ETHICAL ISSUES OF THE SLOVAK NATIONAL MOVEMENT IN THE 19TH CENTURY

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Abstract: GLUCHMAN, Vasil. *Ethical Issues of the Slovak National Movement in the 19th Century.* The author examines the definitions of the terms ethnicity, nation, and nationalism in the context of the development of the Slovak national movement of the 19th century. He concludes that, according to Anthony D. Smith's typology, the Slovaks were an ethnic community striving to achieve an equal position with other nations and ethnicities in Hungary. According to the author, this effort had a clearly positive ethical and moral dimension aimed at the growth, development, and cultivation of the Slovak ethnicity. He documents this in the work of Ján Kollár, although he admits that Kollár also makes negative statements about other nations, especially Magyars and Germans, whom he accused of trying to eliminate the Slavs.

Keywords: *Slovaks, ethnic group, national movement, patriotism, ethics, morality*

Introduction

In literature dedicated to the creation of nations and formation of nationalism, diverse answers can be found to such questions as what an ethnic group is, what a nation is, how a nation originates, how nationalism came to exist, and what to understand by nationalism, especially in the context of the 19th century. The greatest differences are found among definitions of the term 'nationalism'. While Miroslav Hroch and Marek Waldenberg understand nationalism as a manifestation of national ideology expressed by placing one's own nation above other nations, while possibly using force when pursuing their goals and intentions (Hroch 2007; 2022; Waldenberg 2000), in Western literature, nationalism is usually defined as any activity connected to a nation or national life (Breuilly 1999; Gellner 1997; Hobsbawm 2000; Kohn 1965; Maxwell 2008; Smith 1991). This means the term 'nationalism' can be understood in a narrower as well as broader sense. Hroch, rightfully, points to the fact that a broader understanding of the term 'nationalism' complicates mutual understanding and discussion.[1]

With regard to the creation of nations, Anthony D. Smith claims that the essence of the myth of nationalism[2] is the idea that nations exist timelessly and all that is necessary is to wake them from a long sleep. In his view, an ethnic group is a type of cultural collectivism emphasising the role of collective memory and myth of descent, which can be identified on the basis of several attributes, among which are, for instance, religion, traditions, language, or institutions. He differentiates between ethnic categories and ethnic communities. An ethnic category is formed by a population who to (at least some) external observers appears as a distinct historical and cultural

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[1]   Although it is not the aim of my paper to address this issue, I incline towards Hroch's and Waldenberg's opinion, which is why, when presenting my views in the paper, I work with the narrower understanding of nationalism, while I preserve the broader conception when presenting the opinions of Western authors.

[2]   In my perception, these are myths of the national movement and national ideology.

group. Such a group can, however, have a low level of self-awareness and only a foggy idea of its own collectivism. As an example, he uses the Slovak population of the Carpathian valleys prior to 1850 in spite of the fact that they shared a dialect and religion (Smith 1991, 20-21). Regarding an ethnic community, he defined six attributes for its identification: 1) a collective name, 2) a common myth of descent, 3) shared collective memory, 4) distinctive cultural attributes, 5) an association with a specific 'fatherland', and 6) a sense of solidarity with significant parts of the population. An ethnic community should be distinguished from a race as a social group, in which unique hereditary biological features are assumed, which, allegedly, also determine its mental abilities (Smith 1991, 21).

In my view, in the case of Slovaks, it has never been true they shared a religion, unless Christianity in general is meant, while it was also not true they shared a dialect, as, a good while ago, Ján Kollár in the foreword to a collection of folk poetry, stated Slovaks used seven dialects (Kollár 1988, 15-17). Apart from this, Slovaks in the 1840s had a standard, codified, language, which means one cannot merely speak of dialects and overlook the existence of a literary language. On the other hand, it was certainly true that, in the given era, the Slovak ethnic group had scant ethnic awareness and the issue of identity was equally problematic. In spite of that, I believe it could be said that Slovaks met at least four, possibly five, criteria for being recognised as an ethnic community; they were not merely an ethnic category as defined by Smith's terminology.

