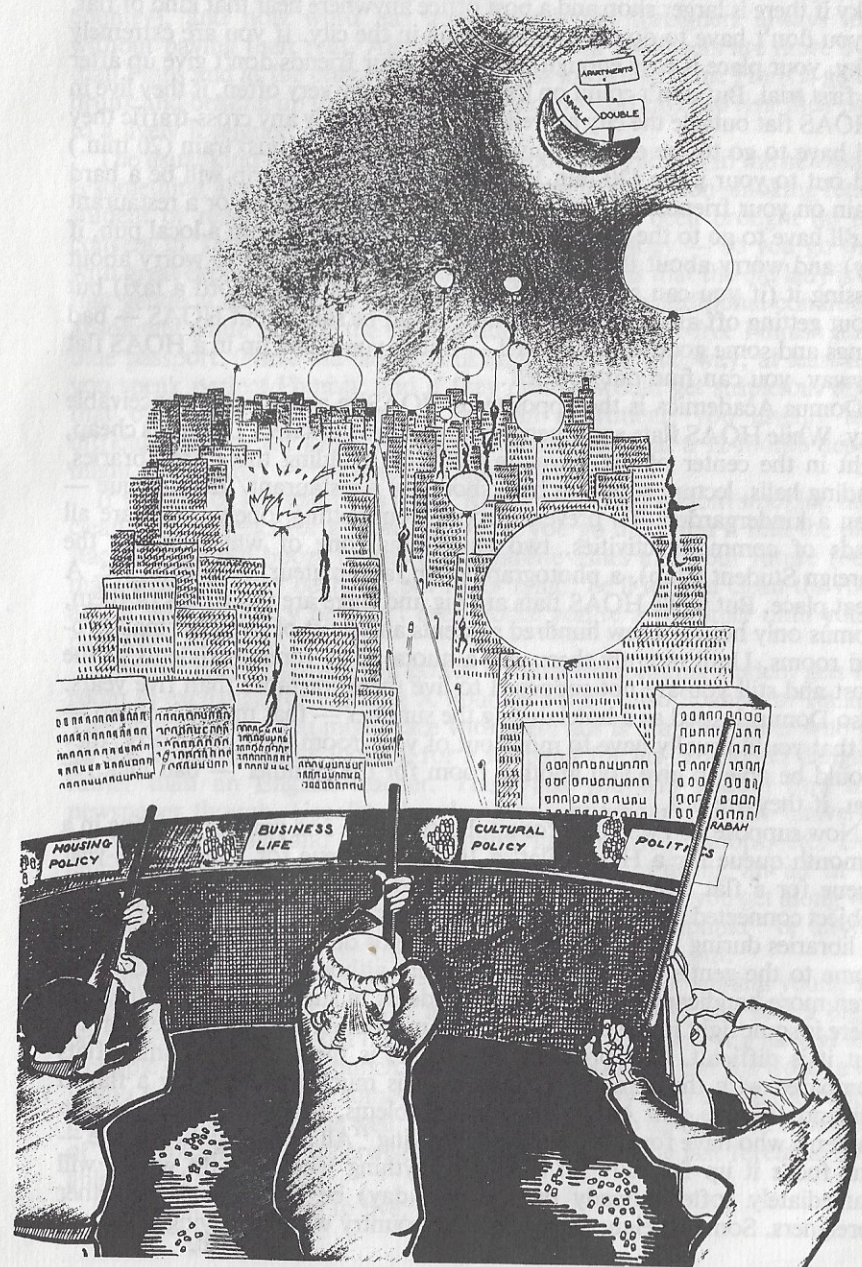


no other choice than staying in a hotel until a student place was arranged. That was achieved in an astoundingly short time — special regard was given to their plight — and took only three months. As there is one hotel in Helsinki that I know of, which costs less than FIM 100 per night, a quick calculation will show you that your purse in going to look pretty slim pretty soon.

