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CONCEPT OF THE “OTHER” IN THE WORKS OF L.N. TOLSTOY AND KAZAKH WRITERS OF THE 19th-20th CENTURIES: A POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Through a postcolonial theoretical lens, this paper investigates the literary construction of the “Other” by reading the works of Leo Tolstoy and Kazakh writers from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As such, the analysis examines how representations of cultural, ethnic and social difference reflect and interrogate imperial power, domination and resistance within the Russian Empire and the subsequent Soviet context. Through a comparative analysis of Tolstoy's philosophical and ethical constructs surrounding marginalized subjectivity and the narrative tropes of Kazakh authors, set against the backdrop of colonial subjugation, we uncover overlaps and differences in the modes through which alterity, identity and national self-awareness are articulated and experienced. The results prove that although Tolstoy tends to depict the “Other” as a moral and universal category of the human being, Kazakh writers are more open to locating alterity within the fabric of collective historical experience and cultural survival. Hence, literary discourse becomes a field of contesting imperial stereotypes, redrawing cultural frontiers and suggesting alternative humanistic definitions of coexistence and of ethical responsibility. The research falls within the domain of postcolonial literary studies by bringing to light cross-cultural dialogues and asymmetries in imperial era texts and by placing Kazakh literature within a broader comparative matrix of world literature.

KEYWORDS: Postcolonialism, The “Other”, L.N. Tolstoy, Kazakh Literature 19th-20th Centuries, Empire and Colony.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Theoretical Framework

The "Other" in literary criticism and cultural studies is a key element of postcolonial theory and is at the centre of literary criticism and/or critical field theories of postcolonialism as it underlies the analysis of power, identity and representational relations within the discipline. Literature according to scholars is therefore always the projectual history of interpellating relationships between dominant and subordinate cultures, constructing and challenging the hierarchies of meaning, value and belonging and their relations between (Said, 1978; Ashcroft et al., 2002). The USSR displayed apparent self-interest and otherness and a dynamic nexus between imperialist ideology and the cultural histories of colonized and peripheral peoples.

1.2. Russian Imperial Context

Russian literature then served as a means to relay imperial narratives and in return non-Russian cultures developed new discursive strategies to define their own identity and subvert imposed categories (Leighton, 1994; Moore, 2001). And the writings of Leo Tolstoy stand most notably in this regard. Tolstoy's preoccupations with moral philosophy and ethical universality engendered for him a profound concern with the dignity of the human race as individuals, cultural difference and social marginality. His portrayals of non-Russian peoples, peasants, soldiers and the downtrodden often question the moral propriety of violence, subjugation, and coercive power. In particular, Tolstoy's later publications take a critical stance towards imperial authority and militarism characterizing them as empathetic agents with an ethical obligation to the "Other" (Emerson 2008). Tolstoy's works fall within the dominant imperialist cultural worldview and postcolonial analyses have shown how his work exposes the frameworks of empire and at times legitimizes imperial expansion by valorizing the imperial plough, according to a recent article in *Slavic Review* (Thompson, 2000).

1.3. Kazakh Literary Context

Kazakh writers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by contrast, approached the topic of originality from a different historical and cultural perspective. Writing in the context of Russian colonial expansion and Soviet post-intervention ideological restriction, they grappled with the struggle to maintain cultural identity while navigating foreign systems of knowledge and

representation. Writers like Abai Kunanbayev, Shokan Ualikhanov, Ibray Altynsarin and later Mukhtar Auezov responded with literary responses that combined ethical reflection, cultural criticism and national self-determination. Their works reflect the tensions of tradition and modernity, autonomy and domination, internal self-understanding and external categorization (Kudaibergenova, 2017; Dave, 2007). Unlike imperial narratives that make the colonized subject an object in the act of describing it, in the literature of the Kazakh language, identity is often constructed through internal cultural logic, historical memory and collective experience, in the struggle against colonial stereotypes and thus asserting the agency of narrative. We analyze Tolstoy and writers from Kazakhstan to identify similarities and differences in the presentation of the "Other." Tolstoy's search for universal moral norms frequently leads to a universalistic humanistic understanding of change, stressing common ethical values between people. Whereas Kazakh writers emphasise specific historical experience, shared trauma and cultural existence. To these writers, literature operates not only as a reflection on ethics but also acts as resistance, preservation and self-affirmation. Nevertheless, each literary tradition raises issues of cohabitation, moral accountability and the boundaries of dominance, which re-ignite the dialogic nature of intercultural exchanges in imperial circumstances. From a postcolonial perspective, a comparison of these texts offers a more subtle view of how power, identity and representation co-occurred in the Russian-Kazakh historical moment (Spivak 1999). This practice challenges literary hierarchies that favor metropolitan literatures and marginalize colonial or marginalized texts (Spivak 1988). By linking Kazakh literature to this Russian literary corpus, this research builds a fuller picture of literary history and illuminates modes of cultural hybridity and mutual determination that define Eurasian identities (Bhabha 1994). L.N. Tolstoy and Kazakh writers throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries also go beyond historical poetics. It grapples with perennial issues of cultural diversity, identity formation and postcolonial memory as well as with current discussions of representation and marginalized voices in global literary dialogue. From this comparative point of view, literature is therefore an important site for contesting imperial stories, developing alternative concepts of humanity and reshaping common cultural connections. The academic pursuit of the "Other" in Russian and Kazakh literature is at a crossroads between postcolonial theory, Russian imperial studies and

Central Asian literary criticism. Some of the theoretical frameworks of this discourse consist of Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, for whom the conceptual foundations of Orientalism, hybridity and subalternity lie and have been core elements of literature studies conducted in imperialist contexts (Said, 1978; Bhabha, 1994; Spivak, 1988). While those theories emerged from Western European colonialism, their adaptations have taken into account the unique historical circumstances of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, paving the way for postcolonial Slavic and Eurasian studies. Russian imperial discourse, scholars claim, created a privileged spatial structure of the metropolitan centre and peripheral areas that was enacted against a relatively untransformed political and cultural background. This specificity makes it challenging to apply classical postcolonial theories directly (Moore, 2001).

Studies dealing with Russian imperial depictions of the Caucasus and Central Asia are essential for understanding this context. Narratives about the Caucasus, which deal with the traumas of danger, freedom, and moral testing, have also turned it into a symbolic frontier, a topic that has received extensive scholarly attention in both Russian literature and imperial studies (Layton, 1994).

