Reconstructing Identity And Home: Exploring The Transformative Effects Of Return Migration In Caryl Phillips's A State Of Independence

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Abstract:

The research aims to analyze the issue of return in Caryl Philips' novel A State of Independence (1986), Our purpose is to investigate how the tale depicts physical return. It aims to explore how the protagonists' return to his home country impacts his sense of self and his knowledge of what home means to him by relying on diaspora theories connected to conceptions of identity and belonging. We will also look at the possibility that a complete comeback is not possible. The article establishes its theoretical framework by examining key notions of return, identity, and home. It subsequently highlights the theme of impossible return within Philips's A State of Independence. The analysis concentrates on the disillusioning and discouraging facets of return, which result in the protagonist becoming estranged, disheartened, and trapped in a state of ambiguity.

Keywords: Return, Caryl Philips, Home Country, Identity, Diaspora.

Introduction

Diaspora critics and theorists often grapple with concepts of belonging, identity, and the idea of home. When people move from their original countries to host countries, it has a profound impact on their sense of self and destabilizes fixed and essentialist notions of identity and home. Diasporic identity is viewed as a dynamic dialogue between the different places diasporic individuals inhabit, resulting in a hybrid

identity that encompasses elements from both cultures. This movement also influences the concept of home, making it more flexible and fluid. In essence, the construction of home is a negotiation between the original country and the host country.

However, what happens when diasporic individuals return to their home countries? This study explores that aspect and reveals that the reverse migration can lead to similar transformative effects. Anastasia Christou argues that "[r]eturn migration challenges, translates, defines, narrates and constructs new meanings of who I am in connection to the where I am" (Christou 15-16).

Therefore, this research delves into the manifestation of return found in Caryl Phillips's A State of Independence (1986), This novel is categorized as narrative of return, depicting the protagonist's journey back from the diaspora to his country of origin. Through this return, he comes to recognize the loss of his original culture or attempt to reconnect with his roots. The novelist explores the concept of this "journey," especially how return can be profoundly transformative.

The study investigates the implications of this return on the construction of the returnees' identities and how it challenges and influences notions of home and identity. Drawing from diaspora theories, particularly those related to identity and home, the analysis sheds light on how identity is formed and the perception of home is shaped in the studied narrative of return. The protagonist's return emphasizes the significance of the original homeland as a crucial element in shaping one's identity. The novel examined a perspective on the notion of return, suggesting that it takes a certain form, which affects the articulation of identity and the meaning of home. In this novel, return involves an actual physical relocation to the original home country. The study uses the term 'narrative of return' literally to explore how the idea of returning to an original home is represented in the selected novel.

Return Theory:

The movement of people from one place to another, whether willingly or forcibly, occurs for various reasons. Upon arriving in a new country, immigrants have the desire to prosper and create an alternative home that aligns with their ambitions and expectations. There are two potential approaches to living in this new environment: One is to adapt and participate in building a home in the new land, while the other involves holding onto the belief in a fixed homeland, ultimately leading to a potential return. Both options highlight the significance of the homeland in shaping one's identity and the construction of a sense of home. Additionally, constructing a home in the diaspora involves negotiation between the original country and the host country.

Timothy Berman illustrates this idea by arguing that for many former residents of decolonized countries, the primary sense of place might no longer be the nation but instead a local or ethnic culture taken into exile, intermingled with the official cultures of the metropolis and those of other immigrants. This cultural amalgamation is sometimes remembered when not actively practiced (Berman 45). This means that even if the individuals are not actively practicing their cultural traditions, they still remember them and hold them as a part of their identity. It is essential to note that the subject's settlement in the new land does not necessarily imply a rejection of their original homeland.

The subject's settlement in a new land does not necessarily indicate a rejection of the values of their homeland. Diasporic cultures, according to James Clifford (1997), experience a lived tension between separation and entanglement, dwelling in the present while remembering and desiring another place (255). Similarly, Gabriel Sheffer (2003) defines "modern diasporas" as ethnic minority groups who reside in host countries but maintain strong sentimental and material connections with their countries of origin (03). Roben Cohen (1999) aligns with Sheffer's statement, asserting that diasporic communities, despite their diverse histories and experiences, always maintain some loyalty and emotional attachment to their "old country."

