 2013).

At the time, the government of Chile under the presidency of Arturo Alessandri Palma, exerted a strict no-immigration policy. Former President Alessandri ruled the country on two occasions, between 1920-

1925 and between 1932-1938, the last of which was especially characterized for his close relationship with the Nazi German government (BCN, 2018). The immigration policy measure under which migrants would be selected according to Chile's economic needs at the time, was immediately put in place. In October 1932, Chilean ambassadors were sent abroad under the mandate of exerting the most restrictive immigration policy. One year later, in 1933, the scope of this policy became even more limited under Decree number 4072, according to which Chilean consuls weren't allowed to grant travel visas to those individuals who did not have any profession, skills or resources that would allow them to live in Chile, without representing a social burden. Further on, adding to these provisions, the consuls were given even a broader scope of discretionary authority; they could also reject a visa to any individual who, according to the consul's personal judgement, wouldn't be able to adapt to Chile's legislation and customs (Brahm & Montes, 2013).

The following year in 1933, the Chilean government tightened even more its migration policy, while the Jewish migration flow started to increase. By 1934, these restrictions on Jewish immigration to Chile were even more evident. The Spanish government sent a petition to the Chilean authorities to allow the entry of 2.000 German Jews into their territory. The government firmly denied this petition, alleging once again the economic crisis at the time, which didn't allow Chile to open its borders to foreigners. During the following years, Alessandri's government maintained its closed-borders policy. It is interesting to note that within the economic crisis discourse for restricting the immigration flow, the authorities also encouraged a stereotypical rhetoric when addressing the issue. In 1936, Foreign Minister Miguel Cruchaga, when explaining the reasoning behind the restrictions on immigration, he may have implicitly addressed the issue in a stereotypical manner by saying immigrants are asked to be "adaptable" to the circumstances in Chile. Given that the government's goal was to put in place certain measures to facilitate and encourage the "middle class", their perception was that allowing all immigrants to enter the country would have been counterproductive. Even more, he added that while those immigrants who worked the land on their countries of origin, in Chile they prefer to work as traders, which in turn, increases the competition (Brahm & Montes, 2013).

In fact, Alessandri's government had a close relationship with the German Nazi regime. The German and Chilean powers maintained a cultural, educational, and commercial exchanges. This close relationship resulted in the introduction of the racial ideology in Chile, as well as anti-Semitic ideas, which in turn, clearly impacted the country's migration policy. As the years passed, former President Alessandri tightened even more his government's migration policy. By 1937, his administration decided to impose a "Special Legal Statute" for Jewish migrants. As mentioned above, despite the fact that Chilean consuls had the authority to reject or accept visa applications, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs imposed restrictions to the immigration of Jewish refugees through confidential memos. We can therefore identify a behavioral pattern between the government, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and

the resulting restriction on Jewish immigration. Once again, these confidential memos explained that Chile should facilitate the migration of those individuals who would be “productive elements” for the country’s economic development, as well as “adaptable within the social context”, the memos even employed the word “assimilation”. Even more, the memos clearly stated that, when adjudicating a visa, the consulate must have had to safeguard the biological interests of the country, with the purpose of “improving the population” (Schonhaut, 2015).

1.1 Integration difficulties for Jewish refugees in Chile – survivors’ testimonies

The Chilean inflexible migration policy and the restrictions imposed by the government didn’t facilitate the inflow of Jewish refugees in Chile. However, those who could manage to flee, although having been able to escape the horrors in Europe, encountered some difficulties while adjusting to a new country. The surge of extreme-right movements in Chile allowed for the Nazi ideology to spread around the country, resulting in anti-Semitic campaigns, not only in the capital city of Santiago, but other cities as well. Later on, in 1938 the Evian Conference took place, being Chile one of its participants (Schonhaut, 2015), whose results were completely inefficient to bring a solution to the rising Jewish migration, illustrating the conflicting migration policies in the region at the time.

Going back to those who were able to escape, the survivors’ testimonies confirm the fact that anti-Semitism was increasing in Chile, which fortunately, gave birth to organizations that fought against the anti-Semitic efforts. A survivor testimony I would like to highlight is that of Hans Frankenberg, a German Jewish who was born in Düsseldorf in 1918, whose family attempted to flee to the United States in 1938, and as this wasn’t successful, instead they fled to Chile. When his family was trying to arrange the documents to travel to the United States in 1938, they received a permission to travel that would have been valid only in 1941. Given that they would have had to wait for three more years to leave Germany, they decided to consider other options, with the exception of Israel, as travel authorizations were scarce (USC Shoah Foundation, 1996).

