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Islamic Epistemology: The Integration of Knowledge and Contemporary Challenges from an Islamic Scholarly Perspective

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Abstract

Islamic epistemology is confronted with a range of contemporary challenges arising from the secularization of knowledge, disciplinary fragmentation, and the intellectual identity crisis within Muslim societies. These issues stem from the dominance of a secular Western epistemological paradigm that separates knowledge from divine values, resulting in a dichotomy between religious sciences ('ulūm al-dīn) and worldly sciences ('ulūm al-dunyā). This study aims to re-examine the foundations of Islamic epistemology grounded in the principle of tawhīd and to evaluate the relevance of A. Amin Abdullah's integration-interconnection paradigm as a methodological response in contemporary Islamic studies. Employing a library research method, this study analyzes classical and modern sources—such as Al-Attas, Nasr, Al-Faruqi, and Amin Abdullah—using content analysis to identify epistemic patterns and assess their significance for present-day academic discourse. Findings reveal that the secularization of knowledge has produced a crisis of value and purpose, as highlighted by Al-Attas and Nasr, who argue that the loss of adab results in epistemic confusion and moral disorientation. Additionally, the sharp divide between Islamic sciences and empirical disciplines has led to epistemological fragmentation, causing both religious scholars and modern scientists to lose the essential connection between text, reason, and socio-historical reality. The study further demonstrates that Amin Abdullah's integration-interconnection paradigm offers a robust epistemological framework by synthesizing the bayānī (textual), burhānī (rational), and 'irfānī (spiritual-intuitive) domains within a dialogical and multidisciplinary model. This paradigm not only restores the balanced relationship between revelation, reason, and experience but also enables the development of knowledge that is socially relevant, ethically grounded, and spiritually meaningful. The study concludes that reconstructing Islamic epistemology based on tawhīd and interdisciplinary integration is an urgent agenda for addressing modern intellectual challenges. Amin Abdullah's paradigm proves to be an

effective epistemological bridge connecting religious sciences, the humanities, and science–technology, thereby offering a holistic foundation for higher education curricula. Thus, Islamic epistemology possesses the potential not only to respond to contemporary issues but also to serve as an intellectual framework capable of fostering a morally grounded and scientifically advanced modern Islamic civilization.

Keywords: Islamic Epistemology, Integration of Knowledge, A. Amin Abdullah, Secularization of Knowledge, Islamic Knowledge Tradition.

1. INTRODUCTION

Knowledge occupies a highly central and fundamental position within the structure of Islamic epistemology. This assertion is not merely normative but is grounded in strong theological foundations. The most primary evidence can be found in the first revelation delivered to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), the command “*Iqra*” (Read) (Qur’an, Al-‘Alaq 96:1–5). In its broader interpretation, this command is not simply an imperative for literacy but a philosophical call to read, study, and contemplate the entirety of existential reality. This reality is divided into two categories of divine signs: *ayat qauliyyah* (verbal signs contained in the sacred text) and *ayat kauniyyah* (cosmic signs manifested throughout the universe). Both serve as integral and complementary sources of knowledge. From this perspective, Islamic epistemology regards knowledge as a divine gift (*ni‘mat Allah*) that enables humans to fulfill their mission of stewardship (*istikhlāf*) on earth—namely, to manage and cultivate life (*isti‘mār al-ardh*) with full responsibility.

Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, one of the most influential contemporary Muslim thinkers, emphasizes the sanctity of knowledge by intrinsically linking it to the concepts of *tawhīd* (the oneness of God) and *adab*. *Tawhīd* provides the ontological framework that all forms of knowledge ultimately originate from the One, thereby affirming that reality is a coherent unity rather than a collection of fragmented domains. Meanwhile, *adab* situates knowledge within an axiological framework, in which the pursuit and application of knowledge must be accompanied by ethical values, spiritual awareness, and the proper recognition of the rightful place of everything in the order of existence. Consequently, knowledge in Islam is neither neutral nor value-free; it functions as a means of drawing closer to God (*taqarrub ilā Allāh*) and promoting universal well-being (*jalb al-maṣāliḥ*).