Leo Tolstoy also made a significant contribution to this field. Through his Caucasian texts that marry lived experience with ethnographic observation and ethical investigation, he constructs two images of non-Russian peoples as morally virtuous but culturally exotic. Some scholars argue that Tolstoy critiques imperial violence whilst also reinforcing an imperialist attitude, most notably through the narrator's quasi-ethnographic stance (Emerson, 2008; Thompson, 2000). Such critiques as in Hadji Murat, tend toward self-reflexivity, revealing the moral contradictions of conquest while simultaneously preserving culturally marked representations of the "Other" (Tolstoy, 2003).

Scholarship also examines Central Asian authors and how they articulate their identities amid periods of colonial and Soviet rule. Abai Kunanbayev and Mukhtar Auezov are pivotal in shaping contemporary Kazakh literary awareness. Studies on Abai highlight his ability to blend Kazakh oral traditions with elements of Russian realism, thereby establishing a discerning literary voice that is attuned to both internal societal dynamics and external imperial influences (Dave, 2007). Auezov's *The Way of Abai* (The Path of Abai) is examined as a hybrid text that adheres to Soviet literary conventions while

developing a national historical narrative grounded in the experience of the Kazakhs. Its dual role as a Soviet cultural project and a foundational text of Kazakh national identity has raised tensions among scholars (Kudaibergenova, 2017). Some of this recently introduced work (Young, 2001) on Central Asian studies is increasingly employing postcolonial frameworks to reconceptualize Kazakh literature and culture, addressing hybridity, the coloniality of power, language, memory, and historical agency as contested in relation to the USSR and the post-Soviet world. Recent studies in postcolonial Slavic and Eurasian scholarship have further emphasized the asymmetrical yet dialogic nature of imperial cultural production, highlighting the necessity of examining center-periphery relations as mutually constitutive rather than unidirectional.

Although postcolonial viewpoints arrived comparatively late in the region, scholars say Kazakh writers had been critiquing imperial hierarchies for some time and have used literature as a tool for cultural preservation and self-assertion. Current methodological controversies concern whether postcolonial theory is relevant to the Russian-Kazakh context. Postcolonial discourse studies "one scholar's approach to the term" does not clearly agree with the use of Orientalism and Shafranskaya argues the term is not directly applicable to Russian literature, but "...when analyzed differently, some scholars argue that its application reveals power hierarchies. Representational hierarchies of the imperial centre and the steppe or the Caucasus (Moore, 2001). Yet such advances also represent relatively little in reference to direct comparative studies, which would facilitate a conversation along the line between Tolstoy's depictions of the "Other" and Kazakh literary formations of selfhood. However, despite the growing body of scholarship on Russian imperial literature and on Kazakh national writing, there remains a lack of sustained comparative analysis that examines how alterity is constructed simultaneously from imperial and colonized perspectives within the same historical field. The relational production of the "Other" across both literary traditions has not been sufficiently theorized.

Most existing literature situates Tolstoy within the Russian imperial canon or reads Kazakh literature as part of national revival or Soviet modernization, rather than as postcolonial in a coherent sense. Consequently, the exchange and dynamics of alterity - how the "Other" is produced on both sides in the imperial relationship - have not been fully conceptualized. Despite important contributions in

Russian imperial studies and Kazakh literary scholarship, sustained comparative analyses that examine the relational construction of alterity from both imperial and colonized perspectives remain limited. The dialogic production of the “Other” within a shared imperial space has not yet been systematically theorized. To help bridge this gap, this study conducts a comparative postcolonial reading of Tolstoy and Kazakh fiction works from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to reveal how literary discourse constructs, competes with and presupposes alterity in the Russian–Kazakh imperial world.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The methodology of this study is based on comparative literary analysis informed by postcolonial theory. The research integrates close reading of primary literary texts with conceptual frameworks developed in postcolonial studies, particularly Edward Said’s theory of Orientalism, Homi K. Bhabha’s concept of hybridity and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s notion of the subaltern (Said, 1978; Bhabha, 1994; Spivak, 1988). These theoretical tools are employed to examine how literary discourse constructs the figure of the “Other” through narrative voice, character representation, symbolic structures and ideological positioning. The approach allows for identifying both explicit and implicit mechanisms through which cultural difference, power relations and identity hierarchies are articulated in texts produced within imperial and colonial contexts.

2.1. Analytical Approach

The analysis focuses on the socio-historical contexts of both the Russian Empire and the Soviet era, considering literary works as culturally situated artifacts instead of independent artistic entities. By situating textual interpretations within broader political, social and cultural processes, the study follows a contextualized model of literary analysis commonly used in postcolonial and imperial studies (Ashcroft *et al.*, 2002; Moore, 2001). In addition, elements of intercultural comparison are employed to trace convergences and divergences between Russian and Kazakh literary traditions, especially in their narrative strategies for representing alterity, moral authority and collective self-understanding.

2.2 Research Context

The research context is defined by the historical processes of Russian imperial expansion into the Kazakh steppe in the nineteenth century and the

subsequent incorporation of Kazakhstan into the Soviet state in the twentieth century. These processes profoundly transformed social organization, cultural institutions and systems of knowledge, producing asymmetric power relations between the Russian metropolitan center and the Kazakh periphery (Dave, 2007). Russian literature of the imperial period, including the works of Leo Tolstoy, reflects and negotiates the imperial gaze toward non-Russian people, often combining ethical critique with inherited representational hierarchies. At the same time, Kazakh writers articulated literary responses from the position of a colonized culture, seeking to preserve language, cultural memory and moral agency under conditions of political domination. This shared but unequal imperial space provides the analytical framework within which representations of the “Other” are examined, contested and reinterpreted.

2.3. Corpus

The study is limited to a selective corpus of literary works to ensure analytical depth and coherence. The main Russian texts include Tolstoy’s Caucasian prose and other works starring non-Russian characters and Imperial encounters and Cossacks (Tolstoy, 1998) and Hadji Murat (Tolstoy, 2003). For example, the Kazakh Corps draws attention to such authors as Abai Kunanbayev and Mukhtar Auezov in the XIX and early XX centuries, who discussed who the Kazakh people are, the Empire in which they live, and how their culture is changing. The Kazakh corpus does not try to cover all of Kazakh literature from that time. It looks at a group of texts that show how different cultures interact with each other. This is based on the work of people like Layton and Kudaibergenova. By focusing on these texts, the Kazakh corpus can examine more closely what the authors are saying. It can also think about what the texts mean theoretically, examining themes and history. The Kazakh corpus examines texts in detail, helping us understand Kazakh authors and their ideas about identity, empire and cultural change.

