Research Paper

Framing the Russia-Ukraine Crisis: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Ideological Strategies in British and Arab Online Newspapers

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Abstract

This study investigates the representation of the Russia-Ukraine crisis in British and Arab online newspapers through a critical discourse analysis (CDA) framework based on Fairclough's three-dimensional model. By analyzing news articles from *The Guardian*, *The Sun*, *Arab News*, and *The Gulf News* published between June 2022 and April 2023, the study examines linguistic strategies, ideological positioning, and sociopolitical influences shaping media narratives. The findings reveal distinct framing patterns: British newspapers, particularly *The Sun*, employ emotionally charged and polarized language reinforcing an anti-Russian stance, while *The Guardian* maintains a more balanced yet subtly pro-Western perspective. In contrast, Arab newspapers, especially *The Gulf News*, present a nuanced and analytical discourse, often contextualizing the conflict within broader geopolitical and economic frameworks. These variations highlight the role of media in constructing public perceptions and emphasize the interplay between regional political interests and journalistic practices. The study contributes to discourse analysis and media studies by offering cross-regional insights into the ideological framing of global conflicts, underscoring the need for critical engagement with news narratives.

INTRODUCTION

Discourse analysis examines how language interacts with social, cultural, and political contexts, aiming to understand how communication—through the structures and strategies of texts and talk—shapes and is shaped by the surrounding world (Gee, 2014). A key subfield within this framework is text analysis, which explores how textual features, such as coherence and cohesion, create meaning in communication (Beaugrande & Dressler, 1981). Halliday and Hasan (1976) were instrumental in defining cohesion as the links that bind parts of a text,

and textual analysis continues to reveal the role of linguistic cohesion in constructing meaning (Eggins, 2004). Building on this foundation, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) emerged in the mid-1980s, drawing on critical social theory to examine the relationship between discourse and societal practices (Fairclough, 2006). Scholars such as Fairclough, van Dijk, and Wodak have been at the forefront of CDA, expanding discourse analysis to investigate how language reinforces power dynamics and ideologies (Fairclough, 1989; Van Dijk, 1993; Wodak, 1996).

Despite the extensivE research on media representations of the Russia-Ukraine crisis

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through CDA, there remains a notable gap in comparative studies examining the interplay between Western and Arab media narratives. Most existing literature focuses predominantly on Western, Ukrainian, and Russian perspectives, often neglecting how Arab outlets approach the same geopolitical conflict. By synthesizing insights from existing literature and applying a consistent methodological approach, the current investigation intends to reveal the complexities of media framing and representation, providing a more holistic understanding of how language is wielded as a tool for shaping public opinion on the Russia-Ukraine crisis.

This study aims to bridge this gap by employing Fairclough's three-dimensional model of CDA to analyze how British and Arab online newspapers represent the Russia-Ukraine crisis. By examining both textual and contextual elements, this research reveals the ideological strategies employed by each group of newspapers and offers insights into the broader cultural and political agendas shaping their discourse. Through a comparison of *The Guardian*, *The Sun*, *Arab News*, and *Gulf News*, the study explores how language is used to either reinforce or challenge dominant narratives, shedding light on biases, impartiality, and objectivity in media coverage of the crisis. The significance of this study lies in its potential to enhance our understanding of how global conflicts are framed through media discourse, especially in contexts where ideological and geopolitical interests diverge. By providing a cross-regional analysis of media representations in British and Arab online newspapers, this study contributes to the broader fields of CDA and media studies, offering valuable insights into how language serves as a tool of power and influence in international relations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent research on the media representation of geopolitical conflicts through CDA has gained considerable attention, particularly in relation to the Russia-Ukraine crisis. For instance, Latif et al. (2024) conducted a qualitative analysis focusing on the portrayal of Russia and Ukraine in Western media during the first month of the war. Their findings revealed that Western outlets, such as *The New York Times* and *The Guardian*, framed Russia as the aggressor and Ukraine as the victim, aligning with broader geopolitical narratives that promote democracy (Latif et al., 2024). This study emphasizes the significance of framing strategies and language choices in shaping public perceptions of international conflicts. Pavlichenko (2022) further investigated polarization in media political discourse, particularly in British and American press coverage. Through an integrated CDA approach, Pavlichenko identified various discursive strategies—such as labeling, evidentiality, and hyperbolism—that illustrate the dichotomy between in-group and out-group representations. The study concluded that polarization is prevalent in media narratives surrounding the Ukraine war, demonstrating how linguistic devices reinforce ideological positions (Pavlichenko, 2022).