To avoid this kind of a disaster, the wisest thing to do is to put in application for a student flat to any possible place as quickly as possible. The possible places amount to some thirty, although as a first-year foreign student, there are only a few where you have a realistic chance. Luckily, the two biggest are among those few HOAS (Helsinki area student accommodation foundation) with some 9000 flats and HYY (Helsinki University student union) which owns two smaller dormitories. You can file applications to both as late as the beginning of August, while most of the smaller places require your application already in June, some even earlier. You can actually put in your application to HOAS at any time, but chances are that you'll have to wait for months. So tackle these two places quickly — rather today than tomorrow. A difference of a few minutes when putting in the application can make a difference of weeks in getting the flat. Anyhow, you could try the smaller places as well, you might just be lucky. Many Finnish students dream about a flat from a "student nation" or some other foundation, because they are far cheaper and usually more comfortable than HOAS flats. Then we come to the problems with HOAS flats. They are better than nothing for sure, usually very new. Because they are new, they are expensive. It is almost always cheaper to rent a flat on the free market, than from HOAS but the difference is that a foreign freshman has no chance at all on the free market (try it anyhow!) while at HOAS he has. Even worse, and usually more problematic, for foreign students is the location of HOAS flats. Only a third of them lie within Helsinki city limits and even those are mostly on the borders of the city. Anyway, a 5...25 minute bus/train/tram/metro ride will take you to the center and — most important — you are entitled to the famous "blue card". The "blue card" is a monthly ticket entitling you to all city transport systems inside the city borders (blue buses, trains, trams, metro and even the Suomenlinna ferry) at just a lousy FIM 85. If your study combination is, for example, Math-Computer / Science-Physics and you have a tight time schedule you might have to use public transport 5...10 times a day. For the poor two-thirds of HOAS inhabitants living outside Helsinki, that's about FIM 4 off the budget each time. And with students, "off the budget" means usually off the food (who would save on beer now?). I have known students who could not afford more than one hot meal a week, but that was before you could get a hot soup for just FIM 3 at student cafeterias. Now many students live on that daily hot soup.

But living in a HOAS flat outside the borders of Helsinki does not only bring extra expenses — it very often brings a student back to the third



question in the beginning of this chapter. Usually you can count yourself lucky if there is larger shop and a post office anywhere near that kind of flat, so you don't have to do all your shopping in the city. If you are extremely lucky, your place is easy enough to find, so your friends don't give up after the first trial. But don't count on them dropping by very often, if they live in a HOAS flat outside the city as well. As there is hardly any cross-traffic they will have to go to the city (20 min.), wait for the next bus/train (20 min.) and out to your place (20 min.). An hour for a 10 km trip will be a hard strain on your friendship. If you want to visit a discotheque or a restaurant you'll have to go to the city (don't show your foreign face in a local pub, if any) and worry about the last train back. You don't have to worry about missing it (if you can afford a late restaurant, you can afford a taxi) but about getting off alive. Well, a lot more could be said about HOAS — bad things and some good things as well — but as you'll end up in a HOAS flat anyway, you can find out yourself.

Domus Academica is the opposite of HOAS in about every conceivable way. While HOAS flats are expensive, distant and isolated, Domus is cheap, right in the center of the town, in the same building there are libraries, reading halls, lecture rooms, a bookshop and a restaurant/ discotheque — even a kindergarden. To prevent people from getting lonely, there are all kinds of common activities, two clubrooms (one of which houses the Foreign Student Club), a photographic lab, an amateur radio club, etc. A great place. But while HOAS flats are big and there are thousands of them, Domus only houses a few hundred students and most of them in small two-bed rooms. Until recently there was a quota of 25 foreign students at the most and still you are not supposed to live there for more than five years. Also Domus is used as a hotel during the summer — that makes it cheap — so that you'll usually have to move out of your room then. No worry, they should be able to give you another room for the summer — bad luck for you, if they are not.

Now suppose you were late for application time and you are standing in a 6-month queue for a HOAS flat, a 10-month queue for Domus, a 2-year queue for a flat from a student nation and a 3.5-year queue for a study subject connected flat (not an unusual combination, this). What now? Sleep in libraries during the week and home in Lagos during the weekend? Or go home to the gentle care of Pinochet? Well, although foreign students are even more handicapped than Finnish students in such a hopeless situation, there is some light in the darkness. I have mentioned the free market before, but it is difficult. One problem, of course, is the scarcity of small flats compared with the demand. Generally, it is much easier to buy a flat in Finland than to rent one. The worst problems, though, are the foreign students who have forgotten the golden saying "All have to fight for one — one fucks it up for all!" In Finland, anything what you do wrong will immediately (often already on the next day) be held against all other foreigners. Some foreigners have left the country without paying their rent

(on the other hand not paying your rent is a reason to throw you out of the country), and now word has gone round that foreigners always leave without paying their rent. Also it is known that foreigners are more lively than Finns and as the only form of liveliness known to some Finns is getting drunk and beating up the furniture, they are not too eager to rent their place to a lively foreigner.

