

# Peace Journalism in Haiti

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*Peacekeeping in Haiti has been attempted with different results and with different actors. The most recent effort was with the United Nations (UN). A contingent of military officers were left to train a national police force and to focus on the justice system and the rule of law and order. If peace is seen as an important existence for any country, then more needs to be done to leave Haiti with a lasting peace. This essay suggests that UN peacekeeping should have provided a space for institutions within Haiti to transition into keeping the peace for themselves and to offer a process that would incur a change of mindset rather than financial support. Through philosophical logic, existing constitutional guarantees, and functions of three major institutions: political, economic and communications, the argument here is that each of these institutions, with emphasis on communications, especially in peace journalism, Haiti can create its own peacekeeping policies.*

**Keywords:** Peacekeeping, Peace Journalism, Communication, Institutions

## Introduction

What do peacekeepers do? According to the United Nations (UN) website, peacekeepers provide security and support to help countries transition from conflict to peace guided by three basic principles: consent of the parties, impartiality, and non-use of force except in self-defense and defense of the mandate. The UN peacekeepers maintain peace and security but also facilitate the political process, protect civilians, assist in the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants, support the organization of elections, protect and promote human rights and assist in restoring the rule of law, according to the peacekeeping UN organization.

After 13 years of the UN in Haiti, most of the military forces were removed leaving a smaller contingent in place to train Haitians as National Police and to focus on the justice system and rule of law. The Mission des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation en Haiti (MINUJUSTH) began in Haiti in 2004 after the unrest of Jean-Bertrand Aristide's exile but was extended in October 2017 to 2019. According to MINUJUSTH's website, the mission was completed due to the force completing its goals. The website listed their accomplishments as reducing community violence with 75,000 direct beneficiaries, helping 1,587 youth who have benefited from income-generating activities (vocational training and entrepreneurship), and promoting community dialogue, capacity development and vocational training with 3,881 beneficiaries. For two years of additional effort, and 10 million people in Haiti, this seems like a drop in the bucket. The 15-year mission left more controversy than helpfulness. Reported by Aljazeera (6 Oct. 2017), UN peacekeepers may have helped train a police force, but members of the mission were also responsible for the cholera outbreak killing 9,000 Haitians (see the film "Haiti in the Time of Cholera") and 134 members were found guilty of rape and other sexual charges.

If the mission's charge was to assist the Haitian government to develop a Haitian National Police, to strengthen Haiti's rule of law institutions, including the justice and prisons, and to promote and protect human rights, according to the peacekeeping UN website, they failed. The strengthening of Haiti's rule of law institutions to include the justice and prisons is where the Haitian development toward peace should begin to happen and could make a difference. Without a strong judicial system and belief in the rule of law, there is little to be done to maintain peace

except with force and that is not peaceful. The U.S. State Department in its document, 2018 Human Rights, reported that the Haitian government rarely took steps to prosecute government and law enforcement officials accused of committing abuses and that corruption and a lack of judicial oversight severely hampered the judiciary. The judicial branch investigated several corruption cases, but none of them resulted in prosecutions in 2018. The government fired 21 assistant prosecutors because of allegations of corruption. According to the 2018 Human Rights report, “the perception of corruption remained widespread in all branches of government and at all levels.... As of year’s end, no government had ever prosecuted a high-level official for corruption.”

The rule of law should protect all three basic institutions that form a democratic society: political, economic, and communication. Democracy, according to Schiller (1981), is a form of government established when these institutions operate separately as institutions but together as enabling democracy. According to Schiller (1996), how and for what purposes information is used is essential and can define features of the social order. Information can be regarded as a social good and central element in the development and creation of a democratic society. Under this premise, information serves to facilitate democratic decision making, assists citizen participation in government, and contributes to the search for roughly egalitarian measures in the economy at large. Comprehensive and well-organized information enables decisionmakers to make rational resource allocation decisions, to prioritize social claims, and to maximize social welfare. It allows them to overcome baleful practices that harm the general welfare, like pollution, smoking, and armaments production. Such information resources allow leaders to promote the development of science and invention that are socially beneficial and to organize historical experience for meaningful contemporary reflection and use. In brief, comprehensive, well-organized public information enables decisionmakers to bring past knowledge and experience to bear on current issues and problems.