2.4. Data Collection

Khalid believes that data collection is carried out through the analysis of primary and secondary texts. Primary sources include published works by Kazakh and Tolstoy authors using authoritative publications or reliable academic translations. Additional materials include peer-reviewed articles, scientific books and basic research on postcolonial theory, Russian Imperial literature and the history of Central

Asian Literature. The data were studied through careful reading and thematic comparisons, with the study of repetitive motives, narrative structures and ideological assumptions. In order to ensure

methodological openness, repeatability and compliance with the quality standards of literary criticism, archival materials and oral history were excluded.

Table 1: Data Sources and Inclusion Criteria Used in the Study.

Type of data	Content / examples	Source / access	Role in the study	Inclusion criteria
Primary literary texts	Works by L. N. Tolstoy (Caucasian prose, texts with non-Russian characters)	Critical and academic editions; reliable online libraries	Provide core material for analyzing representations of the "Other" from the imperial center	19th-early 20th c.; thematically linked to empire, otherness, cultural encounter
Primary Kazakh texts	Works by Abai, Auezov and other key Kazakh writers of the 19th-20th centuries	Published Kazakh and Russian editions; scholarly translations into Russian/English	Provide colonized/peripheral perspective on self-other relations and national identity	19th-20th c.; focus on Kazakh society, identity, and contact with Russian empire/Soviet power
Theoretical literature	Works on postcolonial theory (Said, Bhabha, Spivak), empire studies, identity	Academic monographs, peer-reviewed articles	Supply conceptual tools: Orientalism, hybridity, subalternity, colonial discourse	Relevance to colonial/imperial contexts and literary analysis
Historical studies	Research on Russian imperial expansion, Kazakh steppe, Soviet national policy	Historical monographs, archival-based studies, reference works	Provide socio-political background for contextualizing literary texts	Empirically grounded studies on 19th-20th c. Russian-Kazakh relations

Table 1 describes the types of data used in the study and their sources, functions as well as the criteria for selecting samples in the research project. The main database includes famous publications and literary works by leading Kazakh authors of the XIX-XX centuries, translated from scholarly sources (Olcott, 1995) These texts constitute the main empirical basis for the research, allowing a comparative analysis of how the figure of the "other" is constructed through the prisms of Imperial and colonized thought. Tolstoy's prose reveals the ethical, ethnographic and ideological background of the Russian Imperial discourse, while his works in Kazakh literature reflect the colonial domination of that time and the development of cultural adaptation and integrity (Leighton, 1994; Kudaibergenova, 2017).

The information for the second study included significant postcolonial theoretical publications, historical studies on Russian Imperial and Soviet policy in Central Asia, knowledge of Tolstoy and Kazakh literature. Such resources provide the theoretical, historical and interpretive foundations necessary for the artistic processing of images in the field of literary representation within broader power relations and cultural dynamics (said, 1978; Bhabha, 1994; Moore, 2001). By focusing on texts and studies that explore these issues, the analysis maintains analytical continuity and coherence. It also shows the possibility of using a comparative method based on theory.

2.5. Data Analysis

Data analysis is conducted through qualitative, interpretive and comparative literary analysis. It first performs close readings of each selected work by Tolstoy and the chosen Kazakh authors to identify narrative strategies, character representations, symbolic motifs and discursive patterns that contribute to the construction of the "Other" (Fierman, 2000). A marked degree of attention to narrative voice, descriptive language, metaphorical structures and plot organization occurs, with these qualities typically encoding hierarchies of center and periphery, self and other, colonizer and colonized (Emerson, 2008). This phase of analysis identifies the repeated modes with which cultural difference and moral evaluation are articulated across texts.

The second stage seeks a comparative account of the textual characteristics found in the Russian and Kazakh works. However, this comparison reveals convergences and divergences in the expression of alterity. Reading through comparisons allows the differences in narrative point of view, ethical position and cultural symbolism to be detected. These contrasts correspond to uneven historical positions within the imperial system.

In addition, this approach allows you to follow typical thematic patterns, including moral responsibility, cultural coexistence and negotiations on coexistence. Through such a method, it is possible to achieve methodological openness, repeatability, compliance with the quality standards of literary criticism. The analysis uses postcolonial theories, in particular the ideas of Orientalism, hybridity and subalternity, as a basis for explaining the

ideological significance of literary texts (Said, 1978; Bhabha, 1994; Spivak, 1988). In addition, he notes that historical and critical sources intertwine literary strategies in specific periods of Russian imperial expansion and Soviet cultural policy. This contextualization connects textual trends with broader structures of power, domination and resistance that allows the study to interpret literary

discourse both as a product and as a place of cultural negotiation in a historical context. Through close reading, thematic comparison and theoretically justified analysis, the work is based on the idea of the image of the "other" in the creation of its own, cultural memory and ethical discourse in the Russian and Kazakh literary traditions (Sarsembayev, 2004).

Table 2: Stages Of Analysis, Methods and Expected Outcomes.