The usual kind of ad for a subtenant room you will find in the newspaper is something like, "Gentle old lady rents room to sober non-smoking female student of religious background". Now you have been brought up in a convent in Tanzania and came here to study theology — so you go there with great expectations. The first thing you find out, is that the old lady is not that gentle at all, the next thing that there are a few additional conditions: absolutely white skin of the same shade as hers, accent-free Finnish and a blue passport. These old-lady ads usually turn out that way, at least until you speak perfect Finnish; and if they don't I would get suspicious about that old lady. When trying to rent an apartment, you usually meet difficulties along the same lines, with the addition that a 12-month deposit might be required — for reasons explained earlier.

If you go for ads select this type "Rather sober and seldom smoking fairly clean student seeks for a room-mate". If you go there you'll find the place stacked with old booze bottles and cigarette ashes and your future room-mate wears a 7-day beard — but never mind, he'll let you clean the room and if you are lucky he won't even notice you're a foreigner until you've paid your first rent.

Another type of ad you can go for is "English speaking student gets free room in exchange for teaching X hours a week" (also Spanish or Italian). The only problem you might face with these ads is that the father who put up the ad was actually looking for a husband for his 280-pound daughter rather than an English teacher. These ads you will seldom find in a newspaper though. Usually, they hang on noticeboards in the University (mainly Porthania and main building), in Domus, in shops, etc. Even cultural centers might be worth while checking. Putting an ad in the newspaper yourself is generally just a waste of money. If you get along with the old ladies you might try an ad in "Kirkko ja Kaupunki" or another religious paper read by old ladies, who have flats to let out.

Another trick you could try — which I would try, if I was still young and unmarried — is to get together a bunch of 6...8 people and rent a bigger place, perhaps even an old house. It is not easy, and unless you have at least a couple of Finns in the bunch, it will prove impossible, but it's worth a try. If you rent an old house somewhere outside the city with a larger group, its going to be quite cheap as well. But if you try it, keep up the good reputation of your commune — otherwise, you're going to be the last foreigner to be able to live that way.

So much for "where to live."

On Finnish Censorship

ADRIAN SOTO

It took me many years to begin to understand Finnish society. The process of understanding has been long and slow, and still continues. The thing which has caught my attention more than anything else is the intellectual and ideological consensus prevailing in Finland. Such consensus is, however, only superficial. In Finland, as anywhere else in the world, people think in different ways, despite what any official rhetoric might claim.

The peculiarity of Finland is that people here do not openly express what they really think. Of course, this does not apply to everything that happens on earth. If a person feels a winter day is cold, he will probably comment on the fact to his colleagues. But concerning social, economic or political subjects, people will prefer to follow the official line and keep their personal opinions to themselves. Apparently, there is an unwritten law in this country that requires such behavior. In Finland, people engage in many different sports, one of the most common seems to be Self-Censorship.

While in most European countries decisions regarding national questions are occasions for passionate discussion, here in Finland people prefer to remain quiet and wait for an official decision and then repeat it like good schoolchildren. Traditionally, the Finns have been taught that this country's authorities can do no wrong. History has shown, however, that rulers do wrong whenever possible.

Before the last general election, a high official in one of the opposition parties promised that if his party were taken into the government coalition, unemployment would be eliminated in six months. The party was so successful at the polls that the man in question became the Minister of Labour. After a year-and-a-half in office, unemployment continues to steadily increase. Anybody with the slightest knowledge of economics, or just common sense, should realize that total elimination of unemployment is impossible. There are always thousands of people moving from one profession to another, others migrating from countryside to cities, and so on. An ideal rate is considered to be 1.5%. The minister remains comfortably secure in his office.

As I recall, in 1978 a fellow journalist told me that President Kekkonen

was no longer in any condition to take care of affairs of state. The President was becoming increasingly senile. The very same year, President Kekkonen was reelected to another six-year term, with practically unanimous support from the political establishment. Later on, I heard many journalists discussing the sad condition of the President, always in unofficial circumstances, usually after a few beers. Not a single journalist ever wrote an article telling people what he really thought about the subject. Everybody understood that that would have constituted professional suicide. This is a strange model of democracy indeed!