I think, following Smith's criteria of ethnic community, Slovaks had a collective name, as the term 'Slovaks' is to be found in a certain form as early as the Middle Ages (since the 14th or 15th century). Equally, in the given period, a common myth existed about the association of Slovaks and Great Moravians or, even before that, Nitrans, as keenly discussed in the literary works of Ján Hollý and Jozef Miloslav Hurban (Hollý 1985; Hurban 1983). I believe that Slovak folk culture was a clear distinctive feature of Slovaks and other ethnic groups in the given region in the 19th century, as well as before.

Concerning the territory, if Smith defines it as a 'fatherland', I believe it is possible to historically support a continuous settlement on the territory that was originally the Duchy of Nitra and, later, the East part of Great Moravia. This territory spread approximately from the Morava and Tisza Rivers, i.e. in the East-West direction, with the Tatras providing the Northern and the Danube River the Southern border, by Slavic and, later Slovak, inhabitants. These were not, however, exclusively Slavic or Slovak settlements, albeit the Slovak ethnic group formed a clear majority, following the turn of the 13th and14th centuries, German colonisation began. This was followed by Vlach-Ruthenian colonisation (between the 14th and 17th centuries) and, during the Turkish occupation in the southern parts of Hungary, especially Hungarian aristocracy from the south of Hungary moved to the North. This significantly changed the ethnic composition of the population in the areas of Upper Hungary, but the Slavic ethnic group still formed the majority of the population, which subsisted mainly on agriculture and shepherding (Teich – Kováč – Brown 2011).

As the ethnic awareness of the Slovak people was poor, so was the solidarity with other parts of the population, a negative role also being played by complex geographical and climatic conditions in the areas inhabited by the Slovak ethnic group – these were surrounded by hills dividing the population of individual regions or, oftentimes, even individual settlements. As a result, the population of the Eastern counties was extremely scarcely represented in the Slovak national movement and rarely participated in Slovak national life (Hroch 1985; Hučko 1974), which is, for instance, evidenced by the pre-1918 history and activity of the Slovak National Party, in which the East barely participated (Podrimavský 1983). Another disadvantage of the Slovak ethnic group was poor development of the towns, which could have been significant centres of political, administrative, social as well as cultural life. This was evidenced by Turčiansky Svätý Martin becoming the centre of the Slovak national movement and life in the 1860s. This small

town of 3,000 inhabitants single-handedly managed to support Slovak national activities, despite strong opposition from the Magyar governmental bodies and the state institutions. Unlike A. D. Smith, I do not believe that the Slovak ethnic group in the mid-19th century was merely an ethnic category but an almost fully developed ethnic community.

According to Smith, when identifying an ethnic community, it is not really a common descent that is key, but rather a common myth of descent. When defining who we are, what is important is the idea of where we came from. According to this author, shared collective memory can also be a myth, as, for a great number of pre-modern populations, the borderline between myth and history was rather unclear if not non-existent. He claims that the borderline between the two is not very clear at present either. Links to a specific territory or place can have an equally mythical and subjective character. In order to identify an ethnic community, this subjective relationship is even more important than true land ownership; it is often a sacred place, the land of our ancestors, which makes it our fatherland. It is these sacred places that attract the members of an ethnic community ('ethnie'), or inspire them, possibly, from a distance. An ethnic community is not definitely primordial (Smith 1991, 22-23). Above, I mentioned my views regarding the aspects that are key to the definition of an ethnic community and to what extent, in my opinion, they related to the Slovak ethnic group. Further claims by the same author support my stance even more in that the Slovak ethnic group almost entirely met the criteria necessary to be classed as an ethnic community, i.e. within the scope of Smith's term 'ethnie'. This also concerns what I merely deduced from his understanding of fatherland, as the Slovak ethnic group had one that its predecessors inhabited since, at least, the times of Samo's Empire, the Principality of Nitra and, later, Great Moravia.