Stage of analysis	Description	Methods / techniques	Objects of analysis	Expected outcome
Close reading of texts	Detailed examination of Tolstoy's and Kazakh writers' works to identify representations of the "Other."	Qualitative close reading, textual analysis	Key episodes, character images, dialogues, narrative voice	Detection of core motifs and images related to alterity and cultural difference
Thematic and ideological coding	Grouping identified elements into thematic categories linked to empire, identity, and otherness.	Thematic coding, discourse analysis	Motifs of empire, colonizer/colonized relations, self/other	Structured set of themes for further comparison
Comparative intercultural analysis	Juxtaposition of Russian and Kazakh texts to trace similarities and differences.	Comparative literary analysis	Parallel plots, character types, narrative strategies	Identification of convergences and divergences in constructing the "Other"
Application of postcolonial concepts	Interpretation of themes through postcolonial theory.	Conceptual analysis (Orientalism, hybridity, subaltern)	Scenes of cultural encounter, images of center and periphery	Postcolonial reading of representations of power and resistance
Historical contextualization	Correlating textual findings with historical conditions of empire and Soviet rule.	Contextual and historical analysis	References to politics, social change, colonial institutions	Linking literary representations to concrete power relations
Synthesis and interpretation	Integrating all results into a coherent argument about the "Other" in both traditions.	Integrative interpretation, argument building	All preceding analytical results	Formulation of general conclusions about identity, alterity, and cultural memory

Table 2 outlines the stages, methods and objectives of the data analysis process employed in this study and clarifies the internal logic of the analytical procedure. It demonstrates how the research progresses from close reading of primary literary texts to thematic coding, comparative interpretation and theoretically informed evaluation. Each analytical stage is linked to specific methods such as textual and discourse analysis, comparative reading, and postcolonial conceptual interpretation and to clearly defined objects of analysis, including character construction, narrative perspective and representations of cultural difference (Dave, 2007). Throughout the process, the historical context is taken into account to ensure that literary discoveries are understood in the broader context of Russian imperial expansion and Soviet cultural policy and to create a coherent interpretive argument about the creation, discussion and challenge of the "Other" in the Russian and Kazakh literary traditions. At the final stage of the analysis, the ideas obtained in all

previous stages are summarized.

3. RESULTS

The results of the analysis indicate that representations of the "Other" in the works of Leo Tolstoy and Kazakh writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are shaped by asymmetrical yet interconnected positions within the imperial system. Tolstoy, writing from the perspective of the Russian cultural center, constructs non-Russian characters as ethically charged figures through whom Russian society, state violence and moral hypocrisy are interrogated (Bowie, 2014). Kazakh authors, by contrast, write from within the colonized space and use literature as a means of articulating a collective "Self" in response to external definitions and imperial pressure. Taken together, these two traditions reveal a complex field of dialogue and tension in which alterity is not a fixed category but a shifting position negotiated through narrative form, language and ideology.

One of the features of Tolstoy's analysis of Caucasian prose is his observation of a deep ambiguity in the description of colonized peoples. Tolstoy, on the one hand, idealizes Caucasian figures as morally sincere, courageous, and closer to an unbreakable natural order than representatives of the Imperial Center. This idealization is observed as a criticism of Russian militarism, the decline of the aristocracy and state violence, and reflects the failures of the colonizer, turning the colonized "other" into a moral mirror. In contrast, Tolstoy's narrative voice-over often does so for the benefit of the Russian audience while maintaining a personal quasi-ethnographic vision that sorts and interprets the actions, appearance and character of non-Russian characters. This hybridization of empathy and objectivity speaks to the critical/humanistic author, who is also involved, at least in Imperial epistemology. Such a line of reasoning has been described by academic critics as a moral and/or humanistic Orientalism in which the "Other" retains its dignity, but is nevertheless transmitted through representative categories established in the Imperial Center (Layton, 1994; Emerson, 2008). The narrative perspective is a crucial component of maintaining representative asymmetry in Tolstoy's work. These narrators are usually Russian officers, travelers or observers whose moral dilemmas shape the story. Non-Russian characters rarely find a clear narrative voice; their stories and experiences are mediated by Russian reasoning and interpretations. (Ram, 2003) Even in Hadji Murat, where the psychological depth and tragic dignity of the main character can be traced, the narrative framework becomes external, further strengthening the order of the Observer and the Observed. Even so, the colonized "other" will be necessary for Russian ethical self-expression without claiming narrative sovereignty (Thompson, 2000). Reading Kazakh literature reveals an adjunctive but clearly representative logic. The actual problem of storytelling in the works of Abai Kunanbaev and Mukhtar Auezov is not to find an external "Other" but to form and defend "oneself" in the colonial and cultural environment. Here, the change is demonstrated by Russian officials, soldiers and representatives of the authorities as well as internal agents of alienation – allied elites demanding non-

critical modernization or impersonal agents of "progress" threatening the destruction of cultural continuity. In other words, the self-other border is not just a matter of ethnic difference; he also reveals the internal contradictions of Kazakh society regarding language, education, religious ideology and social class (Dave, 2007). The main concept of the analysis is the centrality of hybridization to Kazakhstan's identity. The lyrical image of Abai is a compositional image of the Kazakh oral tradition and Russian intellectual culture. If the subjects were previously passive absorbers, they would adopt and then select Imperial models, using their Russian and European means to test not only colonial domination but also internal stagnation. Thus, Auezov dwells on this model in detail, turning Abai into a national-symbolic person as an intermediary between tradition and modernity, the steppe and the city, the oral epic and the written novel. In this concept (Kudaibergenova, 2017), the "other" is not only a colonizing, but also an imaginary, future existence of a country that modernity must face. A comparative study shows the similarities and differences between Tolstoy and Kazakh authors. One of the main common aspects of their rapprochement is the general criticism of the violence, injustice and moral decline caused by the Empire and forced modernity.

The "second" in these two traditions serves as an ethical challenge and an invitation to reflect on responsibility, morality, life and death. At the same time, the discrepancies are clearly visible in the structure. For Tolstoy, the "Other" remains external and important in Russian moral self-examination (Young, 2001). The main task of Kazakh writers is an internal, collective self-formulation that can resist both external identification with a particular cultural category and its erasure. These discrepancies lead to two poles of narrative emphasis: Tolstoy's stories foreground personal moral drama, while Kazakh stories foreground personal experience within collective and historical narratives. Thus, Tolstoy's anti-colonial impulses rely on universal ethical appeals and Kazakh literature is at the forefront of cultural existence, linguistic persistence, and historical memory. The differences in language and form are further clarified when discussing these two (Beissinger, 1999).

Table 3: Comparative Representations of the "Other" In Tolstoy and Kazakh Writers.