Living away from their original homeland, migrants strive to uphold bonds with traditional values from their past. This does not mean that diasporic subjects lack roots, as Brah (1996) emphasizes that the configurations of home in the diasporic imagination are not necessarily rootless (191).

Edward Said (1983) distinguishes between "filiation" and "affiliation." "Filiation" refers to the geographical and biological ties a person has with their natal culture, while "affiliation" represents the new allegiances formed with institutions, associations, and communities. Said argues that filiation gives birth to affiliation, suggesting the primacy of one's homeland over the host land and reaffirming the importance of the original homeland in diasporic life (23).

Living in the diaspora has significant effects on individuals, as they often feel excluded from a sense of belonging in the host country. Settling in a new land is challenging, as migrants struggle to reconcile their customs, traditions, and entire way of life with those of the host country.

cultural beliefs and practices can lead to the exclusion of immigrants from the mainstream of their host country, resulting in xenophobic attitudes. Instead of assimilating, some immigrants face experiences of racism, exclusion, and estrangement, which may prompt them to consider returning to their home countries. This challenges the idea of migration as a celebration of cultural blending. Emotions

such as displacement, yearning, and nostalgia for their root country drive them to physically return and seek answers about their complex identities and sense of belonging.

Returning to their places of origin transforms their "imaginary homelands" into tangible, physical homelands. Christou (2006) explores the etymology of return migration in her book Narratives of Place, Culture, and Identity: Second-Generation Greek-Americans Return 'Home, tracing it to the Greek word "palinndsthsh" (palinnostisi), meaning "the return to the homeland." She defines return migration as the process of migrants returning to their country of origin, ancestral extraction, or symbolic homeland, which can occur voluntarily or under external pressures, termed "repatriation." Various terms, such as remigration and re-emigration, are used to refer to return migration (57). Russell King highlights the significance of return migration, an aspect often overlooked in the history of migration that has traditionally focused on leaving and assimilating into the new country, neglecting the opposite movement (Christou 56).

As a prominent theme in diasporic and immigrant literature, the concept of "return" has captured the attention of scholars in the postcolonial field. According to Elleke Boehmer (2005), the act of coming back home is the most significant event in journey narratives, encompassing both celebration and disillusionment (p. 192). Numerous novels explore the return of natives to their countries of origin. For instance, George Lamming's Of Age and Innocence (1985) portrays the challenges faced by West Indian expatriates upon their return. Chinua Achebe's No Longer at Ease (1960) follows the journey of a 'been to' after studying in Britain. In contrast, other narratives depict characters whose journeys end in disappointment and despair, as seen in Buchi Emechata's Double Yoke (1982) and Joan Riley's Unbelonging (1985).

Boehmer also suggests that return can carry symbolic significance. Caribbean writers often employ "dreamlike and mythic images" to metaphorically revisit Africa. A notable example is Brathwaite, whose poems such as "Rights of Passage," "Masks," and "Islands" confront the suffering and mistreatment endured by slaves during their journey from West Africa to Barbados. Importantly, in these poems, return is evoked through the performance of African rituals.

Impossible Return and Complex Identities in Caryl Phillips's A State of Independence (1986)

Similar to Odysseus' experience upon his return, retunees also face the challenge of readjusting to their homelands after a prolonged absence. This section of the study

explores narratives that focus on the physical return of protagonists, a return marked by uncertainties and complexities.

Caryl Phillips, the author of "A State of Independence," was born in Grenada and immigrated to the United States in 1964. His work often explores themes of displacement, identity, and belonging, drawing from his own experiences as an immigrant and his knowledge of the West Indian culture. In an interview, Phillips mentioned that the novel is not an autobiographical account of his life but rather an exploration of the experiences of West Indian immigrants in England and their relationship with their homeland.

In the novel "A State of Independence" by Caryl Phillips, the protagonist, Bertram, is a West Indian immigrant living in England. His cultural background is shaped by his experiences in both his country of origin and the host country. Upon his return to the West Indies, Bertram is confronted with a reality that does not align with the idealized image he had constructed in his mind. He initially expects to make a difference by establishing his own business and contributing to the nation's progress. However, his aspirations and attempts to reconcile with his country are met with disappointment and failure. This mismatch between Bertram's expectations and the actual situation in his homeland leads to a sense of alienation and disillusionment.