However, the development of modern civilization—significantly shaped by post-Enlightenment Western scientific paradigms—has led to a major shift in epistemological orientation. Knowledge has undergone a deep process of secularization, through which it has been separated from transcendental, moral, and spiritual values. Human reason and empirical methods have been elevated as the sole legitimate sources of truth (scientism), while revelation and metaphysics have been relegated to the private sphere and deemed irrelevant to public scholarly discourse. The impact of this secularization has produced a sharp epistemological dichotomy between “religious sciences” and “secular sciences.”

This dichotomy is not merely conceptual but has become institutionalized within educational systems. On the one hand, many Islamic higher education institutions still rely heavily on traditional textual-normative approaches and often lack methodological innovation to address contemporary complexities, resulting in the risk of becoming isolated from modern developments. On the other hand, secular universities tend to adopt

educational models that separate science and technology from moral and spiritual considerations. As a consequence, Islamic education faces a crisis of scholarly identity manifested in two polarized outcomes: religious scholars who struggle to engage with real-world issues, and technically proficient scientists who lack spiritual depth and ethical responsibility. If left unaddressed, this condition will undermine the ability of the Muslim community to contribute meaningfully to global civilization.

Responding to these dichotomous and secular challenges, A. Amin Abdullah offers an epistemological breakthrough through his paradigm of integration-interconnection. This paradigm provides a methodological framework aimed at bridging the gap between text (revelation and tradition) and context (social, human, and technological realities). In contrast to earlier Islamization-of-knowledge approaches that tend to be hierarchical and top-down, Abdullah’s model emphasizes a “spider-web” configuration in which various fields—religious sciences, social sciences and humanities, as well as natural sciences and technology—occupy parallel and mutually interactive positions within a dialogical network.

This approach goes beyond vertical integration (subordinating secular sciences under religious sciences) and instead promotes horizontal interconnection through multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and even transdisciplinary engagement. It encourages constructive dialogue among the three epistemic approaches in Islamic intellectual tradition: *bayānī* (textual–hermeneutical), *burhānī* (rational–empirical), and *‘irfānī* (intuitive–spiritual). Thus, the paradigm not only reconstructs Islamic epistemology to maintain contemporary relevance but also equips scholars and practitioners with methodological tools to address modern human problems—such as injustice, ecological crisis, and moral decadence—in a holistic, comprehensive, and sustainable manner.

For this reason, the present article seeks to explore Islamic epistemology more deeply by focusing on A. Amin Abdullah’s integration–interconnection paradigm as an analytical response to the problems of epistemological dichotomy and knowledge secularization. This study is expected to contribute to the reconstruction of an integrative Islamic education model capable of producing scholars who are intellectually excellent while firmly grounded in spirituality and ethics.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach using library research as its primary method. Library research is conducted by examining primary and secondary sources related to Islamic epistemology, knowledge integration, and contemporary scientific paradigms. This method is selected because the focus of the study lies in analyzing concepts, theories, and the perspectives of both classical

and modern Muslim scholars concerning knowledge and epistemology. Zed (2014) explains that library research aims to explore ideas through texts and scholarly works systematically in order to produce theoretical synthesis and new understandings.

The primary data in this research include original works of influential scholars such as al-Ghazālī (*Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*), Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (*Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam*), Ismail Raji al-Faruqi (*Islamization of Knowledge*), and A. Amin Abdullah (*Paradigma Integrasi-Interkoneksi*). Secondary data are obtained from reputable journals, conference proceedings, and supporting books relevant to knowledge integration, the secularization of knowledge, and contemporary epistemological challenges. Source selection follows the principles of credibility, recency, and relevance (Creswell, 2014).

Data collection is conducted through documentation, which involves identifying, tracing, and organizing scholarly texts from various academic repositories such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and digital libraries of Islamic universities. The collected data are then analyzed using content analysis. This technique focuses on categorizing and interpreting textual meanings to uncover patterns linking Islamic epistemology, knowledge integration, and contemporary challenges. According to Krippendorff (2013), content analysis enables researchers to reveal hidden messages within texts and their relevance to social contexts.