Many writers and journalists, professors and researchers passively accept the government's cultural policy. It is regarded as "natural" that they behave so, since they depend on some official grant, or must think of their professional future. Some peace researchers have gone to go so far as to sign the Armed Forces' petition to the Parliamentary Defence Committee for a considerable increase in the military budget. They too, as expected, must support the official line. Everybody is in the same boat. Neither in political nor cultural life is there much space for dissent. Do we live, then, in a perfect and happy society?

People in Finland are highly civilized. This, as such, is true. But the machinery of the state, and the existing mass media efficiently control information reaching the common citizen. The political culture of Finland lives under the shadow of a Sacred Cow — Foreign Policy.

For example, three years ago, one of the most remarkable political biographies ever written was published in Finnish: Isaac Deutcher's "Stalin". This classic had to wait 30 years before it was offered to the Finnish reader. There are many important historical and political works which may never be translated into Finnish for fear that their publication might damage Finland's relations with other nations, i.e. the Soviet Union. Elsewhere, academicians struggle to make every source of information accessible to all who are interested. Here the question is: Who can best serve the Established Order? Apparently, the critical faculties of the intellectual froze years ago.

Foreign policy in this country is really something! Anyone who speaks in public repeats the same message. It is a necessary formality. The political atmosphere is stifling. Each party speaks essentially the same rhetoric. People are taught that everybody — trade union officer or student leader, school master or nurse — is responsible for the country's foreign policy, and they behave accordingly. A friend of mine calls this phenomenon "little kekkonism". The monotonous rhetoric of the foreign policy has provided a useful tool for development of the present power structure. The official line has proven to be an efficient weapon for keeping people silent.

As a journalist, I have found on many occasions that my texts were not eligible for publication. Usually the censor said "It is a nice text, but we simply can't publish it." The reason? My texts sometimes failed to follow the established official foreign policy. I think that this phenomenon has

resulted in killing the critical mind of the common man and has made people, socially speaking, apathetic.

There is one place in the world where Finns speak what they really think — Sauna. When the hot steam rolls in the small room and sweat flows like a river, Finns are wonderfully honest with themselves and they become critical and polemic. When Sauna is over, however, self-censorship reclaims their personality.

This is, of course, a democratic society. But Finnish democracy is structured in such a way that all ideas and decisions come from above, very little is ever taken from the ground level.

In Austria, for instance, when the question of nuclear energy became a topic of discussion, a referendum was organized and the majority of people decided not to accept that source of energy. In Finland, we were informed by TV, radio and newspapers that this country has moved into the atomic age. Finland is a country with a large share of unexploited energy sources. Nevertheless, Finland is producing more nuclear-generated electricity per capita than any other European country, except France. And steps are being taken for building a new nuclear power station. What a different way of making politics! And what a different way of carrying it out!

I have been thinking about these things long before writing them down. It was a clear winter Sunday, when I felt the need to write them down, just not to fall into the vicious circle of self-censorship.



LOOK MOM! MY FOREIGN FRIEND!

The Finn Introuvable or How to Cope with Girls in Finland

MAARIA SEPPÄNEN

A word of warning

When reading this essay about the Finnish girls' attitudes towards foreigners, I want you to take into account that it is a personal view based on personal experience of more than a quarter of a century — but not a scientific truth, if that ever exists. Exaggeration is a way of pointing out half-hidden, half-conscious truths of this reality in which we are submerged; introspection my method of inquiry. This article is composed of gross generalizations which do not quite give merit to the happy exceptions that exist — even in Finland. Many persons, Finns and foreigners alike, will find these generalizations offensive, which I cannot help.

In this essay I am going to concentrate on the characteristics of the average Finn, on the sexual climate and the problems between the sexes, which in turn affect in a very interesting way the foreigners living in or visiting this country. As I am a girl and most foreigners in Finland are men, I talk mainly about the girls' attitudes toward foreign men. However, this story should also interest female foreigners if they want to understand the Finns, a tricky business indeed.