To create a more peaceful Haiti, the rule of law, a strong judiciary system and transparent communication systems could enable Haitians to govern Haitians peacefully. This essay will focus on how this process can work with emphasis on peace journalism, a concept advanced by Johan Galtung, a Norwegian sociologist. The peace journalism model is a source of practical options for journalists. Peace journalism shows backgrounds and contexts of conflicts, hears from all sides, explores hidden agendas and highlights peace ideas and initiatives from anywhere at any time, (Peace Journalism, nd.)

### **Status of Communications Institutions in Haiti**

Politically there is chaos and fear between the State and communication institutions. The UN peacekeeping would not have been brought in if the Haitian institutions could function on their own. To maintain hegemony over communications institutions, the government continues to use bribes, threats, and sanctions to control information. According to Freedom of the Press:

Threats and assaults against media personnel, including by police, are frequent enough to create a climate of fear among journalists whose work is critical of the government. As antigovernment demonstrations spiked in November and December in response to complaints of election fraud, so did attacks on the media. In the early morning of December 1, unidentified assailants sprayed the office of Radio Télé Kiskeya in Port-au-Prince with automatic gunfire, though no injuries were reported. A few days earlier, a group of armed individuals had denounced the head of Radio Télé Zénith and threatened to set fire to the premises. Both outlets reported that they and their

staff had received death threats. Witnesses say journalists were attacked during the election-related protests, with both demonstrators and police destroying or seizing their equipment. (2016, Haiti).

The Haitian State has no freedom of information legislation. Both Haitian and foreign journalists report that it is almost impossible to obtain government documents and data, especially should the journalists be critical of the regime in power. Haitian law also places defamation as both a civil and a criminal charge. The new law does not make a distinction between public and private figures. Public officials should not be able to hide behind defamation laws. The Omega World News (n.d.) uses the United States as a way to explain defamation. In *New York Times v. Sullivan*, the United States Supreme Court held that “for a public figure to prevail in a civil lawsuit for defamation, that person must prove that the newspaper published patently false information with the malicious intent to defame the person”. In other words, the newspaper must know that the information published was false and that it published the information anyway for the purpose of destroying the person’s reputation. Also, in the United States, truth is an affirmative defense to defamation.

Through the Haitian laws, journalists face imprisonment, civil damages, and litigation costs. Criminal defamation such as insults against public officials can get a journalist three years in prison, according to Freedom of the Press, 2016 – *Haiti report on press freedom in Haiti*.

This same report cites that there were bribes to journalists. President Michel Martelly’s office handed out “gifts” of cash ranging from \$870 to \$1,100 to Haitian journalists at a Christmas reception in 2014. In November 2015, Haiti’s communications minister announced that the government would help finance car loans for journalists. Lemaire, et al. (2019) in VOA News, reported that Radio Metropole reporter, Luckson Saint-Vil, said working conditions were difficult for reporters, which is the reason that reporters get involved with corruption by accepting bribes. And if the journalists do not accept bribes, there are threats. In a Freedom of the Press, 2016 – Haiti report, it was cited that in August 2017, the mayor of Les Cayes threatened the life of a journalist for negative reporting on a local musical festival. Lemaire, et al. (2019) cites evidence of this with a story about a reporter who went to a gang plagued neighborhood and never returned. Moreover, sanctions are used to control the media.

Attempts have been made to raise broadcast license fees for those stations that criticize the government. CONATEL, the National Telecommunication Council, issues licenses and has threatened to sanction stations that “broadcast false information liable to disturb order, destabilize the Republic’s institutions, and attack the integrity of many citizens” (Refworld, 2020). The National Association of Haitian Media argued that CONATEL must stay within the parameters of technology and not content. CONATEL has shut down 50 community stations due to improper licenses, (Refworld, 2020). Additionally, one of the most powerful media countries, the United States, is ignoring Haiti. Some say it is because President Jovenel Moïse has been hand-picked to follow neoliberal policies, that Haiti is open for business, (Regan, 2019).

Economically there needs to be more investment in training and building communications infrastructure, not just making money for outside investors.