Frankenberg’s testimony is quite detailed as he remembers the November Pogrom very clearly. He suddenly woke up after hearing some noise coming from outside, his aunt came instantly to his bedroom and told him the family’s shop was being vandalized. Some people were trying to get in, forcing the entrance door. When they finally got in, they said it was an act of revenge against the killings of German citizens. After Kristallnacht, he remembers feeling resignation and the desire to leave as soon as possible. Despite this horror scenario in Europe, a risen sense of community and family support increased during those hard times. Fortunately, his family had an uncle in Buenos Aires and helped them organize their travel arrangements. However, the family faced difficulties finding tickets, and they were suddenly informed that Argentinian President Roberto Marcelino Ortiz blocked immigration

towards the country. At the time, the government of Argentina also followed an anti-Marxist and anti-Semitic ideology, which was generally covered under a “nationalist” discourse (Oliveira-César, 2014).

Therefore, Hans’s uncle used his contacts for the family to travel to Chile. His family finally arrived to Valparaíso (west of Santiago) in 1939, one of Chile’s major cities and seaports. He remembers that as soon as they left customs, they felt free. However, as any migrants at the time, at the beginning his family feared that they would live in discomfort. Fortunately, the obstacles, fears and challenges were overcome. As time passed, they finally settled in Valparaíso, and haven’t left since (USC Shoah Foundation, 1996).

The following survivor’s story is particularly interesting, as he explains in detail, the presence of anti-Semitism and how he engaged himself in the fight against it. Egon Rosenfeld was born in Vienna, Austria. He was deported to Dachau in 1938 and lived in the concentration camp for approximately four weeks. He was freed on 9th December of the same year. After he left the camp and was reunited with his family, his wife contacted the Chilean government through a family friend (an Arian woman who married to a Jewish man), who had contacts with the Chilean Consulate in Oslo, and helped them obtain visas to travel to Chile. The consul in Oslo said that in Chile they needed young people to work in the industries. Once again, what history tells us is confirmed by the survivors themselves (Egon Rosenfeld, 1996, Segment 37).

With the help of a lawyer, they asked for an authorization from the Tax Office to leave the country, which had to certify that they didn’t have any tax-related debts. After obtaining the visas, they traveled to Chile in December 1938. At the beginning, Egon and his wife sold flowers to support their family. By 1940, they already had an apartment and one child, which he proudly describes as a success, given that in only a few months they were able to integrate into the society and be sufficiently independent to raise a child. Later on, they started to work in the industry of textiles, and owned a small business. Even more interesting, Egon was engaged in the fight against anti-Semitism in Chile, collaborating as a vigilante. He remembers that when they first arrived in Santiago, anti-Semitism was highly present among the society; he vividly remembers when a synagogue in the city was destroyed by a bomb (Egon Rosenfeld, 1996, Segment 80). He describes how one night, he received a call saying there was a man handing out anti-Semitic pamphlets around the city. Being a vigilante, he went to the police station and reported the issue. The authorities stopped the man, however not for anti-Semitism, but for not having a license to hand-out pamphlets. Egon’s testimony is not only a survival story, but also a story of community engagement, cooperation and solidarity that crossed all borders. As soon as he arrived to Chile, he tried to help more Jewish families to enter the country. And so, he found out that a government official was legally selling visas for 100USD per person. In 1939, he was able to help his father and

other relatives to travel to Chile, as well as other Jewish families fleeing the war (Egon Rosenfeld, 1996, Segment 76).

Nevertheless, as mentioned above, anti-Semitism in Chile increased, especially while Jewish refugees started to arrive. Egon confirms this statement, and adds that the protests were taking place in Santiago, as Chileans feared there were too many Jews in the city. Henceforth, the authorities started to displace Jewish migrants to other cities like Temuco (capital of the Cautín province, located south of Santiago), although some were able to stay. His father was even stopped by the police and was told to leave Santiago and head towards Temuco. Fortunately, after showing his identity documents, they let him stay. Later on, the government abolished this measure and Jewish immigrants started to travel back to Santiago (Egon Rosenfeld, 1996, Segment 80). He also managed to bring his parents-in-law to Chile, his wife's brother and his wife, and his cousins who were in Paris at the moment. He said they all found "their existence in Chile"; some managed their own businesses, his parents-in-law were tailors, all in all, they all had ways of earning a living (Egon Rosenfeld, 1996, Segment 84).