The analytical process consists of three main stages: (1) Data reduction, which involves selecting and simplifying relevant information; (2) Data presentation, which organizes information into a conceptual framework; (3) Conclusion drawing, which formulates conceptual conclusions regarding the position of Islamic epistemology in addressing modern challenges (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Thus, this method does not merely present data but also analyzes, critiques, and synthesizes theories to produce constructive and original findings.

This research is descriptive-analytical in nature, aiming to describe Islamic epistemology while providing a critical analysis of the issues of knowledge dichotomy and secularization. This approach aligns with the objective of the study, which is to explore an in-depth understanding of knowledge integration within the framework of Islamic epistemology and its relevance in addressing contemporary civilizational challenges.

3. DISCUSSION

The Nature of Knowledge in Islam

In the Islamic perspective, *'ilm* (knowledge) is not merely rational information but encompasses spiritual and moral dimensions as well. Terminologically, classical scholars define knowledge as clear and certain understanding of something in accordance with its true reality (al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*). The Qur'an employs the term *'ilm* more than 750 times, signifying its centrality within the structure of Islamic teachings (al-Attas, 1995). One of the earliest revealed verses commands reading and invoking the name of God as the source of all knowledge (Qur'an, 96:1–5). This illustrates that the Islamic conception of knowledge does not involve separating the intellect from God; rather, it is the utilization of the intellect to comprehend the signs of God. Thus, knowledge in Islam possesses a transcendental dimension, for its pinnacle lies in the recognition of Allah as the ultimate source of all knowledge (Qur'an, 2:31).

Furthermore, knowledge in Islam is not solely aimed at knowing but also at guiding humans toward recognition, servitude, and submission to Allah. The Qur'an affirms, "Indeed, among His servants, only those who have knowledge truly fear Allah" (Qur'an, 35:28). This verse highlights the ethical dimension of knowledge: true knowledge engenders *khashyah* (humility and spiritual awareness), rather than mere intellectual prestige. Al-Attas explains that the loss of *adab* in the pursuit of knowledge leads to the corruption of knowledge, occurring when knowledge is detached from its theocentric orientation and pursued solely for worldly gain (*Islam and Secularism*, 1978). Therefore, the essence of knowledge is not simply the accumulation of information but a process of spiritual purification, moral cultivation, and strengthening the human relationship with Allah.

In addition, Islamic scholarship encompasses two major categories: (1) *naqli* knowledge (revealed knowledge) and (2) *'aqli* knowledge (rational/empirical knowledge). A. Amin Abdullah (2003), through his integration-interconnection paradigm, asserts that the dichotomy between religious and secular sciences is a colonial legacy that contradicts the Islamic epistemological framework. In Islam, both forms of knowledge must be unified, for they represent different manifestations of the divine signs: the *ayat qauliyyah* (the Qur'an) and the *ayat kauniyyah* (the signs found in the natural world). Ibn Qayyim further emphasizes that reason is a prerequisite for moral responsibility (*taklīf*), yet it cannot attain ultimate truth without the guidance of revelation (*Miftāḥ Dār al-Sa'ādah*). Within this paradigm, Islamic knowledge is integrative—merging metaphysical, empirical, and ethical dimensions. This integrative characteristic represents a unique feature of Islamic epistemology in contrast to modern Western epistemology, which tends to be secular and positivistic.

Functions and Objectives of Knowledge in the Islamic Perspective: A Comprehensive Review

In the Islamic worldview, knowledge is not merely a cognitive tool for understanding empirical reality; it also possesses a deeper purpose intrinsically connected to the very goal of human creation. Al-Attas (1995), in his work *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam*, asserts that the primary function of knowledge is to serve as a means to know God (*ma'rifaṭullah*) and to discover the rightful place (*ḥaqq*) of all things within the order of existence. This function positions knowledge as *nūr* (light) that purifies the heart from the darkness of ignorance (*jahl*) and guides human beings toward recognizing both God and themselves. Furthermore, Al-Ghazali, in *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* (2000), distinguishes between praiseworthy knowledge (*al-'ilm al-maḥmūd*) and blameworthy knowledge (*al-'ilm al-madhūm*). Praiseworthy knowledge refers to beneficial knowledge (*al-'ilm al-nāfi'*), namely knowledge that draws individuals closer to God, purifies the soul, and directs ethical conduct. Thus, the function of knowledge extends beyond the mere accumulation of information; it serves as a means for spiritual and moral transformation, leading human beings from a state of *jahl* toward true *islām* (submission).