Aspect / focus	Tolstoy (imperial center)	Kazakh writers (colonized periphery)	Comparative result / interpretation
Position within empire	Writes from Russian cultural and political center	Write from colonized Kazakh society under Russian and later Soviet rule	Asymmetrical positions shape different angles on identity and otherness

Image of the "Other"	Non-Russian peoples shown as morally significant, often idealized yet objectified	"Other" includes Russian colonizer and internally alien figures within Kazakh society	The "Other" in Tolstoy is external; in Kazakh texts it is both external and internal
Narrative perspective	Russian narrators (officers, observers); non-Russian voices mediated through them	Kazakh voices narrate their own experience; Russians appear from the outside	Narrative control remains with the center in Tolstoy, but shifts to the colonized subject in Kazakh literature
Ambivalence of representation	Combination of critique of empire and ethnographic/Orientalist gaze	Combination of criticism of colonial power and self-critique of Kazakh society	Both traditions are ambivalent, but for different reasons and with different stakes
Function of the "Other"	Serves as a moral mirror for Russian self-reflection	Serves as contrast point for constructing a collective Kazakh "Self"	In Tolstoy, the Other tests individual conscience; in Kazakh texts, it supports national self-definition
Ethics and violence	Exposes violence and hypocrisy of Russian conquest	Shows destruction of nomadic life, social disintegration, cultural loss	Shared ethical critique of imperial violence, but articulated from different sides of the power relation
Hybridity and identity	Limited personal hybridity; focus on Russian moral crisis	Strong theme of hybridity (Abai, Auezov): synthesis of Kazakh and Russian/European culture	Hybridity becomes a key strategy for colonized writers to modernize without losing identity
Language and audience	Writes in Russian for a primarily Russian readership	Writes in Kazakh (and sometimes Russian) for a community under linguistic hierarchy	The imperial language is a stable medium for Tolstoy; for Kazakh authors language choice is itself politically charged
Literary form and tradition	Works within Russian realism, innovating from inside the canon	Adopts and transforms realist/novelistic forms to express Kazakh national experience	Center reproduces and reforms its own canon; periphery retools it for decolonizing and nation-building purposes
Scale of narrative	Focus on individual moral drama set against colonial background	Integrates personal stories into broader national-historical narratives	Tolstoy's texts universalize ethical questions; Kazakh texts tie ethics to collective history and memory
Overall representation of alterity	"Ethical Orientalism": dignified yet still othered and described from above	Self-assertive and reflective: the Self defines itself in relation to multiple "Others"	The concept of the "Other" is fluid and relational; it reveals both domination and ongoing negotiation of identities

Table 3 presents key findings regarding the portrayal of the "Other" by L. N. Tolstoy and nineteenth- and twentieth-century Kazakh writers within the imperial context. Tolstoy, positioned at the cultural center, employs non-Russian characters to critique Russian morals and addresses imperial violence through an ethnographic and occasionally Orientalizing perspective. In contrast, writers of Kazakhs originating in the periphery of colonization emphasize the construction of a collective Kazakh

"Self" by which the "Other" consists of both internal outsiders and Russian colonists (Brower, 2003). The table shows variation in language, style and narrative perspective – indicating that hybridity is essential to Kazakh literature as an operation for survival and modernization as it were. The study concludes on a relatively clear note, however, that alterity is not simply represented in binary terms in these writings. Instead, it is negotiated and dynamic and both changing identities and systems of dominance.

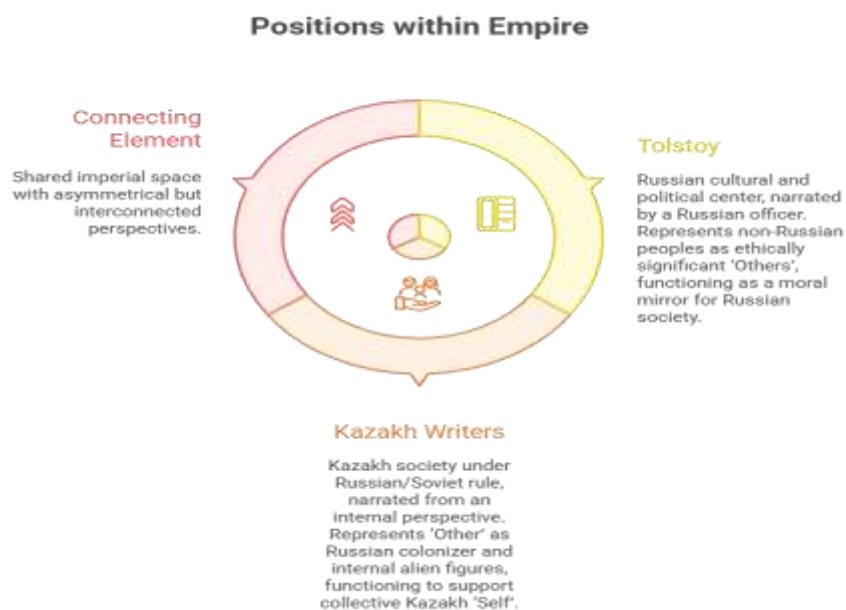


Figure 1: Positions Within Empire and Construction of the "Other."

Figure 1, entitled "Positions within the Empire," depicts the unequal yet mutually connected roles occupied by Tolstoy and Kazakh writers within the imperial structure. On the right side, Tolstoy is situated within the Russian cultural and political milieu. His narratives are typically framed through the voice of a Russian officer, while non-Russian characters are presented as morally significant "others" who act as an ethical point of reference for Russian society (Zenkovsky, 1974). The lower section of the figure places Kazakh writers within the colonized margins, reflecting Kazakh society under Russian and Soviet domination from an internal

social perspective. In their literary works, the figure of the "other" emerges in two forms: as Russian colonial agents and as internal outsiders who play a role in forming a shared Kazakh collective identity. The left segment, identified as the "connecting element," underscores that both Tolstoy and Kazakh authors function within the same imperial space. Despite the clear imbalance in their positions, their literary perspectives remain interconnected. Taken together, these three sections illustrate how hierarchical placement within the Empire shapes literary narratives and influences the construction of the "Other."

Functions of the "Other" in Tolstoy and Kazakh Literature

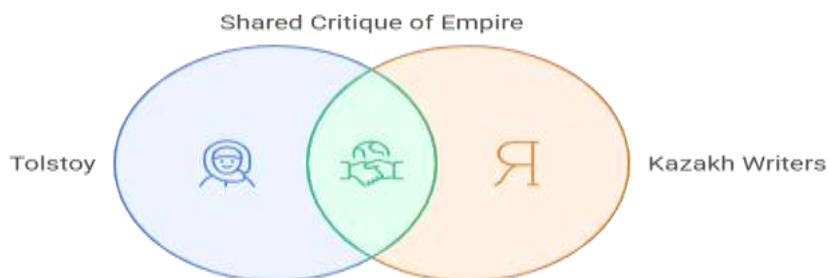


Figure 2: Functions of the "Other" In Tolstoy and Kazakh Literature.