2. A new era for Jewish refugees in Chile, the period between 1938-1941

In 1938, Pedro Aguirre Cerda took over power until 1941, previously he had also served as Minister of State during Alessandri's government (BCN, 2018). After the elections, the newly elected President Aguirre opened Chile's borders to refugees. In fact, the South American country welcomed 13.000 to 15.000 Jewish refugees during 1933 and 1940. German writer Eva Goldschmidt, a Jewish refugee from who migrated to Chile with her family in 1939, tells not only her story but that of other survivors as well, which in turn, illustrates the Chilean government's new migration policy. She tells the story of Emanuel Keller, a Jewish refugee of German origin who migrated to Chile in 1938. He tried to obtain a visa to flee to either the United States, Australia, Bolivia, Paraguay, and Cuba. On Kristallnacht, he was taken to a labor camp by the German police. While he was imprisoned, his mother tried to obtain a travel visa for him, as if a person received a visa while being imprisoned they were immediately freed. After being rejected by all the countries listed above, as well as a rejection from Tel Aviv and Panama, finally the consulate of Uruguay granted him a visa. Nevertheless, after arriving to Montevideo, the authorities had closed the borders and alleged that his visa was illegal. Fortunately, President Aguirre was notified about the issue, and officially welcomed all refugees to Chile (Goldschmidt Wyman, 2016).

Thanks to the new migration policy introduced by former President Aguirre Cerda, the majority of Jewish refugees that entered Chile were able to do so during his presidency period; he wanted to make Chile a "refuge against oppression". According to Eva Goldschmidt, there are two historical events that marked the beginning of a new era for Jewish refugees in Chile, after many years of governmental

restrictions. The first one being the entry of sixty-eight refugees in March 1939, after they were rejected by Uruguay. The refugees were detained for eleven hours, until they were granted permanent residency by the Chilean government (Goldschmidt Wyman, 2016). The second event took place in mid-March 1939, during the International Democracies Congress held in Montevideo. The delegations from the following countries participated during the Congress: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil Canada, Colombia, Cuba, Chile, Ecuador, United States (as well as the territory of Puerto Rico), Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela (Derecho Internacional, 2014).

Given the significance of this Congress, in both time and place, I shall dedicate the following paragraph as a parenthesis to address this historical event. The resolutions that resulted from this Congress were the cornerstone of the changing migration policy in Chile, and the Latin American region as a whole. On section 4 of the document, which addressed the “Repudiation of racism and the commitment to combat it” (“Repudio del racismo y compromiso de combatirlo”, in Spanish), (BCN, 1939). The following statements I shall cite below, use a rich pictorial language, and given the sweetness yet strong rhetoric of the Spanish language, it is a very strong statement from the American continent, acting as a whole at that historical moment, in need of decisive actions. The resolution clearly affirms that the fascist myth is scientifically inconsistent, and therefore, cannot assure the biological superiority of any peoples. When addressing anti-Semitism, the document states that racism and anti-Semitism are weapons used to distract the people from the real causes of their situation. It goes on saying that they are both inseparable allies of oppressive and antidemocratic ideas, which are supported by totalitarian governments. Even more, it says that racism and anti-Semitism are completely alien to the tradition of solidarity that characterizes the American nations. This document also confirms what stated above regarding the pursuit of anti-Semitism tinted as nationalism, by saying that the Nazi-fascist penetration into the American countries is disguised by anti-Semitic propaganda. Finally, it calls for action to all American States (BCN, 1939).

Going back to the second event that marked the changing scenario in Chile’s migration policy, while the Congress in Montevideo was taking place, two ships carrying European refugees arrived to Montevideo, one being Conte Grande, which carried eighty-one passengers, and the second one being Cap Norte, with twenty-seven passengers. Since Uruguay rejected their entry into its territory, and refugees risked being returned back to Europe, President Aguirre welcomed the refugees from both ships (Goldschmidt Wyman, 2016). A few months after the Congress, the arrivals from Europe increased, saving hundreds of Jewish lives, not only thanks to the new immigration policy on the side of the government, but also thanks to the ships’ captains who courageously brought more refugees from Europe.