In Caryl Phillips's A State of Independence, the protagonist's return enables him to realize and affirm the elusive nature of home, dispelling the idealized vision of home they once held in their minds and imagination. The passage of time between departure and return changes things, leading immigrants to feel like strangers in their original home countries. Diasporic subjects are often depicted straddling two cultures in relation to the host country, but the novel under examination in this section shows that the reverse pattern can also yield similar results.

The purpose of selecting this text is to emphasize the shared experiences of returnees. In Phillips's work, the protagonist undergoes a literal journey back to his homeland, driven by a sense of discontent and a desire to reconnect with his roots and find a sense of identity and belonging. Through the trope of return, Caryl Phillip challenges conventional ideas of home and identity, illustrating their fluid and evolving nature. The protagonist's misguided beliefs in fixed and essentialist notions of homelands leads him to confront the painful reality of changing environments. Despite his expectations, the challenges of integrating and adapting after a long absence result in disappointment and disillusionment. This return journey invokes feelings of alienation and estrangement, as the revisited spaces have evolved over time. The paper aims to demonstrate that the supposed metaphorical return to origins through physical return leaves the protagonist caught between cultures and countries.

Disentangling the Homeland and Fragmented Identity in Caryl Phillips's A State of Independence"

Caryl Phillips' novel "A State of Independence" (1986) revolves around Francis Bertram's return to his home country after a twenty-year absence in England. The story delves into the psychological struggle of the returnee, who initially expects to reaffirm his connection to his homeland but ultimately ends up feeling frustrated and disconnected. Upon his return, Bertram is confronted with a reality that does not align with the idealized image he had constructed in his mind.

During his time in England, Bertram had envisioned making a difference by establishing his own business to contribute to the nation's progress, coinciding with the island's celebration of independence from British colonization. He perceived independence with hopeful anticipation, seeing himself playing a role in the nascent nation's development. However, Bertram's aspirations and attempts to reconcile with his country, like those of the island itself, are met with disappointment and failure.

Due to his poorly timed and misguided return, Bertram comes to the realization that he no longer fits in his homeland and feels like a man without a sense of belonging. Phillips's novel can be understood through Fredric Jameson's concept of 'national allegories.' Jameson argues that 'Third-World texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic — necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture'. This concept suggests that individual stories are intertwined with the collective experiences of a nation. A State of Independence can be seen as Phillips' exploration of the disillusionment and futility of independence, as the end of British colonialism is replaced by another form of subjugation represented by United States neocolonialism, seen from the perspective of a returnee (Jameson 86).

The portrayal of the journey back home often reveals a sense of disappointment and uncertainty regarding the stable concepts of home and identity. Returnees, after spending time in the diaspora, commonly experience the realization that their mother country has changed. Winston James and Clive Harris emphasize that "retunees" forget that their return happens at a different point in time from when they left, resulting in a return to a different place due to the ever-changing nature of the location (James and Harris 248).

In the novel, Bertram not only discovers changes within himself but also in the island and its inhabitants. This disparity between his imagined homeland and reality leaves him frustrated and unable to readapt, making him feel like a stranger. The study also highlights the dilemma of living between two different worlds, as Bertram finds

himself caught in a state of in-betweenness, struggling to negotiate his sense of belonging. His return significantly impacts his identity, rendering him unable to fully identify with either culture, leading to a paradox where he feels like a foreigner in England and a stranger in his native homeland.

Back in his native land, Bertram faces indifference and hostility from various sources. This brings to mind Marangoly's definition of home, where homes are often defined by closed doors, borders, and screening apparatuses, rather than wide open arms and inclusivity (Marangoly 18). Unlike the unnamed narrator in Tayeb Salih's "Season of Migration to the North" (1969) who strongly reaffirms his belonging to his country, Bertram's return proves to be impossible, as his birthplace refuses to embrace him (Marangoly 18). Consequently, Bertram's return reflects mythologies of the original homeland, where home is depicted as foreign and alien.