Figure 2 "Functions of the "Other" in Tolstoy and Kazakh Literature," presents a Venn diagram comparing the role of the "Other" in both traditions.

In Tolstoy's works, non-Russian characters function mainly as an external moral mirror through which imperial authority is ethically questioned (Fierman,

1991). In Kazakh literature, the “Other” appears as both the Russian colonizer and internal outsiders, against whom a collective Kazakh identity is formed. The overlapping section highlights a shared critique

of empire, showing that despite their unequal positions, both traditions use the figure of the “Other” to expose imperial violence and moral contradictions.

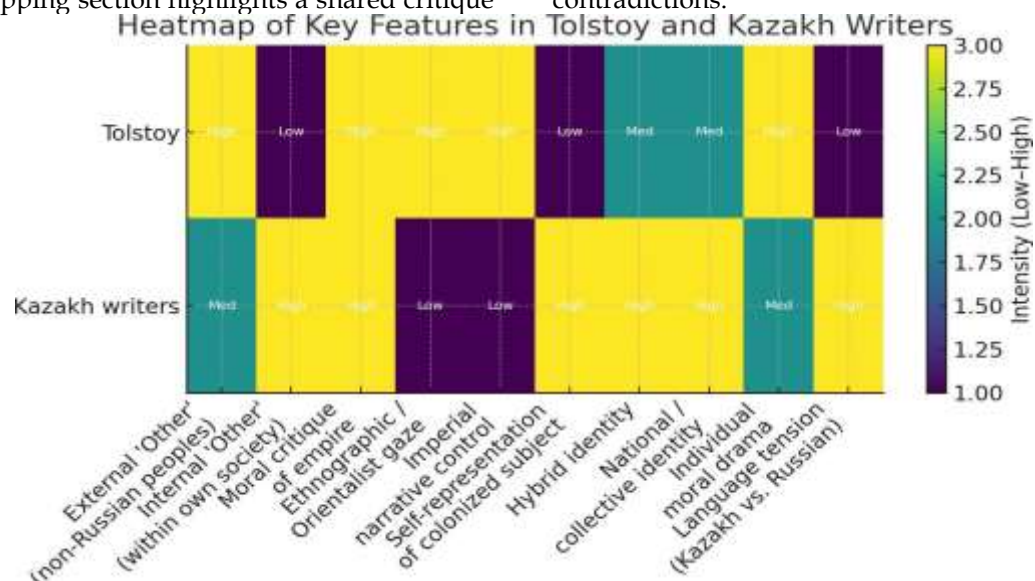


Figure 3: Heatmap of Key Features in Tolstoy and Kazakh Writers.

Figure 3 examines the strength of key themes and structures in the works of Tolstoy and Kazakh writers. The rows represent the two kinds of literature, and the columns express how they represent individuals as different, who tells the story, the blending of styles, and how they critique empires. The darker that box, the more of that thing that's there in the writing. The colored boxes mean that thing is there but not as much. The lighter boxes mean the thing is not really there at all, in Tolstoy and Kazakh writers. This heatmap shows asymmetric but complementary patterns. Tolstoy's imperial centre position represents external othering, ethnographic portrayal, imperial narrative control and personal moral conflict. By contrast, Kazakh writers emphasize internal othering, self-representation, identity hybridity, national focus and linguistic tension - all evidence of their peripheral status. These two traditions offer strong moral critiques of empire, though with different positions they hold a shared ethical stance (Kemper, 2010).

3.1. Demographic Analysis

The demographic context of this study is defined by the multiethnic and multilingual structure of the Russian Empire and later the Soviet Union, in which Russians formed the dominant political and cultural group while Kazakhs occupied a subordinate colonial position. In the 19th century, the Kazakh steppe underwent gradual sedentarization, the growth of Russian military and administrative

settlements and the expansion of trade routes, producing a mixed population of nomadic and semi-nomadic Kazakhs, Russian peasants, Cossacks and other migrant groups (Edgar, 2004). By the early 20th century, processes of urbanization and the spread of imperial and Soviet schooling further intensified contact between Russian and Kazakh speaking communities, while also reinforcing social and linguistic hierarchies. These demographic changes created the lived background for the literary representations examined in this research: Tolstoy writes from the perspective of a numerically and institutionally dominant group, whereas Kazakh authors reflect the experience of a numerically significant but politically marginalized indigenous population whose identity is reshaped under conditions of migration, settlement and cultural assimilation.

3.2. Measurement Model

The measurement model in this study is qualitative and concept-based rather than statistical. The central construct is the representation of the “Other,” which is operationalized through several analytical dimensions: (1) position within empire (center vs periphery), (2) type of “Other” (external vs internal), (3) narrative control and voice, (4) degree of ethnographic / Orientalist gaze, (5) presence of hybridity of identity, (6) focus on individual vs collective/national identity, and (7) explicit moral critique of empire and violence. Each literary text is

assessed along these dimensions using interpretive coding with three ordinal levels of intensity (low, medium, high). This measurement model allows to systematically compare Tolstoy and Kazakh writers using pivot tables and heat maps and visualize differences and convergences.

3. DISCUSSION

This analysis shows representations of the "Other" in Tolstoy and Kazakh writers are articulated in different yet related terms, influenced by imperial context. Tolstoy, a writer who was raised in the Russian Empire's cultural center, conveys a complex blend of imperial legacy and moral critique. They still rely on narrative structures where the Russian viewer is the primary carrier of reality, despite his ability to depict the challenges of conquest and describe non-Russian peoples in a morally sympathetic manner. Although he managed to describe non-Russian peoples morally sympathetically and portray the difficulties of conquest, they continue to rely on narrative structures in which the Russian viewer is the main carrier of reality. This ambiguity shows that even a critical view of the Empire can replicate Orientalist styles, rendering the colonized entity not entirely autonomous, but noble, pure, or exotic. These tensions echo the breadth of postcolonial readings of Russian literature, in which the imperial view, although not completely destroyed, is criticized. Kazakh writers, in contrast, write the figure of the "Other" from within one colonized society characterized by political subordination, cultural pressure and swift social change. In literature, they speak to externally sanctioned subjugation as much as to internal fights about who belongs, who ought to be modernized and what language the author is used to. In Kazakh texts the "Other" might refer to the Russian colonial power or to other imperial characters. It is a more intricate and malleable self-other system in which alterity constitutes an engine of cultural continuity and collective identity. The focus on hybridity – particularly in the works of Abai and Auezov – draws attention to the power of the colonised subject to accommodate and mold external influences and the agency of that subject to reconstitute or reformify others. Yet in spite of those divergences, Tolstoy and Kazakh writers write a common ethical critique of violence, injustice and moral decay as they relate to imperial expansion, and the "Other" as a figure that is employed to address wider social and ethical issues. Yet the purposes and concepts behind such reflections vary massively. For Tolstoy, the "Other" is fundamentally a moral mirror