In the context of Smith's ideas regarding an ethnic community as a developmental stage prior to the formation of a nation, he provided the following definition: "[A] nation... is *a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members.* By definition the nation is a community of common myths and memories, as is an *ethnic.* It is also a territorial community. But whereas in the case of *ethnies* the link with a territory may be only historical and symbolic, in the case of the nation it is physical and actual: nations possess territories. In other words, nations always require ethnic 'elements'. These may, of course, be reworked; they often are. But nations are inconceivable without some common myths and memories of a territorial home" (Smith 1991, 40). When I analyse it point by point, factor by factor, it follows that, by a nation, Smith, de facto, understands a state nation, as he considers the existence of shared economy, laws, rights, and duties as a criterion. The above factors are, more or less, the same as for an ethnic group, but mass culture is directed at a form of institutionalisation, which was, in the 19th century and especially in multi-ethnic empires such as the Habsburg monarchy (with Hungary as part of it), only possible at the level of a state nation and not very likely at the level of an ethnic group or ethnic community. The territorial demarcation of Hungary was also problematic, as, in the case of the Slovak ethnic group, the territory primarily covered hilly areas of Northern Hungary. The Slovak ethnic group also inhabited large areas of the Lower land, such as that surrounding Békéscaba, in the region of the Serbian Vojvodina, i.e. area surrounding Novi Sad, Romanian Banat and, in many other places in Hungary including Pest.

Language as a cultural, humanizing and ethical element of the Slovak ethnic group

On the other hand, in the context of defining the content of the term 'nation', what Benedict Anderson considers important are the ideas that preceded it and were connected to written language, which was to provide an exclusive approach to the ontological truth. Another was the idea that human society is organised around superior centres, such as rulers acting on divine authority. The third was the idea that the origin of the world and people is, actually, the same. However, the fast, albeit uneven, development within Western Europe and the other parts of the continent caused the destruction of such understanding of the relationship between cosmology in the form of God's ruling the world and history. That is why a new way started to be searched for which could meaningfully join these and the nation would offer the answer that would provide responses to existing questions and doubts (Anderson 2006, 36). On the one hand, the author's claims are right; on the other, one cannot fully agree with them. It was establishing the Slovak ethnic group and the shaping of its ethnic and national awareness, identity and ideology that was based on religion, the natural right which God gave equally to all people. Therefore, Slovak patriots, including Ján Kollár, Ľudovít Štúr, and others, requested equal rights and position of Slovaks within Hungary and the Habsburg monarchy (Dupkala 2024; Kollár 1831; 1844; Štúr 1986a; 1986b; Hodža 1847).

In John Breuilly's view, language only gained its significance when it became an important institutional component of law, politics, and economy. For instance, in the language policy of Emperor Joseph II, replacing Latin with German activated Magyar pressure to introduce the Magyar language. Nevertheless, the author states that supporting the use of mother tongue in primary education, which started to be enforced during Joseph II's reign, increased the interest in Slavic languages on the one hand and concerns in Magyars on the other. Therefore, in his view, language is not only important from the viewpoint of national culture and memory, but also as an instrument of political, legal, and education systems. Breuilly claims that, if language is restricted to the first area, then its significance is truly small (Breuilly 1999, 152). Hroch wrote, in a similar context, about language as a means of communication and its importance within the education system that significantly entered the process of shaping a nation, i.e. transforming an ethnic group into a nation, as, according to him, it was important to what extent the mother tongue was used for the education of the ethnic group. He believed that what was decisive for the development of an ethnic group and a national movement was whether the mother tongue was not only used in primary but also secondary education, as thanks to this, the ethnic intelligentsia was more broadly educated in its own mother tongue. Introducing the mother tongue in education at secondary-school level provided conditions for the language of the ethnic group to also fulfil the communication role in the legal, political, and economic sphere. To preserve the existence of an ethnic group, language was also important at the level of primary education, as it aided in retaining the historic and cultural memory of the ethnic group in question; it, however, did not create conditions for its further development, including its institutionalisation (Hroch 2009, 121). That was why the establishment of three Slovak secondary comprehensive schools was vital for the Slovak ethnic group. This increased the number of people who completed general secondary education in their own mother tongue and also enhanced the shaping of ethnic awareness.

New age nations are not, in Marek Waldenberg's view, an artificial creation and nor do they 'wake up'. At most, one could admit that a certain ethnic group that was not yet a nation, even though it already carried the seed of nation-forming activity, 'has fallen asleep'. As he sees it, every nation-forming process has two forms: spontaneous and intentional, whose ratio changes in the course of space and time (Waldenberg 2000, 27). I believe that, for the Slovak national

movement, especially for its initial phases, the term 'ethnic' awakening would be more apt since, as many authors have stated, the Slovak ethnic group not only lacked political awareness but also consciousness.