In 2016, the United States exports of telephone sets to Haiti reached \$13.51 million, an increase of 37.29 percent. Total telephone set imports for the same year reached \$26.07 million with no local production, according to the US embassy website. There are two primary internet/ phone providers: Natcom and Digicel. Natcom is a joint venture between Viettel Global (Vietnam) and Télécommunications d’Haiti S.A.M (Haiti). Natcom was launched in 2011 with an investment of USD 230 million creating 2,400 direct and 25,000 indirect jobs. Digicel, owned by

Irishman Denis O'Brien, reported a revenue of \$2.5 billion in 2012, with Haiti leading the way, generating \$439 million. Digicel has its problems. Though it has been seen as a great investment to build Haitian telecommunications infrastructure, there is a pending lawsuit in 2019 (Adams, 2013). The class-action case revolves around levies that the Haitian government applies to all international phone calls and money transfers to and from the impoverished nation. A fee of \$1.50 is automatically added to every money transfer, while an extra five cents per minute is added to every international call.

Digicel controls more than 70 percent of the Haitian telecoms market, and the overwhelming majority of international calls between the nation and the US are connected via its telecoms network, therefore it is the main collector of the five cents per minute that is passed on, purportedly to fund free education. The question remains: where is the money to fund free education in Haiti?

There is a lot of money in telecommunications for Haiti. Businesses, however, need to remain nonpartisan and avoid politics. They need to be transparent in how they do business. And media owners need to pay fair wages. With journalists working multiple jobs, the risk of bias and of taking bribes increase. Communications institutions in Haiti have been based on both the authoritarian model of the press and the political function of the press. Historically, the four theories of the press were authoritarian, libertarian, social responsibility, and soviet communist, (Siebert, et al., 1994). More current scholars have updated the theories to include developmental, revolutionary, and western systems. These have all been tied to the type of government system in place within a country. However, within our global world, different press systems can be located within the same country systems. These are the political resource model (has a political agenda), commodity model (profit-making is the main function), cultural product (educational, religious or cultural in focus with sponsors and/or pro bono) and the truth-seeking model (combination of western, libertarian and social responsibility models), (Rhodes, 2001). Based on the type of government Haiti has and how the government has supported the bribes and threats of journalists and sanctions against media, it can be argued that the press model in Haiti is authoritarian. The government decides how the media will function. And even though Haitians have struggled to say they have a democracy because they have elections, without a reliable judicial system to protect institutions such as communications, the government system remains authoritarian. Under this system, the media functions as either the political resource model (media with stated political views and agendas) or as a cultural product (for example, radio stations that play all music and the Kreole newspapers focusing on health, education, and language like the early *Bon Nouvel*—Protestant church publication and *Boukan*—Catholic church publication). However, and this is a big however, the political media only survives by supporting the government rhetoric or by being as neutral as possible and not connecting the news with politics, like *Le Nouvelliste*. The Haitian economy has not been strong enough to support a commodity press or much less a truth-seeking press. The ongoing argument here is that the truth-seeking model would encourage more investment in Haiti in all sectors and would be only a mindset change to actually work. The following shows how challenges for both the economic and communication institutions within Haiti can grow.

Economics and communications are organic to society according to Schramm (1972), who suggested that neither can develop without a corresponding development in the other. The challenge for both economic and communication institutions within Haiti is how to grow within a society that has a high level of poverty, little economic infrastructure, and a hostile media environment. For the communication institutions, Haiti's constitution protects the right to express

opinions freely. Censorship of the media is prohibited except in cases of war, and journalists cannot be compelled to reveal their sources. Though there is constitutional protection, the reality is that the rule of law is not extended to include and protect media institutions or media personnel, nor is the justice system used to protect freedom of speech.

Examples are plentiful: Radio Télé Zénith reporter Wendy Phèlè was shot, the case remained stalled in the courts in 2015. There has been no prosecution of who murdered radio journalist Jean Léopold Dominique in 2000 with a key witness killed. And, according to the Freedom of the Press Haiti report (2016):

In 2015, community radio journalist Sony Estéus died of unknown causes in March, and Melodie FM journalist Marc Elie Pierre was murdered on a bus by unidentified assailants in April. Because of a lack of trust in the authorities, human rights organizations and journalists were reportedly suspicious about Estéus's death, and it remained unclear whether Pierre's murder was connected to his work. In July a police officer struck the motorcycle of Radio TV Signal cameraman Samus David François with his vehicle and subsequently beat him. A criminal complaint was filed, but the case made little progress during the year.