In addition, Xu and Tao (2023) analyzed the discourse strategies used by the Russian and Ukrainian media outlets, *TASS* and *UKRINFORM*, respectively. This study revealed how each media platform constructs distinct national identities through naming strategies and representations of social actors. *TASS* portrays Ukraine as a security threat and emphasizes a united front with the Donbas region, while *UKRINFORM* aligns Ukraine with Western nations, thereby stigmatizing Russia (Xu & Tao, 2023). This contrast in discursive strategies highlights the role of national identity in shaping media narratives, with each outlet promoting an agenda aligned with its political context. Moreover, Alyahya (2023) compared articles from *The Washington Post* and *The Moscow Times* published on the outbreak of the war. The study employed attitude analysis to uncover how each newspaper utilizes language to influence its readership's perceptions of the invasion. While *The Washington Post* emphasizes negative aspects of the invasion and presents a critical view of Russia, *The Moscow Times* offers a more nuanced perspective that highlights positive actions from both the U.S. and Russia. This divergence underscores the opposing agendas of the two outlets and illustrates how language is strategically employed to construct ideological

narratives (Alyahya, 2023). In another investigation, Selvarajah and Fiorito (2023) focused on the media's role in shaping public opinion about the International Criminal Court's (ICC) investigations into alleged Russian war crimes. By employing content and frame analysis, they demonstrated a connection between media reporting and the public's perception of the ICC's actions. Their study suggested that media coverage influenced public understanding of international law and the need for accountability, thereby reinforcing the legitimacy of the ICC's investigations (Selvarajah & Fiorito, 2023).

In a similar vein, Mohammed (2023) applied Fairclough's CDA framework to analyze news reports from *CNN* and *Russia Today* (*RT*). This study examined the syntactic, lexical, and rhetorical structures employed by the two outlets, revealing that both utilize various discourse strategies to convey their ideological positions. Notably, *CNN* focuses on themes of anti-violence and human rights, while *RT* emphasizes manipulation and alternative narratives. The findings highlight the significant role of media in shaping public discourse about the conflict (Mohammed, 2023). Brusylovska and Maksymenko (2022) also explored how Russian media constructs narratives that legitimize the Kremlin's actions in Ukraine. By employing discourse analysis of major Russian newspapers, they argue that media serves as a tool for the Kremlin to reshape regional identities and perceptions of the war, reinforcing a narrative of defending Russia against Western threats (Brusylovska & Maksymenko, 2022). In examining the representation of the Russia-Ukraine crisis, it is also essential to consider Pomerantsev's (2023) thesis, which provides a corpus-driven analysis of Russian news media during the conflict. This research investigates the narratives constructed by Russian media around the war, identifying language strategies used to create these narratives and exploring how they evolved over time. By analyzing a corpus of 4,475 articles from *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, the study highlights how language is employed to discredit the Ukrainian government and promote a demonizing portrayal of 'the West.' Furthermore, it emphasizes the role of historical memory in shaping public support

for the invasion, particularly through the use of terms like 'nazi' and 'fascist.' Pomerantsev's work underscores the critical role of media language in shaping public perception and political discourse surrounding the conflict.

In conclusion, these studies collectively illuminate the complex interplay of media, language, and ideology in shaping public perceptions of the Russia-Ukraine War. While employing varying methodologies—ranging from qualitative CDA to content analysis—they consistently highlight how discourse strategies reflect broader political agendas. The findings underscore the importance of critically engaging with media narratives to understand the dynamics of international conflicts.

Based on the study's objectives and methodology, below are the research questions and null hypotheses of the study:

Research Questions

RQ1. How do British and Arab online newspapers linguistically frame the Russia-Ukraine crisis through discourse strategies?

RQ2. What ideological biases are embedded in the representation of the Russia-Ukraine crisis in British and Arab online newspapers?