The objective of knowledge in the Islamic framework is essentially encapsulated within the concepts of *khilāfah* (vicegerency of God on earth) and *'ibādah* (worship). According to Rahman (1984) in *Islam and Modernity*, the ultimate purpose of knowledge is to enable humans to fulfill their mandate as God's vicegerents by building a just and sustainable civilization while embodying total servitude to Him alone. Knowledge, therefore, must be oriented toward achieving *maṣlaḥah* (universal goodness) and realizing the

maqāṣid al-sharī'ah (the higher objectives of Islamic law), which include the preservation of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property. Islamic epistemology rejects the dichotomy between religious and worldly sciences because all forms of knowledge—so long as they do not contradict the principle of *tawhīd*—constitute God's signs (*āyāt*), whether textual (*qauliyyah*) or cosmic (*kauniyyah*), which lead to strengthened faith and righteous action. As affirmed in Qur'an 35:28, "Only those who have knowledge among His servants truly fear Allah." This verse underscores the causal relationship between true knowledge and piety, in which knowledge becomes the foundation of an Islamic civilization that is dignified, ethical, and beneficial for all of creation (*rahmatan lil-ālamīn*).

Islamic Epistemology and the Integration of Knowledge: Constructing a Holistic Intellectual Paradigm

Islamic epistemology offers a uniquely integrative foundation for constructing a scientific paradigm, rejecting the dichotomy between religious sciences (*naqliyah*) and rational or empirical sciences (*'aqliyah*). Unlike modern Western epistemology—which tends to be secular and separates religion from science—Islamic epistemology unites both domains within the framework of *tawhīd*. According to Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (1995), this integration is possible because Islam views all knowledge as originating from God, whether revealed through the Qur'an and the Sunnah (*āyāt qauliyyah*) or discovered through the observation of the natural world (*āyāt kauniyyah*). Ismail Raji al-Faruqi (1982), through the concept of the Islamization of knowledge, emphasizes the need to reconstruct modern sciences by integrating the principles of *tawhīd*, ensuring that knowledge is not value-free but bound to Islamic ethical values. This integrative perspective is reflected in the golden age of Islamic civilization, when scholars such as Ibn Sīnā and al-Bīrūnī saw no conflict between studying philosophy, medicine, and astronomy alongside Qur'anic sciences and jurisprudence, as all branches of knowledge were understood as manifestations of a unified divine truth.

The process of integrating knowledge within Islamic epistemology is not merely a superficial combination of religious and secular sciences; rather, it involves a profound ontological, epistemological, and axiological unification. Osman Bakar (1998), in *Classification of Knowledge in Islam*, explains that the hierarchy of knowledge in Islam is grounded in the principle of the unity of knowledge, where the *naqliyah* sciences occupy the highest level due to their certainty (*qaṭ'ī*) and function as the foundational framework for the *'aqliyah* sciences. This integrative approach requires every scientific discipline to operate within the framework of *tawhīd* and to be oriented toward achieving the *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*. In the contemporary context, the greatest challenge to implementing this integrative model is overcoming the legacy of epistemological dichotomy inherited from colonial educational systems. According to Alparslan Acikgenc (1996), the solution lies in developing a coherent "Islamic scientific paradigm," capable of formulating integrative methodologies for all fields of knowledge while addressing modern challenges without compromising Islamic identity. Thus, Islamic epistemology not only offers an alternative to the secularization of knowledge but also provides the foundation for building a holistic, ethical, and dignified intellectual civilization.