The novel begins with Bertram's return to his homeland after a twenty-year stay in Britain. Even before setting foot on the island, Bertram feels afraid and uncertain about the encounter with his homeland. The experience of returning bears a resemblance to the cultural shock and alienation one may face while in exile. Ledent highlights that both leaving home and coming back can evoke similar feelings of estrangement and dissatisfaction.

Homecoming whether temporary or final, illusory or real, is always present in the mind of the migrant as the reverse side of the exilic coin. Exile and homecoming are indissociable because they proceed from a similar desire to begin [one's] life a new, and both unavoidably lead to the same kind of disenchantment aroused by the confrontation with the realities that has fed one's hope for long. Be it England for the migrant or the Caribbean in case of the returnee.

The concept of homecoming, whether temporary or permanent, real or illusory, is always on the mind of migrants as the opposite side of the coin of exile. Both exile and homecoming are inseparable because they stem from a shared desire for a fresh start, leading to a similar feeling of disillusionment when faced with the realities that have been long hoped for. Whether it is England for the migrant or the Caribbean for the returnee, the longing for home and the anticipation of reunion are intertwined aspects of the migrant experience (Ledent 42).

Bertram undergoes a similar experience, believing naively that his homecoming will be an opportunity to reunite with family, friends, and his homeland, and finally regain a sense of belonging. However, as argued by Andres H. Stefansson, returnees often receive a cool or even hostile welcome from the population that stayed behind in the homeland. Bertram's encounter with his mother and presumed friend, Jackson Clayton, is disappointing and lacking in maternal love and affection. His mother

speaks to him with contempt, reproaching him for not staying in touch during his long absence. Stefansson further emphasizes that stayees, including close relatives, may envy and nurture exaggerated images of the comfortable life that they believe returnees enjoyed abroad (Stefansson 08).

In summary, the idea of homecoming is integral to the migrant experience, but its realization often leads to complex and disheartening encounters, as expectations clash with the realities of the homeland and its inhabitants.

Bertram's self-centeredness and lack of empathy prevent him from acknowledging the pain and suffering he has inflicted on his relatives and friends. He naively believes that he can return to the island and easily start his own business, without considering the consequences of his reckless actions. Even his own mother sees the change in him, recognizing that life in England has taken a hold of him. Although Bertram tries to deny any change, his mother remains resolute and ultimately kicks him out of her house, urging him to return to England due to the shame he has brought upon her.

Feeling rejected and disillusioned, Bertram turns to his friend, Jackson Clayton, for help. While Bertram has returned empty-handed without obtaining a degree, Jackson has risen to the position of deputy prime minister in the government. However, Bertram's hope for support from Jackson is shattered, as his old friend instead humiliates him and flaunts his own achievements, refusing to offer any assistance in establishing Bertram's plans.

There is a common perception among the natives that returnees like Bertram are not only seen as strangers in their homeland but also as a potential threat to its safety and security. Tania Ghanem highlights the concerns that returnees may reclaim occupied land or property, displacing current occupants and causing unrest (Ghanem 47). As a representative of the nation, Jackson views Bertram as a threat to the island and questions his right to start a business there, considering it illegal. Moreover, he accuses Bertram and other West-Indian returnees of laziness, insinuating that they only come back to the island to exploit it for profit. Ledent further suggests that Bertram's ambitions to invest in the island may be driven by exploitative intentions, even if he is not consciously aware of them.

Bertram tries hard not to display symptoms of loss, homelessness, or sadness on his island, but he fails since all of his dreams and expectations have fallen. Bertram's return thus calls into question and undermines the concept of a constant and stable original motherland. His goals and mythologizing creations are shattered by the reality that confronts him. Most importantly, he realizes that not only has the island changed, but he has also changed. Similarly, Malettea et al. claim that the fundamental

reason why the returnee sees his hometown as different is due to his altered viewpoint since "[n]t only did things continue to happen, but they have altered reality." When the exile returns, he or she discovers a new nation whose changes are alien to him or her" (197). As a result, repatriation creates many ambiguities and paradoxes, since both returnees and those who remain have altered and transformed through time. According to Daniel Warner, "exiles return, but they do not return." [They] return to their home nation, but they are not the same, nor are the people in their home country" (172). Bertram experiences what is referred to be a "cultural shock, trauma, or new displacement" since both he and the island to which he is returning have changed over this protracted time of absence, and because he did not anticipate such changes (Stefansson 10).