RQ3. How do British and Arab media outlets differ in their portrayal of the conflict's key actors (e.g., Russia, Ukraine, NATO, and Western countries)?

RQ4. What are the sociocultural and geopolitical factors influencing the discourse strategies of British and Arab newspapers?

RQ5. How does the framing of the Russia-Ukraine conflict in British and Arab media contribute to shaping public perceptions and opinions?

Null Hypotheses

H_01. There is no significant difference in the linguistic framing of the Russia-Ukraine crisis between British and Arab online newspapers.

H_02. British and Arab online newspapers do not exhibit ideological biases in their representation of the Russia-Ukraine crisis.

H_03. There is no significant difference in the portrayal of key actors in the Russia-Ukraine conflict across British and Arab media outlets.

H_04. *Sociocultural and geopolitical factors do not significantly influence the discourse strategies employed by British and Arab newspapers.*

$H_0 5$. *The framing of the Russia-Ukraine conflict in British and Arab media does not significantly impact public perceptions and opinions.*

METHODOLOGY
Study Design

This study employs a critical discourse analysis (CDA) framework inspired by Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of discourse analysis. Fairclough (2013, p. 97) conceptualizes discourse as simultaneously (i) a language text, (ii) a discourse practice encompassing text production and interpretation, and (iii) a sociocultural practice. This multi-dimensional approach allows for the analysis of language in context, particularly how texts are shaped by and embedded within broader social and cultural dynamics.

According to Fairclough (2013), discourse is "embedded within sociocultural practice at a number of levels: in the immediate situation, in the wider institution or organization, and at a societal level" (p. 97). This model involves three stages: (1) linguistic description of the text, (2) interpretation of the relationship between discursive processes and the text, and (3) explanation of the connection between discursive and social processes (Fairclough, 2013, p. 97). This layered structure offers a nuanced perspective on how texts reflect and reproduce sociocultural contexts. A key feature of Fairclough's approach is the idea that the link between sociocultural practices and texts is mediated by discourse practice, meaning that the nature of the sociocultural practice influences how a text is produced and interpreted. As Fairclough (2013) states, "how a text is produced or interpreted… depends upon the nature of the sociocultural practice which the discourse is a part of" (p. 97). For instance, discursive practices in news media are shaped by the broader political, ideological, and institutional contexts within which they operate.

Corpus

The corpus of this study comprised news articles from various online publications, selected to capture a range of perspectives on the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The study included articles from four distinct online outlets: *The Guardian*, *The Sun*, *Arab News*, and *The Gulf News*, offering a combination of Western (*The Guardian*, *The Sun*) and Arab (*Arab News*, *The Gulf News*) viewpoints. The articles were sampled from a significant period, spanning from June 18, 2022, to April 19, 2023. This timeframe covers the lead-up to the war, the initial invasion, and several months of the ongoing conflict. A purposive sampling approach was employed, focusing on specific dates to ensure a thorough representation of the different phases of the conflict. Articles published in October 2022, January 2023, and on February 10th, 14th, 19th, and 24th were selected to provide insights into the rising tensions leading up to the invasion. Additionally, articles from February 25th, 27th, and March 6th, 18th, 24th, and 31st were chosen to capture perspectives on the early stages of the war and its immediate effects.

To document the ongoing developments and the evolving situation, articles from April 2023 (specifically from the 2nd to the 19th, with additional articles on the 13th and 14th) were included. This purposive selection ensures that the corpus reflects various phases of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, capturing diverse perspectives over time.

Data Collection Procedure

Widdowson (2007) highlights that critical discourse analysis (CDA) seeks to identify and challenge the ideologies and assumptions that sustain inequality and bias between elites and non-elites. Following this approach, the study aimed to uncover power dynamics embedded in media representations of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Fairclough (2013) posits that discourse is a site where power is both exercised and manifested, with power relationships underpinning all forms of discourse. In media discourse, elites (the powerful participants) can impose constraints on less powerful groups by controlling content, social relations, and identities. These constraints may function at an immediate level (power in discourse) or at a structural level (power behind discourse), with this study focusing primarily on the latter to examine the

long-term structural effects of power within the discourse. Fairclough (2013, p. 37) further suggests that systematic constraints on discourse can shape individuals' knowledge, beliefs, and identities within societal or institutional frameworks, ultimately contributing to the establishment of shared social realities.