Islamic Epistemology and Its Contribution to the Building of Civilization

Islamic epistemology plays a central role in shaping the brilliance of classical Islamic civilization. Unlike Western epistemology, which tends to be secular and separates religious knowledge from the rational and empirical sciences, Islamic epistemology offers an integrative paradigm that unites revelation (*naql*) and reason (*'aql*) within a coherent intellectual framework. According to Osman Bakar (1998), this integration is reflected in a hierarchical classification of knowledge in which the revealed sciences occupy the highest position due to their certainty (*qaṭ'ī*), while rational and empirical sciences function as supporting tools for understanding the reality of the universe. This paradigm fostered the emergence of multidisciplinary Muslim scholars such as Ibn Sīnā, who mastered not only philosophy and medicine but also Qur'anic exegesis and jurisprudence. Their contributions to the advancement of various scientific disciplines—from mathematics, astronomy, and medicine to chemistry—are inseparable from an epistemological worldview that regards the entire cosmos as *āyāt Allāh* that must be studied and explored (Bakar, 1998). Thus, Islamic epistemology became the driving force behind a civilization that produced monumental scientific achievements.

The decline of this once-flourishing civilization, rooted in an integrative epistemological tradition, began with the weakening of the understanding of *tawhīd* in knowledge and the emergence of a dichotomy between religious and secular sciences. Nasr (1993), in his work *The Need for a Sacred Science*, explains that the secularization of knowledge in the Muslim world—largely influenced by Western intellectual colonialism—has uprooted knowledge from its spiritual and metaphysical foundations. As a result, knowledge has been stripped of its ethical grounding and its ultimate aims (*maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*), contributing to the multidimensional crises faced by contemporary Muslim societies. In response to these challenges, the urgent agenda is to revive Islamic epistemology through a relevant and constructive reconstruction. Ismail Raji al-Faruqi (1982) proposes the concept of the "Islamization of knowledge" as an epistemological initiative to break free from secular frameworks and restore knowledge to the domain of *tawhīd*. This project does not aim to reject modern scientific progress but to undertake a process of critical filtration and creative integration, allowing modern knowledge to be harmonized with Islamic values and worldview in order to build an alternative civilization that is humane, just, and spiritually grounded.

A. Amin Abdullah's Integration-Interconnection Paradigm: An Epistemological Bridge in Contemporary Islamic Studies

The integration-interconnection paradigm proposed by A. Amin Abdullah represents a sophisticated epistemological response to the failure of dichotomous approaches in contemporary Islamic studies. Unlike the Islamization of knowledge movement—which tends to operate within a hierarchical framework—Abdullah's paradigm introduces a "web model" that emphasizes reciprocal, horizontal, and dialogical relationships among various fields of knowledge. In his book *Islamic Studies di Perguruan Tinggi: Pendekatan Integratif-Interkonektif* (2006), Abdullah stresses that integration does not imply subordinating the natural and social sciences to the religious sciences, but rather constructing an equitable dialogue in which texts (*naql*) and contexts (*'aql*), revelation and social reality, mutually enrich each other. Drawing from contemporary philosophy of science—particularly hermeneutics and critical theory—this paradigm functions as an epistemological bridge connecting the classical Islamic intellectual

tradition with modern developments in the humanities and social sciences. Consequently, the integration–interconnection paradigm seeks to overcome the fragmentation of the three major epistemic domains often separated in Islamic scholarship: *bayānī* (textual), *burhānī* (rational), and *‘irfānī* (intuitive).

Furthermore, the implementation of this paradigm requires a multidisciplinary approach that organically links diverse fields of study. Abdullah (2012), in *Religion, Science, and Culture: An Integrated, Interconnected Paradigm of Science*, asserts that this paradigm is not only relevant for Islamic studies but also for the broader development of scientific knowledge. Through the concept of “epistemological triangulation”—which combines the *bayānī* approach for textual analysis, the *burhānī* approach for critical reasoning, and the *‘irfānī* approach for spiritual insight—this paradigm offers a comprehensive methodological framework for addressing the complexities of reality. Within higher education, the implementation of this paradigm requires curricular reconstruction that connects ethical–religious values with advancements in science and technology, while equipping students with the capacity for “epistemological *ijtihād*” in responding to contemporary issues. Abdullah’s paradigm thus not only reconstructs Islamic epistemology but also opens a more inclusive space for dialogue between the Islamic intellectual heritage and modern thought.

