

## **Myths and Religions in Javanese Cultural Axiology: A Case Study on Javanese Belief In Indonesia**

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**Abstract:** *The material object of this study is the Javanese culture concentrated on myths and religions while the formal object of this study is axiology. Axiology is often referred to as the philosophy of values. Meinong defines sources of values as something subjective, i.e. feeling (feeling). According to Ehrenfels, sources of values are objective in nature such as wishes and desires. Myths are either mythical or religious. Religions that are consistent with myths are a belief in the existence of supernatural power above human strength. In accordance with the axiological perspective, what are the values contained in religious myths, and what are their functions related to Javanese cultural values? To answer these problems, the hermeneutical and heuristic methods will be attempted to implement. The results of this study suggest that religious myths in Javanese culture contain the values of the creation, enforcement, and belief in the existence of supernatural forces. Religious myths serve as a processor of human values that according to the Javanese cultural values, consist of intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and togetherness values.*

**Keywords:** *Myths, Religions, Axiology, and Javanese Culture.*

### **1. Introduction**

The material object of this study is culture in which the concentration is put on the Myths and Religions that Javanese culture contains, while the formal object of this study is axiology. Axiology is often assumed as the

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philosophy of values. Some philosophers have argued that the source of values is feeling, meanwhile the others say that it is wishes. In everyday life, issues related to axiology always emerge, both the ones related to education, laws, and culture. Axiology as a branch of philosophy has been known in the nineteenth century. The meaning of values itself is a word covering all sorts of predicates; goodness, truth, beauty and religiosity.

Every culture is designed for the benefit of human life, the life of the society. Every nation always builds culture as humanitarian ideals that equip core values as their foundation. Javanese culture as the spirit characterizing its citizens contains mythical and religious contents that exist in its indigenous culture (Purwadi, 2007). The definitions of myths and religions in general are associated with the presence of the belief in the existence of supernatural forces above human strength.

Through culture, humans create a good living environment. Sutrisno (1993) expressed in general that if the future cultural design is supported by 'spiritual' value of humans, which are holy, noble, and which are not materialistic, thus cultural development towards supernatural values, i.e. the religious values, is desired. In order to apply these cultural values, it is necessary to design the right human culture (Sutrisno, 1993). It means that the design of the culture can develop the most essential human values, which are spiritual and altruist in nature.

In the attempt to design human culture, what are the understandings concerning the functions of myths and religions in Javanese culture? Seen from the perspective of axiology, what values are contained in it. These issues require answers that educate, in order that the understandings concerning myths and religions do not result in entrenched a priori reasoning. To answer these problems, the hermeneutic and heuristic methods try to formulate them.

## **2. Myths and Religions**

### **A. Concerning Myths**

Myths are stories that provide specific guidance and direction to a certain group of people. Those stories can either be told apart or expressed through art performances, for example through dances as well as *wayangkulit* (shadow puppet shows) or *wayang orang* (human puppet shows). The

stories illustrate the existence of symmetrical human life that is the presence of goodness nature and evil nature, life and death, or other stories telling about the world, the hereafter, marriage, fertility, and so forth (Purwadi, 2007; Sri, 1982). The contents of these stories carry more weight and in-depth than just ordinary events or past events that are merely entertaining.

According to Dhavamony (1973) as translated by A. Sudiarja, et.al. (2006), myths are derived the Greek "mythos", which is literally interpreted as stories or something that someone says, in a broader sense, it means a statement, a story or the plot of a drama. Furthermore, it is mentioned that myths are different from legends, although they both tell or narrate the history, i.e. a number of past events taking place that was distant and extraordinary. The actors in myths consist of gods or supernatural beings, while the actors in legends and fairy tales are heroes or magical animals (Dhavamony, 1973). Myths tell not only the origin of the world, animals, plants and humans but also the early events causing humans find out themselves as they are today; humans as parts of a community, humans who recognize the order, humans that can work well for life, and so forth (Dhavamony, 1973). Myths in the view of primitive society are very important. They are lived through rituals.

Religious journeys to discover and to learn the secrets of the nature in order to determine its origin may believe in the existence of events beyond human capabilities, reviving things forgotten or overlooked. Myths direct human life and human behavior patterns. They are a sort of guidance for human life wisdom. Through myths, humans can participate in responding to the problems and power of natural forces (Dhavamony, 1973; Muhni, 1994). They can take part in it so as to be a subject of the fully complete human beings, meaning that, one's religious experience may also appear in myths.