A few months after the Congress, in August 1939, two more ships were destined to Chile from Hamburg, the Copiapó and the Patria, although the timing was unfortunate; given that it was a day before the beginning of the II World War. The German government prohibited the Patria to leave the country. According to the testimony of Manfred Klein, a Jewish refugee who escaped on the Copiapó, despite the government's measure, the captain decided to embark the refugees from the Patria, and managed to save approximately three hundred Jewish refugees (Goldschmidt Wyman, 2016). Unfortunately, the open-border policy lasted until 1940, when President Aguirre introduced a decree that stopped all Jewish immigration, after being pressured by the Nazi opposition, which accused the consuls overseas and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of having received bribes in exchange of adjudicating visas to Jewish refugees (Hernández Ferrada, 2015).

2.1 Local integration in Chile

When addressing the migration of refugees, especially during war times, it is important to understand not only the circumstances that led to their flight, but also the difficulties they face once they arrive to the host country. The stereotypes and stigma around Jewishness travelled along with the escaping refugees all the way to South America. In Chile, the anti-Semitic press accused them of being “usurers, money-lenders and elements of parasitic life” (Goldschmidt Wyman, 2016). Those in power employed this type of terms as well, and given that they highly valued farm work, stated that the Jewish people weren't indeed farm workers and were only involved in trade activities, hence, in their eyes, they didn't contribute to the country's economic development (Goldschmidt Wyman, 2016).

Nonetheless, contrary to the way in which Jewish refugees were portrayed by the media and government officials, they in fact significantly contributed to the economy. According to one of the testimonies above, Jewish migrants accomplished to establish new businesses and even employed locals. In south and central Chile, agricultural production was on the rise, which were coincidentally in the hands of Jewish farm workers. Moreover, the areas around Lake Llanquihue, 875km south of Santiago, was completely transformed into rich lands, producing potatoes, butter, honey, tobacco, and textiles. There were other prosperous locations as well, such as Puerto Montt (1.254km south of Santiago), one of the main port cities; Chillán (530km south of Santiago), Talca (326km south of the capital city); San Fernando, (152km south of the capital), and San Felipe (88km north of the capital), all known today for their wineries and vineyards (Goldschmidt Wyman, 2016).

The contribution of the Jewish community wasn't limited to agrarian activities. In Valparaíso, Santiago, and Concepción (a port city south of the capital), they established various factories producing cloth, silk, conserves and other food products, plastics, crystals, furniture, coffee roasters, as well as pharmaceutical laboratories. By 1938, there were a total of 141 workshops in Santiago, employing

approximately 5.500 local workers. Furthermore, after the arrival of Jewish refugees during the period between 1933 and 1944, Chile witnessed the establishment of more than 1.500 industries that employed 8.000 local workers (Goldschmidt Wyman, 2016).

3. The period between 1941 and 1944: The Chilean diplomatic scandal

After the death of President Pedro Aguirre Cerda on 25 November 1941, Juan Antonio Ríos Morales was elected as the new President for the next term, which lasted until 1946. As a member of the Radical Party, he sustained former President Alessandri's anti-Semitic and fascist ideas, whom he worked for during his presidential campaign (BCN, 2018). The diplomatic bribe-related scandal mentioned above, continued to have an impact on Chilean politics (Hernández Ferrada, 2015).

3.1 Samuel del Campo: The Righteous Among the Nations

In 1939, under Aguirre's Presidency, the Chilean government received a request from occupied Poland, to represent their material interests and those of their citizens in Rumania and Italy, given that their diplomatic relations were ruptured. Part of the consulate duties comprehended the revalidation of Polish passports, allowing refugees to flee. A few years later, during Juan Antonio Ríos Morales Presidency, in May 1941, diplomat Samuel del Campo was deployed from the diplomatic mission in Vichy France to Bucharest, to replace former consul Miguel Angel Rivera González, who was in fact accused of granting passports illegally and profiting from the embassy's assets. Rivera was helping Jewish refugees to escape by granting them passports, even to some members of his wife's family. He started to receive 50 daily telegrams from Polish Jews asking for help from the embassy to leave Romania. The embassy decided to sell their assets in order to provide a monthly stipend to the Jewish families who needed food and in some cases, even a place to stay. On this humanitarian duty, the Chilean embassy officials worked together with the Romanian authorities, as well as with the Chilean embassies in Turkey and the United Kingdom, in order to help Polish refugees to flee (Schindler del Solar, 2017).