National movements, nationalism and patriotism

Gale Stokes claims that freedom and unity were the fundamental promises of 19th century nationalism[3] and the sources of its influence over individuals who were able to make it operable, i.e. use it for their own good. In his view, for political leaders, nationalism has two roles: on the one hand, it legitimises their authority; on the other, it mobilises public support for them and their policies. The essence of the legitimacy of 19th century politicians was the claim they represented the nation (Stokes 1974, 539-540). In the general context of European nationalism, it was certainly true that freedom and unity were the main slogans of 19th century nationalism. I believe one could agree with the above claim also in the context of the Slovak national movement, as it was freedom, i.e. national freedom from the viewpoint of acquiring equal rights and position in Hungary, compared to the ruling Magyar nation, which means it concerned national liberation. Other claims by the same author can also be accepted in the context of the Slovak national movement, as Phase B (following Hroch's typology) was mainly focused on legitimising the authority of political leaders and mobilising public support, i.e., in Hroch's terminology, national agitation with the aim of extending the social base of the national movement and making it a mass movement (Hroch 1985, 98).

One could also agree with the view that political leaders represented the nation, although, as it seems to have been based on a study of 'apocryphal' sources, the actual process of crystallisation of the Slovak national movement and its representation was not as unified, clear, and direct as the idea of it, according to which Ľudovít Štúr, Jozef Miloslav Hurban, and Michal Miloslav Hodža were to stand at its forefront on the grounds of their activities, while others only were of marginal importance (Pichler 2011). Not to mention that, prior to the armed procession of Slovak volunteer forces against the Magyar Revolution at the side of Vienna, a major conflict arose in the Slovak national movement between Kollár's and Štúr's followers (Gluchman 2023a; 2023b; Hodža 1848; Hurban 1983; Kollár 1846; Štúr 1986a). Then, during the actual revolution, the opinions on the political, or military, advancement also varied (Winkler 1982, 189), not to mention the conflicts in the periods to come, such as following Štúr's premature death. They continued in the 1860s and 1870s and culminated in the second half of the 1890s with an open declaration of the 'Voice' (Hlas) group against the conservativism of the Martin centre (Podrimavský 1983). The entire process of preparing political leaders for the Slovak national movement was much more complex than is usually admitted; however, one could agree with the author in that these leaders gained legitimacy by means of the national movement, or public opinion. Nevertheless, while the political immaturity of the Slovak ethnic group was mentioned on multiple occasions, the political leaders gained legitimacy by a rather small part of the ethnic group, represented by nationally aware intelligentsia, and, later, by nationally aware small businessmen or craftsmen.

According to John Breuilly, nationalist thoughts, i.e. national ideology, can be utilised in three ways: coordination, mobilisation, and legitimisation. In coordination, nationalist ideas are utilised to enforce shared interests while mobilisation serves to gain support for the political movement among large groups, and legitimisation is tasked with justifying the goals of a political movement towards the state as well as external factors, such as foreign countries and their public opinion.

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[3]   In my view, this stands for a national movement and 19th century national ideologies.

The author claims that, in the Habsburg monarchy, the roles of coordination and mobilisation were important, while legitimisation was not very widespread. The feudal system of the Habsburg monarchy where privileged groups had local power, gave Magyars an institutional base on which their national movement was built. It led to Magyar aristocrats feeling more as the leaders of a nation endangered by the state and Germans than the dynasty's privileged collaborators. According to Breuilly, the events of 1848 caused radicalisation and a sway towards nationalist opposition. On the other hand, this ignited a nationalist movement of inferior ethic groups which, however, did not have a sufficiently developed structure of elites and they were often peasant movements led by the church and intelligentsia (Breuilly 1999, 166-167).