Inexpressiveness as an ideal

We Finns were brought up with the idea that the one who does not know should shut up. Never show your ignorance and stupidity by asking — everybody evidently knows everything already and you'll only make a fool of yourself if you open your mouth! And if you don't have anything

important and reasonable to say, best to keep quiet!

We Finns were — I say “were” because things may change as our children grow up — brought up with the idea that sex is sinful. Well, of course, a gift of God, some might say, but in reality s/he would feel guilty in making love even legally, i.e. with her/his spouse. In morality there are no *external* authorities — in other realms there are for sure — so in principle, you could screw around as much as you like. But the *internal* prison is well guarded and the walls high to climb. From the point of view of the church and the more mundane authorities it is practical: nobody commands you except yourself. This condemns the average Finn to eternal ascetism and self-destructive feelings of guilt.

We Finns are not encouraged to foster emotions. Naturally you are allowed to feel (and the Finns, too, do feel — mainly inferiority and guilt) but then it has to remain deep inside, and you may tell it only “to the woods and the blue sky” like a folk song so neatly phrases it. Never say anything to the people around you! Sometimes we are explicitly sanctioned for having shown our love, joy or hatred. A proverb tells us: “He who is happy should hide his happiness away.” That sounds reasonable, doesn't it? People may get envious about your happiness. Envy, that's the main characteristic of the Finns, like of all other servile peoples.

We Finns are not taught to express ourselves orally. Teachers have insurmountable problems in making their students speak. This is due in part to fear of exposing oneself to criticism. Thus, shyness, a strong faith in authorities, and the feeling of personal insignificance, result in emptiness in the head and an inability to speak after the long, silent years of infancy. Children should not receive too much attention, you know, as this would only spoil them and make them too self-confident. The best is to subdue *it* (i.e. the child) as thoroughly as you can, then it will eventually turn out to be a respectable, humble citizen.

In order to complete their heroic task, the parents condition their love toward the child: if you behave yourself and are a good boy/girl (good = like the parents want you to be) we'll love you; if not — go away! This makes us mere beggars of love and affection, deeply insecure persons unable to love and confront open conflicts. The results are clear: we are a humble, subservient folk, we beat those who are weaker and lack the self-security to be tender.

If you want to prosper and long live on the earth in this country you have to learn one thing: never touch anybody unless you want to beat him/her up. This is not recommended to foreigners, as a single fight may cause the foreigner to be deported.

All these complexes of inferiority and guilt, fear of expression and the never-ending pressure towards suppression of emotions make the average Finn a very peculiar bird. He (the next section explains why it is “he” now) has the tendency to hide his heart in a bottle of spirits and take it out only when drinking. And once drunk, he is the most unreliable person in the

world — either suspicious, aggressive or exuberantly friendly, or all of these at the same time. The internal authority that makes him swallow his sorrows and joys without chewing or digesting them, makes him die at the average age of 68, nine years younger than the average Finnish woman and the youngest of all males in the so-called industrialized world.

Herstory

Now, let it be said, the Finnish woman differs radically from this awfully true caricature. More often than not, she is talkative, in her way sociable and relatively free to show her emotions, cry, laugh, hug and even kiss. She shares the same feelings of guilt, complexes of inferiority and nationalism as the man; the difference is that she is freer to express herself. The social pressure is much weaker among and towards women than men: she is allowed to chatter freely as she isn't expected to say anything sensible anyway.

Emotionally, the woman is no doubt the leading person in Finland. But contrary to the popular myth, Finland is not a country where both sexes are equal. This is a highly masculine society, which does not even let the women dominate in the religious and mythical spheres, and makes her behave in a masculine way.

The question is now, why does the woman accept her subservient position in society, if she is emotionally superior to the man? First of all, it is evident that society is not a voluntary association of free individuals, some of whom can freely alter reality: there are certain socio-economic and political structures which no doubt function in the interests of the men, at least materially. Second, leaving aside the structural reality, my so far unverified, yet-to-be-disproven hypothesis is that the Finnish woman voluntarily but unconsciously submits herself to the factual power of the man *because she has a pity* for her poor, emotionally handicapped, heavy-drinking compatriot, and wants to back him up by not showing her superiority. Otherwise, the man would just collapse. Let the pot-bellied, bald baby have his illusions of male superiority! Furthermore, it would be too hard a shock for the woman to admit that she breeds, feeds, marries, and loves such a poor devil.