In addition to the inadequate protections through the judicial system, there are functions of the press which are underdeveloped in Haiti, some for clear reasons.

These functions include being a watchdog of government performance, being a reliable distributor of information so the people can make informed decisions and being an educator both to provide society with a range of information and to uncover truths over a range of social and political issues, (Rhodes, 2001, p. 12). As a watchdog over the government, if there are threats against the Haitian journalists or the media houses, self-censorship overrides telling the truth. And if information is hard to verify or interviews impossible to secure, then partial information can take the form of untruths. To solve this problem, the government can take the lead and provide statistics and other information to make the news more reliable, granting access to key decision-makers for interviews, and finding money to subsidize educational, ecological and health coverage in the media, (Rhodes, 2001, p. 18). Limitations by the government of obtaining accurate information hurts all segments of the society.

There has been progress on the economic side of communication institutions. Haiti now has an internet penetration of 11.4 percent while other Caribbean islands rank higher. Bermuda has 95.3 percent, Curacao has 94 percent, Saint Lucia has 87.5 percent, Antigua and Barbuda have 81.1 percent, Saint Kitts and Nevis have 80 percent, Aruba has 78.9 percent, and Barbados has 75 percent, according to the internet world stats website. The World Bank reported that 65 percent of the Haitian population has access to a mobile phone and thus access to the internet via their phone. The main suppliers for telecommunications services and equipment are the United States, China, and Sweden. There has been a growth of the telecommunication infrastructure which will allow for an expanded market for internet services with free-zones where investors have access to locations that offer bandwidth connectivity for IT services and call centers to include Lafito Global Business Park, the Caracol Industrial Park, and the Triangular Business Park. Each of these have their controversies, according to the US embassy website. Though more than half of the population have access to a mobile phone, subscription prices are high, up to 34 percent of gross income per capita for a broadband subscription, competition is low and there are few apps which support daily financial transactions, according to the World Bank.

### Can Communications Institutions in Haiti change?

There are many examples of how media has been successful in Haiti. Throughout history, many journalists and editors have fought for freedom of the press but a few of these are notable examples. These include *Le Nouvelliste*, *Radio Soleil*, *Daly Valet* at *Radio Vision 2000*, and social media used during the 2010 earthquake.

*Le Nouvelliste* was founded in 1898 by Guillaume Chéraquit and printed by his friend, Henri Chauvet. The paper is still owned by the Chauvet family. In an interview with Max Chauvet, he said:

“[p]oliticians feel *Le Nouvelliste* is too soft when they’re running, then when they’re in power they like it. The paper doesn’t change; the people do. This paper was to last long, the founders said. It is the first paper with the general public in mind” (Rhodes, 2001, p. 192).

*Le Nouvelliste* has found a way to suggest changes and not demand changes, thus they stay in business. *Radio Soleil* was credited with taking a stand against the Duvalier regime. They did this by ridiculing the persons in power and questioning their decisions. One example is the program “*Garanti la loi*” (Guarantee the Law) when Jean-Claude Duvalier called for a referendum for life-presidence, (Rhodes, 2001, p. 91). Though they were heavily persecuted, the station remained a creative avenue of protesting what was happening in Haiti at the time.

*Daly Valet* at *Vision 2000* used the talk show format on radio. In an interview, Valet said there were two roles for talk shows in society. First, they allowed anonymity. People could hide behind information. Second, talk show formats could encourage democratic formation for public opinion. These allowed deeper discussion of issues with an interaction between the presenter and the audience which allowed policy-makers to hear what the people were living, (Rhodes, 2001, p. 168). The 2010 earthquake in Haiti was covered by blogs and Twitter. Both played a critical role in spreading information and awareness after the earthquake. According to the Twitter-tracking service Sysomos, 2.3 million Tweets included the word “Haiti” or “Red Cross” between January 12 and 14. There were also 189,024 tweets that included “90999,” the number that could be used to text message a donation to the Red Cross. According to CNN, the use of social media helped raise \$8 million by the end of the week, according to Pew Research.