In my view, the above roles that the author mentions significantly (although not completely) correspond with Hroch's three phases characterising the development of national movements of small nations. Following Hroch's conception, coordination and mobilisation can be included in Phase B, which Hroch named the 'phase of national agitation'. I would include legitimisation in the shaping of national ideology which was, apart from other things, tasked with explaining the goals of the national movement in relation to foreign countries, in which the Slovak national movement was rather inactive and, thus, for a long time, misunderstood. While Magyars travelled Europe and presented their liberal ideas in the best possible light, thanks to which they gained affection and support from liberal and left-wing European circles; Slovaks had neither enough means nor did they make enough effort to gain significant support for their interests abroad. Even though they published several brochures in German, mainly issued in Germany (Čaplovič 1842; Chalupka 1841; Štúr 1843), it was still insufficient to speak to Europe and convince it about their fight for rights being justified, or expose the true face of Magyar politics. These were among the reasons why the Slovak national movement was considered, for instance by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, a reactionary force fighting against the progressive Hungarian Revolution (Marx – Engels 2010). Marx and Engels, of course, did not have enough information regarding the behaviour of Magyars towards non-Magyar nations and ethnic groups, which, logically and necessarily, resulted in these nations and ethnic groups standing up against Magyars and on the side of Vienna which, very skilfully and tactically used the radicalism of Magyar liberalists towards non-Magyar nations and ethnic groups for its profit. Moreover, as usual, they only fulfilled very few of their promises made in the times of danger on the part of Hungarian Revolution.

The model of nationalist ideology in the narrower sense must, in Marek Waldenberg's view, include the following features: national egotism is justified and necessary; good of one's own nation is the highest value; relationships between nations are not based on justice but power, ethical principles used at the level of an individual do not apply here; territorial expansion is commonplace; there is a hierarchy among nations and one's own nation is at its top (Waldenberg 2000, 42). On the other hand, he also mentions differences between nationalist ideologies, such as the view of the good of mankind, as some claim these are only empty words, while others consider it a real and main value that is not contradictory to the interests of a nation. Similarly, such ideologies might differ in the opinion on how to achieve the interests of one's own nation (by means of fight or cooperation). There might also be a difference in whether ethics has its place in international politics and, thus, whether politics is to be subordinate to ethics. The author believes patriotism, in contrast to nationalism, does not reject individualism and is a universalistic ideology (Waldenberg 2000, 44).

In the context of the above definition, I believe it is somewhat possible to differentiate in its narrower definition between xenophobic nationalism and humanistic patriotism. The former is typical, to a significant extent, of large nations that saw an opportunity to prove their task in the history of mankind by means of national egotism placing the interests, needs, and good of one's own nation over those of other nations; equally to the idea that only force is truly important

and decisive to realise national interests, which, almost explicitly, negates the recognition of ethical principles and values at the level of international politics. This, more or less naturally, results in territorial aggression as a means of increasing one's importance and international prestige in the history of mankind, in order to present the superiority of one's own nation over all others. I believe Napoleonic France, Nazi Germany, fascist Italy, or imperial Japan are good examples of the above practice. Austro-Hungary can also be partially included in this framework, due to its goals regarding international politics which resulted in the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (1908) and aggressive politics directed at declaring war on Serbia, with the subsequent start of World War I (1914). It can similarly be related to pre-revolutionary Czarist Russia, which also had its imperial power-related ambitions towards Japan, the Ottoman Empire and other countries.

The latter, humanistic, form of patriotism can be represented by, for instance, Kollár's conception of nation, including its forced or defensive national egotism resulting from the need to protect the Slovak ethnic group and Slavic nation, including the requirements for their equal position and rights within the Habsburg monarchy and, especially, Hungary. It is definitely possible to agree with the opinion that the good of one's own nation (in his understanding, the Slavic nation with the Slovak ethnic group being part of it) was the highest value, especially in a situation when an ethnic group and the entire Slavic nation within the monarchy and the country were doubted, marginalised, and ostracised. Through his sermons on good characteristic features of the Slavic nation which were, according to a great number of authors, abstracted from an idealised form of the Slovak ethnic group, he wished to evidence a moral prevalence over those who humiliated the Slavic nation and overlooked it, while also denied it equal rights and position in the monarchy and Hungary (Kollár 1831). In his treatises, Kollár pointed out that the relationships between nations in his era were not based on justice but rather power and an abuse of the position for the benefit of national egotism of the governing nations and their priority position at the expense of the justified needs and interests of the Slavic nation and the Slovak ethnic group.