To examine these dynamics, the study first analyzed the formal characteristics of the texts, focusing on member resources (MRs)—a concept in CDA referring to the cognitive, social, and cultural knowledge that individuals draw upon to produce and interpret discourse (Fairclough, 1989). These include knowledge of language (such as grammar and vocabulary), social norms, ideologies, and past experiences that shape how texts are understood and created. MRs were used as interpretive tools to decode how social phenomena are represented in the news articles.

The data collection process involved several key steps. First, relevant news articles were identified through online searches and selected based on their content and relevance to the research focus. The articles were then downloaded and prepared for analysis, with particular attention to their discourse structures. The researchers thoroughly reviewed each article to ensure a comprehensive understanding, examining both textual and contextual elements. Relevant data were subsequently extracted for detailed analysis and categorized to facilitate a structured approach to critical discourse analysis.

Data Analysis Procedure

The data analysis employed content analysis framed within Fairclough's model of CDA. Content analysis, a widely recognized technique in social research, helps identify patterns within texts. Berelson (1952) describes content analysis as a systematic, objective, and quantitative method for examining the explicit content of communication. In this study, content analysis focused on linguistic elements such as specific words, concepts, themes, phrases, and sentence structures to reveal the underlying messages conveyed in the texts.

The analysis followed a structured process as follows:

--Selection of Appropriate Samples – Articles were chosen based on their relevance and representation of different perspectives on the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

--Formulation of Research Questions – The analysis was guided by research questions that aimed to explore media bias, ideological positioning, and power dynamics in discourse.

--Coding and Categorization – The texts were systematically coded into categories based on linguistic and discursive features. Different linguistic markers were identified to uncover biases, intentions, and omissions in media representations of the conflict.

--Interpretation and Thematic Analysis – Beyond basic word counting, the analysis examined the depth of coverage, ideological stances, and framing strategies employed in the texts. This step provided a more nuanced understanding of the perspectives, biases, and potential intentions of the authors and publishers.

RESULTS

This section presents the results of the critical discourse analysis of selected British and Arab media outlets, examining their representation of the Russia-Ukraine conflict through textual analysis, discursive practices, and sociocultural contexts.

British Media Outlets
The Guardian
Text Analysis
The Guardian employs neutral, factual language, but subtle word choices introduce nuances that shape reader perception. While it attributes statements to various actors (e.g., "Stoltenberg said," "Prigozhin said"), verb choices such as "claimed" and "may have lost" subtly influence perceptions by emphasizing uncertainty or doubt.

Discursive Practices
Sourcing primarily draws from NATO, Ukrainian, and Western officials, subtly positioning the reader to favor a Western narrative. Russia's claims are often framed with skepticism, reinforcing the perception of Russian setbacks and uncertainty.

Sociocultural Practices

The Guardian situates the conflict within a broader geopolitical context, highlighting NATO and the West's role in responding to Russia. It acknowledges the information war, incorporating disputed claims and unverified information, further emphasizing the complexity of wartime narratives.

The Sun

Text Analysis

The Sun employs highly emotive language, using strong adjectives and verbs to evoke reactions. Terms such as "brutal all-out offensive" and "Putin's monsters" dehumanize Russian actors, framing Russia in a consistently negative light.

Discursive Practices

Sourcing includes official statements, eyewitness accounts, and unnamed sources, often amplifying dramatic and emotional elements. The Sun prominently features Ukrainian voices while diminishing Russian perspectives.

Sociocultural Practices

The Sun frames the war as a struggle between good and evil, appealing to British nationalism and using sensationalist language to engage readers. Emotional appeals, dramatic storytelling, and references to war crimes reinforce an anti-Russian stance.

Arab Media Outlets
The Arab News
Text Analysis

The Arab News employs a neutral and factual tone but subtly shapes perception through word choices. It predominantly uses active voice to assign agency clearly while using cautious verbs such as "claims" and "said" to maintain objectivity.

Discursive Practices

The Arab News integrates multiple perspectives, featuring statements from Ukrainian, Russian, and international actors. However, its emphasis on Ukrainian and Western sources suggests alignment with broader Western narratives.