Contemporary Challenges in Islamic Epistemology

One of the most serious challenges in contemporary Islamic scholarship is the secularization of knowledge—namely, the detachment of knowledge from divine and spiritual values. Secularization, adopted from the modern Western paradigm, positions reason and empiricism as the sole valid sources of knowledge (*scientism*), thereby rendering revelation irrelevant in the process of knowledge production (Nasr, 1996). As a result, a dichotomy emerges between religious sciences (*‘ulūm al-dīn*) and worldly sciences (*‘ulūm al-dunyā*), even though in Islam all knowledge ultimately originates from Allah and serves the function of worship. Al-Attas (1995) asserts that secularization has “caused confusion in knowledge” by stripping it of *adab* and its proper orientation, which should guide humans toward the recognition of God. Thus, secularization shifts the purpose of knowledge from cultivating morally refined human beings to merely producing technology and material advancements devoid of spiritual orientation.

A second challenge is the fragmentation and overspecialization of knowledge, which has resulted in the loss of interconnectedness among disciplines within Islamic intellectual development. The modern educational model, with its rigidly disciplinary and sectoral structure, creates a disconnection between religious sciences and empirical sciences. Amin Abdullah (2003) describes this condition as “disciplinary egoism”—the arrogance of each discipline that considers itself the sole bearer of truth and refuses dialogue with others. This stands in contrast to the Islamic epistemological principle of *tawhīd* and integration, in which revelation, reason, experience, and intuition must interact harmoniously. Abdullah’s proposed solution is the Integration–Interconnection paradigm, an epistemic framework that unifies the social sciences, humanities, religious sciences, and natural sciences within a dialogical structure—ensuring that knowledge is not only logically valid but also ethically and spiritually meaningful.

A third and equally pressing challenge is the crisis of scholarly identity among Muslims, particularly in higher education institutions. Many Muslim students master modern science and

technology yet lack a grounding in ethical and spiritual values. This is evident in the phenomenon of moral disengagement—knowledge advances, but moral responsibility does not (Al-Faruqi, 1982). Conversely, many religious scholars possess mastery of sacred texts but struggle to engage with social, political, and technological realities. Farid Esack (2005) describes this phenomenon as a rupture between text and context: interpretation without reality, or reality without revelation. Epistemological integration is therefore necessary so that religious scholars develop scientific literacy and scientists develop spiritual literacy, creating a generation of ethical scholars capable of addressing contemporary challenges.

Thus, contemporary challenges in Islamic epistemology are not merely methodological but also ontological and axiological. The Muslim world must reconstruct its epistemology in a way that restores knowledge to its primary function: achieving human flourishing (*maṣlaḥah*) and bringing people closer to Allah. Without such reconstruction, Muslims will continue to be consumers of Western knowledge without becoming dignified producers of knowledge. For this reason, the integration of knowledge through the paradigms of *tawhīd* and Integration–Interconnection constitutes an urgent epistemological agenda for rebuilding Islamic civilization.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the discussions presented, it can be concluded that Islamic epistemology offers a holistic and integrative scientific paradigm, fundamentally different from the secular and fragmented epistemology of the West. Islamic epistemology is grounded in the principle of *tawhīd*, which views all forms of knowledge—whether *naqli* (revealed) or *aqli* (rational-empirical)—as originating from Allah SWT. Knowledge in Islam is not merely a cognitive product; it possesses a transcendental dimension that serves as a means of knowing Allah (*ma’rifatullah*), purifying the heart from ignorance, and establishing a dignified and just civilization (*rahmatan lil-‘alamin*).

Contemporary challenges such as the secularization of knowledge, the dichotomy of sciences, and the crisis of intellectual identity demand an epistemological response that is relevant and substantial. The paradigm of integration–interconnection proposed by A. Amin Abdullah offers a methodological solution by harmonizing the *bayani* (textual), *burhani* (rational), and *irfani* (spiritual) approaches within a multidisciplinary framework. The implementation of this paradigm in higher education—particularly through the reconstruction of an integrative curriculum—becomes a strategic agenda to produce scholars who master their disciplines while also possessing strong spiritual and ethical foundations.

Thus, the reconstruction of Islamic epistemology does not only address contemporary intellectual challenges but also serves as a foundation for the revival of a modern Islamic civilization capable of uniting scientific excellence with moral integrity.

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