Bertram's extended stay in England makes him "English," unable of adapting to the island's fast pace of change. His schooling and experiences in England influence the way he sees his island; he sees it through a different and critical lens, or, more correctly, through an English lens. Malettea et al. remind us that "migration is in sense the end of innocence, the end of an immediacy with one's country that will never be attainable again by the returning migrant" (200). He arrived with a new accent, new habits, and behavioral tendencies (Stefansson 200).

Bertram's thoughts regarding his island exemplify Bhabha's concept of imitation. In his essay "Of Mimicry and Man," Bhabha contends that mimicry is a colonial strategy. He states, "Mimicry is the process by which the colonized but not quite. The copying of the colonizing culture, behaviour, manners and values by the colonized contains both mockery and a certain 'menace', 'so that mimicry is at once resemblance and menace" (Bhabha 86). This quote illustrates Bhabha's view that mimicry is not simply a form of flattery or homage, but rather a complex process that embodies both imitation and subversive elements, ultimately revealing the limitations and uncertainties of colonial authority. Bertram is a foreigner since he was educated in English. Bertram's remarks are rife with racist stereotypes, prejudice, and caricatures. He frequently equates the islanders with notions of sluggishness, indolence, apathy, and inactivity (Stefansson 12-13).

Even after leaving England, he keeps a sense of belonging by adhering to English customs and ideals. This aspect contributes significantly to his alienation and prevents him from readjusting to life on the island. In fact, most people he meets note how much he has changed, and especially how English he has become. His mother, for example, informed him that "England had taken your spirit"; his boyhood buddy Jackson Clayton, too, is aware of how his friend's stay in England has altered him, telling him that "you let the English fuck your minds... You're still coming like Father Daniels, with your head buried in your blasted books. He blinds you, or maybe it's

something that happens in England that turns your head so"(111); Mr Carter, the shopkeeper, gazed up at him "as if he could see some awful alteration that England had made in him" (78). The natives' reactions to Bertram's new self-emphasize his status as a foreigner and outsider.

Bertram's estrangement from his home island mirrors his identity construction since the concepts of home and identity are inextricably linked. The writers are able to express the experiences of diasporic characters and dive deep into their psyche by using the motif of return, where they frequently depict persons spanning many cultures (Oliver-Rotger 3). Bertram therefore feels like an outsider on the island, among sentiments of rejection and isolation. All of these elements make it tough to identify with the island. This has a significant emotional and psychological impact on Bertram since it tarnishes the idealized image he built while living overseas. Bertram becomes doubly alienated, locked in an in-between situation and unsure of his place. He is caught between two conflicting cultures and worlds, unable to place himself, and will never be able to truly identify with anybody. This ambiguous mix, according to Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra (2005), is a migrant who is "dispossessed, schizophrenic, exilic, and often profoundly unhappy" (384). According to Hodge and Mishra, being rejected and excluded from both cultures causes negative psychological repercussions including sadness. Bertram constantly bouncing and doubting his connection and belonging since he doesn't know where to go or have a clear path (Stefansson 10).

The final scene portrays Bertram seating in the fence representing his perplexity and doubt. When Patsy asks if he intends to return to England, Bertram admits that he has "nothing to go back to," and yet he does not "feel at home back here either" (Phillips 152). He never feels totally at home in either of these areas, leaving him estranged from both the English and Caribbean civilizations. Despite his efforts to blend in, British culture becomes an integral part of his identity. He is caught between two cultures, neither Caribbean nor English. His attempts to identify with both cultures would fail and be rejected. Bertram is an outsider and stranger since he does not belong to any culture.

The phrases "fence," "edge," and "pier" appear repeatedly throughout the story to emphasize Bertram's ambiguous, divided, and fractured personality and identity. In other words, Bertram lives a "'border li[fe]' on the margins of different nations, in-between contrary homelands" (MacLeod 217), which indicates his incapacity to reconcile competing elements of himself and leads to his isolation and alienation from both cultures. Bertram's inability to create a healthy and stable identity is hampered by his confusion and uncertainty about which nation he belongs to. Because of his hybrid identity, which includes aspects of both cultures, he now dwells in what

Bhabha refers to as the "liminal space" or "third space." More importantly, Bhabha argues that hybridity is not only a type of celebration in which the subject has access to many cultures, but it also involves alienation and identity crisis as the subject is stuck between two worlds and belongs to neither.