Sociocultural Practices

The outlet frames the conflict as a complex geopolitical issue, balancing coverage of military developments, diplomatic efforts, and humanitarian consequences. It presents a more analytical and global perspective than its British counterparts.

The Gulf News
Text Analysis

The Gulf News maintains a neutral tone but occasionally employs loaded language to emphasize the economic and political ramifications of the conflict. Its vocabulary highlights both Russian aggression and Ukrainian resistance, contributing to a balanced narrative.

Discursive Practices

Sourcing includes statements from diverse international figures, including Ukrainian, Russian, and Western officials, offering a nuanced perspective. The analysis of economic consequences, geopolitical shifts, and food security issues adds depth to the coverage.

Sociocultural Practices

The Gulf News contextualizes the war within global economic and geopolitical frameworks, emphasizing long-term consequences rather than immediate battlefield developments. Its approach contrasts with more emotional or sensationalist reporting.

DISCUSSION

The findings highlight key differences in the ways British and Arab media outlets frame the Russia-Ukraine conflict, revealing ideological and geopolitical biases in news coverage.

British vs. Arab Media Narratives

British media, particularly *The Guardian* and *The Sun*, largely align with Western political perspectives. *The Guardian* maintains a more subtle critique of Russia through word choices and source selection, while *The Sun* employs highly emotive language and sensationalist framing, emphasizing Russian brutality and Ukrainian heroism. In contrast, Arab media presents a more varied narrative. While *The Arab News* aligns more closely with Western

perspectives, *The Gulf News* offers a broader geopolitical outlook, acknowledging the complexity of the conflict without overtly favoring one side.

Ideological and Linguistic Strategies

Both British and Arab outlets employ specific linguistic strategies to shape narratives. British newspapers favor active voice for Russian actions and passive constructions for Western or Ukrainian responses, subtly reinforcing perceptions of Russian aggression. Arab newspapers, particularly *The Gulf News*, adopt a more balanced grammatical approach, offering both Russian and Ukrainian perspectives without excessive editorialization.

The Sun's reliance on hyperbolic adjectives and dramatic verbs starkly contrasts with the measured language of *The Arab News* and *The Gulf News*. The latter outlets use precise vocabulary to maintain a neutral stance, while British tabloids such as *The Sun* utilize emotionally charged language to generate a strong reader response.

Geopolitical and Sociocultural Considerations

The sociocultural framing of the conflict varies significantly. British media tend to reinforce a narrative of Western unity against Russian aggression, frequently citing NATO and Western officials. *The Sun*, in particular, emphasizes themes of good versus evil, often appealing to British nationalist sentiment.

Arab media, on the other hand, incorporate a wider range of perspectives. *The Arab News* underscores Ukraine's victimhood while focusing on the war's humanitarian toll, aligning with broader Western discourse. Meanwhile, *The Gulf News* frames the conflict as a geopolitical struggle, emphasizing economic consequences and diplomatic negotiations. This suggests an interest in regional stability and trade implications rather than a purely ideological stance.

Media Influence and Public Perception

The findings indicate that British and Arab newspapers shape public discourse through distinct discursive and sociopolitical strategies. British media, particularly tabloids, contribute to heightened emotional engagement by portraying Russia as an unequivocal aggressor.

Arab media, especially *The Gulf News*, take a more analytical approach, fostering a deeper understanding of the geopolitical ramifications of the war.

These differences highlight the role of media in constructing public opinion. Sensationalist narratives, as seen in *The Sun*, may fuel stronger anti-Russian sentiment, while neutral reporting, as seen in *The Gulf News*, allows for a more multifaceted interpretation of the conflict. The divergence in these reporting styles underscores how geopolitical interests and regional priorities influence media representations of international crises.