Foreign men offer a solution. There *are* problems between the sexes in Finland, the situation reflecting the general lack of communication and difficulties in handling conflicts that are so common in this country. An insecure man, incapable of expression and more heavily bound to the societal structures (the gaining part, anyway) is less likely to satisfy the emotional and sexual needs of the woman, who slowly but surely is on her

way to emancipation. Handsome, bright-eyed, black men seem to offer a solution.

The dialectics of objectification

There are two kinds of girls who look for contacts with foreign men. First, there are the Hunters and Gatherers. For them the foreigners are above all foreigners: exotic, dark, reputedly good in bed, possess a high prestige value when shown in the street, and are useful for language practise. The girls are looking for a short adventure or a longer affair, but may think a Finn, in the end, is the only plausible mate. For them, and there quite a lot of them, you will always be an object, a foreigner, not a human being.

So if you are an objectifier yourself, and there lots of them among foreign men, this is a paradise for you. It is relatively easy to pick up young, blond, pretty little girls who look like 20. But beware! They may be under 15, and sleeping with a girl under 15 years of age is a crime. You take the risk of eventually being expelled if the father happens to know and minds your banging his under-aged daughter.

The best places for you to meet these kind of girls are, as far as I know, Happy Days, St. Urho's Pub and The Old Baker's.

This attitude towards foreigners is very common, even among those women who do not actively seek foreign contacts. And more important, it is *the attitude* Finnish men have about foreigners. This will cause you many problems. You may be assaulted by a drunkard when walking with a Finnish girl, you may be told you have only come to steal our girls, or at least you and the girl will be objects of intense, hostile staring. This goes to the extent that foreigners married to Finnish girls tend to find the Finnish public more racist than do unmarried foreigners.

Another problem is that you will find it difficult to find persons, men and woman alike, who are interested in you as a human being, not as a representative of another race or a nationality. If you frequent discotheques and restaurants you may, after a while, arrive at the sad conclusion that the main thing Finnish women want of you is going to bed. (Eventually they will not fulfil their desires because of feelings of guilt and the sexual problems I discussed earlier.) For some people this is flattering, and they really take advantage of the situation, but some others find it highly deceptive.

The other category of girls, the Polyglots, a tiny minority, are those who look for foreigners because they are frustrated with the Finns. They have most likely been abroad and only feel free with foreigners, or when they are abroad themselves. However, they might not be ready to speak Finnish with you because they want to demonstrate their linguistic skills, and because the relationship would be too intimate and expose too much, were you to speak

Finnish. Speaking a foreign language can be a theatre; it is so easy to hide behind simple English/French/Italian/German etc. expressions.

By the way, the Finns are not used to speaking Finnish with foreigners. They take a strange pride in their language which, as they believe, is impossible for a non-native speaker to master. This is not true — and it is up to you to prove it.

This is the kind of girl you have to find, if you want to gossip about the Finns — and there are lots of foreigners who see only the negative sides of Finns. This girl does not want to have anything to do with Finns; the nationality precludes any Finnish man from having contact with her. Still she may believe all the mythical stuff about Finland's superiority that the mass media spew at us: architecture, opera, sports, liberal Scandinavian democracy, high level of education, no racism, ...ad nauseam.

So if you want to compartmentalize yourself into a foreigner's isolation in Finland, meet only foreigners and her! The place to find her is somewhere outside Finland, or once in the country, in the cafeterias of the universities.

Conclusion

In reality, there is no archtypical Finnish Woman, Finnish Man or Foreigner: there is much more variety between individuals than between stereotyped national characters. The nature and value of a person do not lie in the colour of the skin or of the passport cover.

The difficult task that lies ahead of you is to try and find friends here in Finland. The solution is neither to admire uncritically the foreign and discriminate against the Finns, nor to admire the Finnish and discriminate against the foreign — two sides of a coin called nationalism.

If the Finns ever are to change their attitude towards foreigners, foreigners also have to stop objectifying the Finns.

Last but not least: foreigners can contribute to changing the suffocating mental climate in Finland by expressing their fresh views and by teaching interaction, tenderness and self-respect — the lack of which is at the very root of racism in this country. In the long run, this is the only solution to abolish discrimination: Finland needs you more than you need Finland.

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