### How can Haiti create its own Peacekeeping Policies?

There are many challenges for Haitian communications institutions: having legal protection, paying fair wages to journalists to lessen bribes and to strengthen professionalism, and gaining access to information. In spite of these challenges, there are processes media personnel can take to assure better peacekeeping in Haiti. As defined earlier, the peace journalism model is a source of practical options for journalists. Peace journalism shows backgrounds and contexts of conflicts; hears from all sides; explores hidden agendas; highlights peace ideas and initiatives from anywhere at any time, (Peace Journalism, nd.) Scholars Lynch and McGoldrick (2005) expand this definition to include how editors and reporters make choices of what to report and how to report it to create opportunities for society at large to consider and value non-violent responses to conflict. These scholars offer 17 steps to guide a journalist in providing peace initiatives in reporting. In *Peace Through Media*, Rhodes (2018, pp. 161-173) offers these 17 steps and provides news examples of how journalists have covered stories using techniques offered by the scholars familiar with peace journalism. These steps are helpful, but only if the mindset of the journalists and editors actually covering the conflict is changed from one of

covering the conflict as a win/lose situation versus covering conflict as nonpartisan and finding sources to explain all facets of the conflict.

To begin this process, Irvan (2006) offers an ethical code for journalists to use when conflict areas are being covered.

a) Mission oriented principles:

- Journalists should seek peaceful solutions.
- Peace journalism is truth-oriented journalism. Journalists should expose untruths.
- Journalists should avoid becoming part of the problem – they should try to become part of the solution.

b) Principles on news gathering

- Journalists should seek “non-elite” sources.
- Journalists should give more and positive attention to peace-makers.
- Journalists should try hard to verify all claims. Skepticism is an important quality of good journalists.
- Journalists should investigate the wrongdoings of all sides of a conflict.
- Journalists should focus on the process, not only on the specific events.

c) Principles on news writing

- Journalists should highlight peace initiatives.
- Journalists should focus on visible and invisible effects of violence and conflict.
- Journalists should provide background information.
- Journalists should always exercise the ethics of accuracy, veracity, fairness, and respect for human rights.
- Journalists should avoid victimizing, demonizing, derogatory, and inflammatory language.
- Journalists should avoid relying on the simple “us versus them” dichotomy.

How can Haitian journalists apply these ethical codes? To understand, an article published in *Le Nouvelliste* (the first/top article in the newspaper that day) is used to discuss ethical principles and to suggest how the reporter could develop the article using peace journalism concepts. The reporter from the *Agence France-Presse* (AFP), wrote a story about women in the *La Saline* slum who have suffered violence and abuse. Though the story was published on July 14, 2019, the news event took place in November 2018. The reporter interviewed three *La Saline* residents and received brief quotes. Two documents were referenced but with incomplete information on how to verify the facts (UN Report and a Haitian Human Rights Organization Report), and Evelyne Trouillot, who is a well-known writer, and a member of the *Gathering for a Dignified Haiti Movement* was quoted (Baron, 2019).

To apply the ethical code to this story, the reader first asks, “what is the truth?” The Haitian paper acknowledged the AFP reporter writing the story, but not that it was published two days earlier in *The Jakarta Post*. The newspaper also used an outside reporter to cover a crime story, possibly a way to remain outside of the backlash of covering a crime story in Haiti and a way of protecting the newspaper’s local reporters. Though the story said there were no police resources available to protect the women, no spokesperson was quoted. The story news event happened in November 2018, yet the story was reported eight months later. As mentioned above, Evelyne Trouillot, a well-known Haitian writer suggested that people looked down on the people in the slums and therefore no help would be given. Using her as a source was based on the fact that she is member of the *Gathering for a Dignified Haiti Movement*. Information on this movement and the impact on helping women living in the slums was not discussed. What type of peaceful solutions could the journalist have offered the reader?

Information on how the Gathering for a Dignified Haiti Movement is working to make a difference would have been a good start. Nothing was readily available via the web on the organization, so the reporter on the ground in Haiti could have investigated or even asked Trouillot. Then, according to the article, Haiti, Event of 2018 in the Human Rights Watch Report for 2019, “Gender-based violence is a widespread problem. Haiti does not have specific legislation against domestic violence, sexual harassment, or other forms of violence targeted at women and girls. Rape was only explicitly criminalized in 2005, by ministerial decree.” Again, here is where judicial institutions are necessary to protect women in the slums. A conversation with one of the ministers of government might shed some light onto why women are not protected. In the article, the reporter inferred that gang violence was a result of a turf war to control one of the largest marketplaces in Haiti; more reporting could have been done. Easily accessible was an article in the Miami Herald:

“The culprits: bandits tied to gang conflicts over control of a sprawling outdoor market where protection rackets are the norm, but also guns-for-hire by powerful politicians and well-heeled businessmen seeking to control votes in the run-up to upcoming legislative and mayoral election” (Charles, 2019).