Unlike the supporters of xenophobic nationalism, Kollár called for the enforcement of ethics and morality in relationships among nations referring to the rights of man as a citizen in the context of granting all citizens of the country, regardless their ethnic background, equal rights in all areas in the same way as the members of the ruling nations. This also concerned education, religion, and public, or state, administration in order for them to get education in their own mother tongue and use it in public and political life, which he considered a natural right of every man and every group of citizens, including the members of non-Magyar nations and ethnic groups living in Hungary. His requirement for equality and equal rights, or same treatment, was not only legitimate but also ethical and moral in correspondence with the philosophical and ethical views of the Enlightenment and Herder's philosophy of nation of which Kollár, in various forms, declared his direct or indirect support (Krištof 2022; Martinkovič 2022).

From this it logically resulted that, in Kollár's case, an agreement with territorial expansion was not an option; on the contrary, he often reproached it, mainly based on historical knowledge regarding Slavic tribes that were subjected to violence and expansion on the part of Germans, which led to their almost entire elimination in Lusatia and Pomerania. He accepted a certain historical hierarchy of nations, based on the concept that some nations had played a leading role in history, from the Greeks and Romans to the Western nations of Europe, which, however, in his view, were on the decline. Following Herder, he defined his own conception of Slavic reciprocity, according to which Slavs were to, in the future, lead mankind in the pursuit of humanity, based on their moral features that, in his view, designated them for this role (Kollár 2008, 112).

In fulfilling this role, Slavs were to follow the goals of humanity, i.e. in a humane way and, especially, by means of cooperation with other nations for whom they were to be a bright example on the way to humanity. The good of one's own nation and its ethnic groups was part of the

universal good of mankind. However, Kollár believed that, for this task to be met, they need to be united, stop any infighting, as it is the only way to fulfil their historical mission (Kollár 2008, 85-87). Cultural and literary reciprocity as a form of cooperation, and getting to know and exchange the products of literature was to be the first step. In spite of the fact Kollár claimed his conception of Slavic reciprocity to be apolitical, it aroused great disconcertion on both sides, i.e. on the part of some Slavic ethnic groups and, possibly, even greater turmoil among Germans and Magyars who considered it as dangerous Pan-Slavism, which could seriously jeopardise their Pan-Germanic intentions (Drang nach Osten), as well as Magyarisation. This led to Kollár, as well as others who supported the idea of Slavic reciprocity, being accused of Pan-Slavism; however, on the other hand, it also increased their activity in the form of even greater national, or ethnic, intolerance towards Slavic nations and ethnic groups.

On the other hand, it must be admitted there were some aggressive elements in Kollár, expressing certain ethnic groups; however, more hostile expressions can be found regarding Germans for the injustices and suffering they caused Slavic tribes in the past (Kollár 1862, 132, 259, 297-298). In the same author, negative statements addressed to Magyars can also be found, but these are mainly aimed at specific manifestations of injustice towards the Slovak ethnic group or, more generally, the Slavic nation that he experienced with his own eyes as a pastor of the Slovak Lutheran parish in Pest (Kollár 1831; 1844). In his case, these were expressions regarding the fight for cultural and linguistic rights for the Slovak ethnic group and Slavic nation rather than political statements resulting from his perception of nation.

Conclusion

It is, therefore, definitely possible to claim that the 19th century Slovak national movement, in all its forms and phases, played a positive role in the shaping of ethnic and national awareness of the Slovak ethnic group, forming an ethnic and national identity as well as constituting national ideology. This was primarily based on the humanist ideas of the Enlightenment mainly expressed in Herder's views regarding Slavs and their future, as well as following his thoughts of mankind's direction towards humanity. It was these ethical and moral ideals that became the basis of Kollár's conception of nation and Slavic reciprocity, which were then, with some necessary era-related modifications, followed by Štúr's adherents as well as other Slovak patriots, striving to enforce them not only in the cultural, linguistic, and religious, but also political and social life of the Slovak ethnic group in the second half of the 19th century. With regard to objective external circumstances, as well as subjective drawbacks, they did not always succeed but what they managed was to preserve the Slovak ethnic group and, albeit with significant problems, establish it politically in the first decades of the 20th century as a modern European nation in the shared country of Czechs and Slovaks.

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