For social anthropologists such as Malinowski, the reality of certain myths has an active power in the life of primitive society (Malinowski, 1971). Myths do not merely mean a told story, they are the facts which existence is lived, and thus

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myths in the view of primitive society are the power for the mental life of the community itself(Malinowski, 1971). According to the psychologist Gustav Carl Jung, myths are psychological realities(Jung, 2011). Jung further states that they are expressions of archetypes which are primordial pictures of the collective unconsciousness(Jung, 2011). Thus, myths are not social and cultural agreements. They are realities inherited in certain thought patterns in certain cultures. Myths provide local color for a particular culture to the level of psychological consciousness and realities(Sudiarja, 2006). They always have something to do with the words and actions of supernatural creatures that show forces, ideals which should be imitated and repeated by human beings in their act of rituals.

We often get stuck at a misnomer when we assume myths a mythical world that includes primitive cultures. The term primitive is not appropriate because the stories in myths in fact also contain a deep philosophy, magical description and colorful customs(Sudiarja, 2006). The mythic tales and magical ceremonies are often perceived closer to our lives. Stories about the secret natural forces that sometimes spawn tensions between human beings and the power of natural forces itself. People sometimes respond to myths very romantically, but on the other hand the rationalists' attitude sometimes assumes the nature of mythic mind primitive and unscientific. Both of those romantic and rational views are actually equally important roles. According to van Peursen, the romantic and rationalist views are equally incomprehensible, that in the mythic world, a common human trait emerges(Peursen & Doeser, 1985). Even if the form of the culture and the way it works are different. Even in myths, we see how humans develop a strategy, set the relationship between the human and natural forces.

There are several kinds of myths(Malinowski, 1971; Sastrapratedja, 1983); creation myths, cosmogonic myths, origin myths, myths about the gods and supernatural creatures, myths related to the stories of human creation, and the like. In relation to the creation myths, this kind of myths tells about the creation of the universe or the world simply through the thought that the origin of the world is

from the creator god. Unlike the creation myths, in cosmogonic myths, the thought concerning the universe is characterized by the presence of religious philosophical speculation on the structure and the origin of every single thing.

It is not sufficient to regard the origin of the universe only as something created by gods, there are also elements of the primordial substances such as mythic stories that do not begin on rational things and in the cosmogonic myths a lot of speculation related to mythic stories about the way the nature present happens. This type of myths is in line with the origin myths; however these origin myths emphasize the presence of cosmogonic changes, periodic reforms so as to give birth rituals for the novelty of this universe. To complete the meaning of the myths that have been put forward, the primitive society believe that after creating the world and humans, there are also myths about gods and other supernatural creatures and these myths involve the previous myths. Broadly speaking, these myths emphasize harmony in life, for nature, humans, even animals.

According to Peursen, within the myths there are magical powers. These forces help and influence as well as control the universe and the life within it, without previously providing any information (Peursen, 1975). Considering this situation, it can be said that in this mythic life, there are two types of environment, the one which is sacred in nature and another one which is profane in nature.

Often, myths can also serve as an intermediary between humans and natural forces. The existence of the skeleton of an animal head mounted in the house, the use of decorations on tools or sharp weapons covered with tiger leather, and so on. They indicate as if supernatural forces exist although sometimes such items are regarded only as mere decoration.

Myths also contain similarities in terms of the functions of science and philosophy of the modern mind. Through myths, humans acquire knowledge or explanations about the origin of the world, the relationship among gods, or about

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crimes. Experts explain that the term cosmogony means stories about the origin of the heavens and the earth. Stories describing the origin of gods' existence are called theogony. Such stories are the ones that have been standardized and therefore can not be changed. These stories sometimes become more advanced, speculative even perverse. The point is that through the myths, humans actually gain knowledge concerning the existence of life forces, the ones that are able to protect and provide references to natural events.

In line with the view of vanPeursen about myths, Dhavamony argues that myths are stories told in order to establish a certain trust, serving as the starting event of a ceremony or rite, or as the model of permanent actors of both moral and religious behavior(Dhavamony, 1973). Myths in their relation to a certain society are usually a collection of stories woven into their cultural customs, beliefs, rituals, and sociality and morality(Dhavamony, 1973). Hence, myths mean their existence. The main function of myths is not to tell and to describe stories of the past, but rather to provide a basis on the origin of the past. Myths also serve to formulate confidence as well as to protect and to strengthen morality and to provide practical rules to be followed by humans. Another meaning of myths is the power that institutionalizes the society itself. Myths and religions as a unity play an important role in social life.

### **B. Definitions of Religions**

Religions in general are the belief in God, i.e. the belief in the existence of supernatural power above human strength. On the other hand, religion can also mean the existence of faiths either animism or dynamism even religions. One's piety can be obtained through religious education. Religions are known not only by the modern society but also by the indigenous people. Generally, they acknowledge a particular religion, for example they still worship the lightning, mountain, and so forth.