for Russia – a vehicle used to criticize the values and conduct of the imperial center. For Kazakh writers, representations of the "Other" are vital in delimitating the territory of the Kazakh "Self" and maintaining cultural identity during repression. Not to mention, these distinctions suggest that the role of alterity was very much contingent upon the writer's socio-political positioning. More generally, these results indicate that the imperial literary field of the 19th and 20th centuries cannot be fully described by simple dichotomies of colonizer and colonized, or center and periphery. In addition, literary constructions and representations of identity and difference present a spectrum of negotiated locations. Tolstoy's humanistic critique of empire might have little appeal in terms of its potential to induce moral reflection in history but the Kazakh literature shows how oppressed societies dynamically modify dominant cultural practices to gain autonomy. Collectively, these traditions suggest that uneven but interdependent relationships made the cultural production of the Russian-Kazakh imperial context.

4.1. Recent Postcolonial Studies

Recent scholarship in postcolonial Slavic and Eurasian studies highlights the continued relevance of colonial frameworks for interpreting Russian and Soviet cultural production, particularly concerning the persistence of Orientalist tropes and asymmetrical power relations in the Caucasus and Central Asia (Koplatadze, 2025). Contemporary research emphasizes that post-Soviet and Central Asian literatures exhibit postcolonial sensibilities that extend beyond historical chronology, showing how linguistic, aesthetic, and narrative strategies reflect ongoing negotiations of identity and centre-periphery relations (Koplatadze, 2025). In the context of Kazakh literature, studies have underscored the importance of postcolonial analysis for understanding regional literary identities, cultural preservation, and translation practices, linking these dynamics to broader discourses on hybridity and historical agency (Akhmetova, Hanayi & Junisbayev, 2022). Furthermore, recent reviews of contemporary Russian postcolonial writing highlight evolving notions of transcultural identities and the polydomous nature of Russian-speaking literature in the twenty-first century, suggesting that both imperial and colonized perspectives continue to shape literary production and reception (Shafranskaya, Garipova & Keshfidinov, 2024). Incorporating these insights strengthens the comparative study of Tolstoy and Kazakh writers by situating their works within ongoing dialogues about

power, identity, and representation across Eurasian literary spaces.

Although scholarship has increasingly emphasized the ambiguity of Russian imperial discourse, particularly in relation to the Caucasus and Central Asia (Moore, 2001; Kemper, 2010), much of this work tends to focus separately on either Russian metropolitan literature or national revival narratives in Central Asia. The present study contributes to this discussion by placing Tolstoy and Kazakh writers within a shared analytical frame, thereby revealing how alterity is co-produced across asymmetrical positions within the same imperial field. For example, Tolstoy's *Hadji Murat* demonstrates how the moral lens of an imperial author shapes the representation of non-Russian peoples, while Auezov's *The Path of Abai* illustrates the agency of colonized authors in preserving national identity under Soviet constraints.

While previous research has highlighted the ethical ambivalence of Tolstoy's imperial imagination (Layton, 1994; Emerson, 2008), less attention has been paid to how this ambivalence structurally contrasts with colonized literary self-representation. By foregrounding narrative control, hybridity, and collective self-construction in Kazakh texts, this study demonstrates that alterity functions differently depending on the author's structural position within the imperial field.

In sum, the conversation suggests that postcolonial analysis is a productive paradigm through which to draw attention to how literary texts produce, question and reconfigure perceptions of the "Other." It reveals the persistence of domination and dialogue, hierarchy and hybridity, critique and constraint – the dynamics through which historical encounters, histories and controversies on culture, memory and decolonization in the region have been viewed (albeit imperfectly). Collectively, these findings suggest that postcolonial theory, though developed in a Western context, can be meaningfully adapted to the Russian–Kazakh imperial setting. The study illustrates that alterity is co-constructed across imperial and colonized positions, revealing a dynamic interplay of domination, resistance, and ethical critique, which contributes to a more nuanced understanding of cultural hybridity and the relational production of identity in Eurasian literary fields. These insights allow us to conceptualize the production of the "Other" within a structured framework, distinguishing between direct and indirect relationships that operate across literary, cultural, and historical dimensions.

4.2. Direct Relations

The model assumes several direct relationships between its key concepts. The author's position within the imperial structure (center or periphery) directly shapes how the "Other" is represented, influencing whether it appears primarily as an external colonized figure or also as an internal, alien element within one's own society. In turn, these representations of the "Other" directly affect the degree of moral critique of empire, the use of hybridity and the focus on either individual or collective/national identity in the literary texts. These direct relationships are further mediated through literary techniques, including narrative voice, use of dialogue, and internal monologue, which allow authors to negotiate ethical critique and cultural representation simultaneously.