According to Bhabha (1994), emulating the colonizer has an influence on the colonized's identity articulation, since "the mimic is ambivalent" (Bhabha, 85). Bertram's reluctance and inability to identify with both cultures originate from his indecisive and conflicted disposition. Despite the fact that Bertram was educated in the United Kingdom, the English do not consider him to be one of them. In this vein, Bhabha (1994) adds that even when the colonizer inserts its culture, language, education, and values to improve the colonized, it retains a sense of difference: "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of difference, that is almost the same but not quite" (85). However, because to ethnic distinctions, these people are not entirely accepted and fit into the colonizer's society. As a result, Bertram's attempts to be identified as English are futile. Even though he makes an effort to integrate himself into English culture, he nevertheless experiences some sense of homecoming while living in England: "After twenty years he had already discovered that he still felt an attachment to the house, to the village, and to his mother [...] the attachment was in no way greater than that he felt towards these other facets of his life that he thought England had stripped from his consciousness" (Phillips 82). Even while he acknowledges that being in England has had a significant impact on him, his desire to return to his island is driven by prejudice, nostalgia, and a sense of belonging and identification as an islander. However, he experiences the exact reverse while on the island: he feels more English than before. He admits, for example, to Patsy that "things are still jumbled up in my mind. For instance, I had a dream about the fog the other night. Regarding the fog I first encountered in England. English fog always fascinated me because it resembled a blanket of grey and white that could be torn apart with the same ease as water yet was as thick as solidified cow's milk. You know, it used to intrigue me" (Phillips 151). The image of the 'fog' represents the English side of Bertram's identity that he cannot ignore or deny.

As a result, Bertram becomes perplexed and perplexed, unable to identify to which world he belongs and to negotiate the two aspects of his existence. Aschcroft et al. (2000, 8) underline that the location and the ego are inextricably linked, and that any detachment from the area one resides leads in an identity crisis and ambivalence. Bertram is therefore stuck between two loyalties, fluctuating between two separate worlds and cultures, each of which is a vital component in the creation of his identity. The accumulation of such circumstances has an impact on his identity and leads to an identity crisis.

Bertram feels that his homecoming would give him a sense of belonging to his island, but it only leads to disillusionment and rejection. At the end of the novel, Phillips has Bertram sitting on the fence, pondering his options: "he tried hard to imagine how he might cope, were he to make peace with his own mediocrity and settle back on the island" (157). As a result, Bertram's homecoming demythologizes and calls into question the essentialized concepts of home and identity. Bertram's in-betweenness prevents him from asserting and reaffirming his belonging and identity.

Conclusion:

The theme of returning home is prevalent in immigrant and diasporic literature. This cliché allows writers to explore themes such as home, belonging, and identity. Return tales, sometimes known as "modern odysseys," contrast with the ancient ones in that contemporary diasporic heroes return to their ancestral country as reversals of ancestral migration. This dissertation studied the many expressions of return and their influence on the articulation of identity and experience of home through an examination of chosen novels as "narratives of return." The authors whose works are examined in this research play a significant role in exposing the diverse character of the literary return from the diaspora to the original home.

This study shows that Phillips' book redefines the concepts of unchanging and stable homelands and identities. Bertram expects that returning to his birth nation will help him reclaim and reconfirm his sense of belonging and affiliation with his homeland, but he is disillusioned and frustrated. As a result, home becomes "a contradictory, contested space, a locus for misrecognition and alienation" (Brah, 188), as well as "a place of no return" (Davies, 84). Bertram's visit home subverts the mythological character of his mental country, because the version experienced is just a mirror image of his mental imagining. Bertram is presented with shifting homelands that fall short of his expectations and aspirations. His homecoming also reflects his shifting thoughts and feelings regarding his homeland. Because the concepts of home and identity are so intertwined, the protagonist has an identity crisis as he finds himself in a condition of in-betweenness, unable to discover and negotiate his belongingness. However, it is vital to note that returning is more than just sadness and irritation; it is a varied and complex process that should be examined more (Rotger, 3).

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