Let us remember that during this period, the Chilean borders were closed for all immigrants, especially those of Jewish origin. In fact, diplomat Samuel del Campo informed the Chilean government, as early as 1941, about the existence of a Final Solution from the German government to exterminate all Jews. When del Campo took over the responsibility of the embassy in Bucharest, he kept granting visas to Polish Jewish refugees, despite the pressure from the Romanian authorities, as well as the difficulties caused by the presence of more than one million German soldiers in the country. According to historical documents, more than 1.200 Jewish refugees were saved by diplomat Samuel del Campo, mainly in Czernowitz, where after the establishment of the ghetto, hundreds of thousands of Polish Jews were deported towards Transnistria (Schindler del Solar, 2017).

The political scenario for Chile and the permanence of the embassy in Bucharest started to be at stake. The premises where the embassy was operating were closed by the Romanian authorities, as well as all their resources. Consul del Campo informed the Chilean authorities about their lack of resources for the Polish refugees, as well as for the embassy's personnel. However, Chile wasn't heard by the Romanian authorities, and del Campo was informed he would be declared *persona non-grata* if Chile insisted on their position. As months passed, the relations between the Romanian government and the Reich were at stake, as well as those between the Chilean government and the latter. Samuel del Campo became then a Gestapo target. In 1943, after being accused of profiting from the passport fees the embassy received from Polish refugees, he was forced to leave Romania. He died during the 1960s in Paris, and never served in any other diplomatic mission again. After this diplomatic scandal, added to the rising pressure from the Chilean pro-Nazis within the government, once again Chile closed its borders for Jewish refugees (Schindler del Solar, 2017). On the 22nd of October 2017, Yad Vashem honored Samuel del Campo as Righteous Among the Nations. His great-grandson Christian Beals Campos received the medal and the certificate of honor in his name (Yad Vashem 2017).

4. Conclusions

This article explored, within the context of the II World War, the history of Jewish immigration to Chile. The shifting Chilean immigration policy can be divided into three main periods, between 1933 and 1937, under the Presidency of Arturo Alessandri Palma; between 1938 and 1941, in the hands of former President Pedro Aguirre Cerda; and finally, between 1941 and 1944, when the fate of Jewish refugees heading towards Chile was in the hands of President Juan Antonio Ríos Morales. During these three presidential periods, Chile's foreign policy and immigration measures were not only dictated by the country's economic crisis, but even more important, by the government officials in power, and their diplomatic and economic interests, and hate narratives, which at times, were disguised as nationalist and isolationist decrees overseas. In spite of this discouraging scenario, this research has also brought to light the tremendous efforts by the Chilean consulates overseas, which despite the rising political tensions, the threats and the restrictive presidential decrees, they managed to save thousands of lives across Europe.

Regarding the integration of the Jewish community in Chile, as well as their interaction with the host community, the survivors' testimonies, as well as the academic material, have illustrated how, despite the difficulties any immigrant at times of war may face, one may always find success stories, in which, the sense of community and the will to face the obstacles in an unknown land, can be decisively stronger. Not only the Jewish community in Chile accomplished to fully integrate into the host country, but it also contributed to its development, and have certainly helped Chile's economic flourishing.

Today, there are approximately 18.000 Jews in Chile (Enlace Judío, 2018), the majority of whom arrived through the immigration flows during the XX century. The stories told by the Jewish survivors, as well as the written testimonies, are proof that in-between the horror in Europe, and despite the undesirable impact the Nazi ideology had in Latin American politics, there are thousands of success stories that are worth remembering. We may think of World War II as a solely European issue, one that happened thousands of kilometers away from South America, a completely alienated part of history. Nevertheless, the South American nations, although overlooked as long-distanced countries that had no inherence in the war, was one of the most significant refugee destinations. Although Chile's constantly changing immigration policy turned its back to the incoming Jewish refugees on various occasions, it shall be rescued the sense of solidarity and community from the diplomatic missions overseas, as well as government officials in Chile, who despite the constant pressure from those attempting to introduce once and for all the Nazi ideology in the country, accomplished to save thousands of families, who are today, proud Chilean citizens.

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