4.3. Indirect Relation

Indirect relationships in the model appear when one variable influence another through mediating factors. The author's position within the empire indirectly affects the form and intensity of moral critique of empire via its impact on narrative voice, degree of self-representation and the configuration of the "Other." Similarly, demographic and historical conditions (colonial policies, language hierarchy, migration) indirectly shape literary constructions of identity by first transforming social experience and cultural practices, which are then reflected and reworked in the texts. Moreover, the ethical function of the "Other" varies: in Tolstoy, it serves as a mirror of imperial morality, whereas in Kazakh texts, it acts as a tool for collective self-definition and cultural preservation. This aligns with contemporary literary theory on moral relationality, which interprets intersubjective relations as mutually constitutive and ethically significant.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis in this study significantly allows us to draw general conclusions about the usefulness of the "other" and the postcolonial perspective for the Russian–Kazakh literary sphere in the works of L. N. Tolstoy and Kazakh writers of the 19th–20th centuries. At a broader level, the study shows that literary "Other" images do not reflect cultural differences in a neutral way but are included in historical power relations; they trace the role of the author in the imperial structure through linguistic and cultural hierarchies and through the social changes that exist today. Speaking from the Imperial Center, Tolstoy and the Kazakh writers from the colonized periphery represent the same political space but radically differently reflect the two-way

experience. In Tolstoy's writing, the "other" is characterized by external traits associated mainly with the Caucasian mountaineers and the Empire's non-Russian population. Especially, these figures are very important for his ethical project: through them, he reveals the cruelty, hypocrisy and spiritual emptiness of Russian Imperial behavior. The colonized "Other" is bold, dignified, close to nature, completely different from the corrupt representatives of the Russian state and aristocracy. However, narrative levels remain largely in the hands of Russian observers – officers, travelers, and reflexive narrators – who interpret and classify the colonized world for a Russian audience. However, this creates a classic ambiguity: Tolstoy carefully considers the moral justification of the conquest and gives great ethical value to "Others", while not fully overcoming the ethnographic and orientalist views that render non-Russian peoples objects of knowledge and thought. Thus, the "Other" is a strong moral mirror but not really a subject that speaks for itself. Defining the "other" is more complicated and internally differentiated in the Kazakh literature of the 19th-20th centuries. Kazakh authors represent a society that is subject to cultural oppression, administrative restructuring, colonization, and settlement. The task for them is not to find an external "other", it is impossible to get rid of it, because this is the definition and protection of the threatened "I". Thus, in the "other" there are not only Russian officials, soldiers and cultural agents but also internal figures and forces considered foreign: employees of an imperial power, elites who renounce communal duties or abstract notions of "civilization and "progress" that threaten to disrupt local customs. Self-isolation from others is widespread in Kazakh society, because it includes language, education, religion and social hierarchy. In other words, the colonized subject is not a passive victim, but rather an active participant in the struggle for self-determination, rejecting foreign models and selectively appropriating them. One of the most important discoveries of this study is the complex relationship between hybridization and mediation, which is reflected in the Kazakh identity (Sarsembayev, 2004). One of the most important discoveries of this study is the complex relationship between hybridization and mediation, as manifested in Kazakhstan's identity. Figures such as Abai and the subsequent literary revival of Abai in Auezov's novels represent a hybrid cultural position: fluent in Kazakh and Russian traditions, they have the analytical skills necessary to test both their society and the Imperial Center. This hybrid is not only an

indicator of assimilation; it serves as a matter of intellectual and cultural survival. Kazakh authors expand the resources of national self-expression by mastering Russian and European forms of knowledge. Thus, the use of a realistic novel, the combination of an oral epic with a written story and the transformation of European philosophical ideas are many examples of how Imperial cultural forms take on local forms. Thus, the "other" is a source of tools that can be reshaped for the benefit of the alien and colonized. A survey of comparative literature concluded that Tolstoy and Kazakh writers share many similarities in formulating a strong ethical critique of violence, injustice and spiritual degeneration caused by the Empire's rapid modernization. In both traditions, the contrast of cultural differences is used as a means of moral reflection and self-criticism. But this scene seems to be happening elsewhere. Tolstoy's suffering and his claims to each other are intended to cast doubt on the Russian conscience; his vision ultimately develops into universal humanism, grounded in moral principles that transcend national boundaries. For Kazakh writers, the same themes of suffering and injustice are inseparable from the problems of collective identity, historical continuity and who the real surviving people are. Thus, their ethical horizon is universal and multipurpose but it is first formulated in terms of national experience. This distinction makes the point that the same moral anxieties can be buried in different narrative and ideological logics if the author occupies some other part of the Imperial hierarchy. Methodologically, it emphasizes the importance of qualitative methodology, with its systematic, conceptually oriented analysis. Mapping how the other is represented by criteria such as position within the Empire, type of otherness, narrative control, ethnographic approach, hybridity and moral criticism enables disparate texts to be compared systematically without dumbing down their complexity. Visualizations such as summation and refinement patterns, tables, comparative diagrams and heat maps that may otherwise remain invisible help facilitate this identification. However, the study highlights the need for careful reading and historical contextualization: quantitative metaphorization of "high" or "low" intensity always comes from broad textual interpretations that accompany an understanding of the specific historical circumstances in which the works were created. The current study has some limitations that indicate directions for future research. The corpus of texts is always limited to a small number of selective and

canonical authors. A number of other Kazakh and non-Russian writers of the Empire and Soviet period, as well as other little-studied works of Tolstoy, still go beyond this analysis. More precisely, the postcolonial approach I proposed here is both productive and cautious, taking into account the specificities of the Russian Empire's history and Central Asia's colonial experience. In studies, the field of comparison can be expanded to include other Central Asian Literature, Caucasian writers, and non-Russian authors of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, thereby developing and experimenting with the results of these studies. However, the results presented on the basis of these shortcomings provide a more complex understanding of how Empire, identity, and change are incorporated into literary texts. They indicate that the Russian-Kazakh literary space is incorrectly covered by both national narratives and Imperial narratives. Rather, it is seen as an uneven but reciprocal field, in which voices from the core and the periphery collide, knocking heads and sometimes echoing. Tolstoy's ambiguous humanism, together with the self-demanding

hybridity of Kazakh literature, reveals a complex landscape in which domination and dialogue coexist. The "Other" category here is not a fixed category assigned to one nation or culture, but an active, changing position regarding who, with whom, and under what circumstances to communicate. In conclusion, as this article notes the postcolonial approach to the development of Russian and Kazakh literary traditions, informed by careful textual reading and drawing on local historical elements, is promising. The description of the "other" in the texts analyzed here reflects both the brutality of Imperial hierarchies and the ongoing struggle of people and communities to find identity within and against them. This recognition of duality is very important for getting beyond the simplified representations of Russia as a monolithic colonizer and of colonized peoples as passive recipients of history. Rather, it demands that Eurasian Literature be viewed as a multi-channel Archive, a workbook of negotiation, resistance, adaptation and ethical reflection—a space in which the connotations of "I" and "others" are continuously reworked, rewritten and revisited.

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