At least with the Miami Herald article there are more local connections to explain the gang violence. The Le Novelliste article only illustrates why journalists have problems in Haiti covering stories. Though the reporter used non-elite sources (the three people who had experienced violence in the slum, all were women who had had their husbands or sons killed, none attested to being raped), there were no verified official sources to the story. Trouillot would be considered a safe source since she was involved in a movement to help women and to establish dignity for all in Haiti. However, to be able to verify all claims eight months after the news event is nearly impossible, especially with no police records to use as facts. The story left the reader with the feeling that the situation is hopeless. No investigation into what is being done to control the gangs was even explored; therefore, not all sides of the conflict was covered. And when other reporters verified that a journalist went into a gang area to report a story, he was killed. Losing one’s life to write a story is not an option for some journalists, nor should it be. The process of the story, however, was how violence impacted the lives of women living in the slums, but the writer chose to write only about specific events of violence. Other sources and deeper understanding of the process of the story would have provided the reader options to think about and policies to promote for the state to enforce.

The peace journalism concept has been successful in many places around the world that has had major conflicts. As a result, peace journalism has been included in journalism training programs to include: The United States, Australia, The Philippines, Turkey, Egypt, and Afghanistan. Conflict sensitivity training for journalists has happened in Denmark, The United States, Colombia, The Netherlands, United Kingdom, Switzerland, France, Germany, and Canada. Major peace-oriented media projects around the world include radio for peacebuilding on the African continent, the SFCG production studio in Angola, communicating justice through Studio Ijambo in Burundi, Radio UNTAC in Cambodia, Radio MINURCA in Central African Republic, Medios par la Paz in Colombia, communicating justice through Studio Ijambo in Democratic Republic of Congo, Studio Moris Hamutuk in Indonesia/East Timor, the Common Ground News Service in Israel/Palestine, STAR radio in Liberia, regulation of commercial press in Northern Ireland, Studio Ijambo in Rwanda, radio soap opera in Casamance region of Senegal, Talking Drum Studio in Sierra Leone, Radio Voice of Hope in Sudan, radio talk shows in Uganda, TV OBN in Yugoslavia, and Eyes on Zimbabwe in Zimbabwe (Rhodes, 2018, pp. 195-201). If

peace journalism can work in these conflict prone places, it can work in Haiti; there is only the need to change how media covers conflict.

### Conclusion

This essay argues that the Haitians can be their own peacekeepers. This is based on using Schiller’s philosophy that political, economic and communication institutions should operate separately as institutions but together to enable democracy. This argument is also based on the notion that the UN peacekeeping force can strengthen the Haitian judiciary system and allow the courts to manage and protect the Haitian citizens. With a strong judiciary system, communications institutions could then operate in a more truth-telling function rather than political or cultural by applying the principles of peace journalism. Historically, through individual media houses and journalists, the “will” to have a truth-seeking media has been sought.

The task now for the communications institutions in Haiti is to provide a space where journalists can report stories fairly and in-depth. To do this though, there must be cooperation between the state and all communications institutions. Communication institutions need to change the mindset of media personnel to explore how stories can be ethically reported. Moreover, state representatives must provide access to information and protect the constitutional guarantees already in place. Defamation laws need to be updated to protect the journalists. Both political and communication institutions must work together, not go against each other. And both of these institutions need the judiciary to provide a balance and to assure the people that fairness is being sought. There can be no peace in Haiti without protection by the courts. Both the state and courts may be willing to cooperate if media personnel agree to be more truthful than sensational; these institutions must work together. The UN peacekeeping force in Haiti has provided a space where the judiciary can be strengthened. A strong, fair court system would enable Haitians to finally have a system where communication institutions could verify that Haitians can keep peace without the UN.

### ENDNOTES

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