CONCLUSION

Our first point of concern was to identify the frequent strategies associated with the representation of the Russia-Ukraine crisis in selected British and Arab online newspapers. The Guardian's coverage was balanced but subtly emphasized Russian actions as problematic and highlighted the importance of Western responses, reflecting a potential Western bias. As can be seen in Table 1, *The Guardian* used neutral, factual language, but nuanced vocabulary choices, such as "claimed" and "said," implied skepticism toward Russian statements. It framed the conflict as an ongoing geopolitical struggle, focusing on international responses and the complexities of the war, aligning with theories such as Framing Theory (Entman, 1993), Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), and Social Construction of Reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). *The Sun*, on the other hand, employed a highly partisan and emotionally charged approach, portraying a clear pro-Ukrainian and anti-Russian perspective. Its use of sensational language, such as "Butchers of Bucha" and "nuclear Armageddon," dehumanized Russian forces and appealed to readers' emotions. The Sun framed the conflict as a simple struggle between good (Ukraine) and evil (Russia), reinforcing anti-Russian sentiment and contributing to a polarized view of the conflict. The Sun's sensationalism aligns with Framing Theory and the Propaganda Model (Herman & Chomsky, 1988), demonstrating how media can manipulate public opinion through emotional appeals.

In contrast, Arab News provided a more neutral and analytical perspective, avoiding emotionally charged language and emphasizing the conflict's complexity and global implications. By incorporating multiple viewpoints, including official statements from various actors, it presented a balanced account of the crisis. Arab News framed the conflict as a complex geopolitical issue and offered insights into its regional impact, particularly regarding energy security and political stability in the Middle East. This approach aligns with Gatekeeping Theory (Lewin, 1947) and Media Framing Theory, showing how media shape narratives through the selection and emphasis of information. Similarly, Gulf News adopted a nuanced and analytical tone, focusing on the economic and political consequences of the conflict. While maintaining a factual tone, it subtly used loaded language, such as "relentless Russian fire" and "fiercer-than-expected Ukrainian resistance," to highlight the conflict's intensity. The Gulf News provided expert opinions, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the situation's global implications. This focus on economic consequences aligns with Agenda-Setting Theory, while its framing of the conflict reflects Framing Theory and critical discourse analysis, emphasizing how language and media shape public understanding and contribute to power relations. In conclusion, The Guardian's coverage was balanced yet subtly Western-oriented, while The Sun's sensationalism promoted a polarized view. Arab News and Gulf News offered more neutral and analytical perspectives, contributing to a more informed and nuanced understanding of the conflict.

In comparison to Latif et al. (2024), our findings align with their assertion that Western media often constructs narratives emphasizing a Western perspective. While they focus on the implications of this framing for the representation of the "Other," our analysis highlights *The Guardian*'s potential bias through nuanced language that fosters skepticism toward Russian statements. Pavlichenko (2022) discussed polarization in media discourse, noting that sensational language exacerbates divisions. This complements our findings regarding *The Sun*'s

emotionally charged, partisan approach, which aligns with Pavlichenko's concerns about the impact of sensationalism in deepening societal divides. In examining national identity, Xu and Tao (2023) revealed how media shapes identities during the conflict. Our analysis of *Gulf News* reflects this focus, emphasizing the geopolitical implications of their coverage while highlighting economic considerations, which both studies recognize as significant. Alyahya (2023) contrasts Western and Russian media, echoing our findings on *Arab News*'s neutrality and analytical perspective. This convergence suggests a critical role for Arab media in providing balanced narratives that counteract dominant Western frames. Lastly, Ononiwu (2023) examined ideology in media representations, resonating with our findings on *The Sun*'s emotional tactics. While we focused on language and framing, Ononiwu's exploration of underlying ideologies underscored the impact of such portrayals on audience perceptions. Together, these analyses highlight the complex relationship between media language, ideology, and public understanding of the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Generally, this research contributes to our understanding of media representation, ideology, and discourse analysis, underscoring the need for critical engagement with media narratives and the importance of recognizing the complexities of international conflicts. However, this study primarily focused on selected British and Arab online newspapers, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other media outlets and contexts. Future research can build upon these findings to explore additional dimensions of media representation and its impact on public perception and discourse, possibly expanding the scope to include diverse international perspectives and alternative media sources for a more holistic view. Moreover, qualitative methods such as interviews with journalists and editors could provide deeper insights into the decision-making processes behind news coverage. Longitudinal studies examining how media representations evolve over time in response to changing geopolitical dynamics could further enrich the discourse on media influence in global conflicts.

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