Humans need religions not only for a while, but for their entire life, not only for now or later. Humans in doing their activities need absolute safety, safety in totality, not only

physical safety but also safety in the broader sense, absolute happiness that can not be achieved in this life. In running their religious life (*bereligi*), humans actually experience feelings of fear as well, and in such condition of feeling fear, they do nothing. They, with all their self-consciousness, surrender with joy since such feeling of fear also contains important meaning that people live in consciousness. The word surrendering itself can not be interpreted or occur in fear. Running religious life as exemplified in the work entitled *KaryalengkapDriyarkara* (A Complete Work by Driyarkara) is as follows (Sudiarja, 2006),

*“Tan kenapisahsiyanglanratri  
Tansahaworwinor  
Angembaningembansalawase  
Amurukiosikenengmami  
Awisikwinisik  
Akehbektilulut”*

"God and I always unite,  
It is God that teach me how to move,  
I always listen to His promptings  
And I whisper  
Fill me  
With love and devotion"

A lyric quoted from Javanese literature as mentioned above, is a description of how humans conduct their religious life.

Conducting religious life does not only mean experiencing, but rather a deeper understanding, an understanding from the inside and an understanding gained after doing it. Experience here emphasises more on all activities, wisdom and activities in religious life. Religious activities involve many complex things. In these activities, people are able to express their wishes, regret, resignation and others. In the language of religion, religious experience can also be experienced by praying. Humans actively do their activities and they are aware of having communication with God, meaning that humans have purposes when they communicate with their God. What they communicate to

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God is based on their own personal self-awareness rather than on compulsion.

The experience of being religious (*mereligi*) as stated previously put its basis on the psychology of religion. On the other hand, there are several definitions of religions and being religious according to the views of the philosophers, among them are Durkhem and Bergson (Muhni, 1994). According to Durkheim, religions society life is something that can not be avoided. Religions in the simple society are social glue having a strong affinity (Durkheim, Cosman, & Cladis, 2001). Religious thought is characterized by the presence of dichotomous division of the world, namely the sacred world and the profane world. The meaning of the word sacred here has nothing to do with gods or the spirits (Durkheim et al., 2001). Anything considered sacred or sanctified is the meaning of the sacred world. There must be a distinction between the sacred and the profane. The displacement of sacred objects is not absolute because something sacred may change into something profane and vice versa. In relation to worship, according to Durkheim, it does not only mean the sign system that is physical in nature to translate a belief, but rather a collective way to re-create a certain belief eternally (Durkheim et al., 2001). This way is encouraged and raised more by collective life within individuals as members of society. Society creates a mental state towards the ideas of belief through symbolic images. The ideas of belief in their relation to the human mind have spawned a religion, which is the essential symptom not limited to the intellectual understanding that has been started by humans. In the opinion of Durheim, religions absolutely come from the society (Durkheim et al., 2001).

Bergson's view on religion is different from the one of Durheim's, though there are also similarities between these two views. Religions are static and dynamic in nature (Bergson, 1977). Static religion serves specifically as self-defense. Humans have intelligence, in addition to instinct and intuition. Imagination images can be arranged through human intelligence and the instincts attached to it altogether (Bergson, 1977). Bergson considers such benefits as "power to create myths", i.e. the power either to resist or

to counter intelligence forces committing violations or irregularities (Bergson, 1977). Religions basically are self-defense reactions against the intellectual power, this is what is referred to as static religions, i.e. natural religions resulted from humans' ability to create myths. On the other hand, the dynamic religions are the ones that base themselves on the revelation given by God to the Prophets. Bergson refers these as the mystics that are able to carry the divine message to mankind peace (Bergson, 1977).

The similarity of the views on religions for both the philosophers as described by Djuretno, are that the two views value humans' intellectual power (Muhni, 1994). In addition to the intelligence power, both Durheim and Bergson equally concerns about the conditions of the civil society that are not conducive. Differences in the way they view religions lies in the thing underlying religions themselves. For Durkheim, religions mean community, something secular, something natural and immanency. On the other hand, Bergson considers religions as something human, supernatural and transcendent.

### **3. Javanese Cultural Axiology**

Some axiological concepts made by the philosophers were derived from the debate between Meinong von Alexsius (1915) and Christian von Ehrenfels (Sudiarja, 2006). In the debate, there were two versions concerning the theory of values or axiology. According to Meinong (1915), feelings are the sources of values, while Ehrenfels considers wishes and desires as the sources of values (Sudiarja, 2006). Starting from the two views, they clearly indicate that values are subjective in one hand, and are objective on another hand. Related to the understanding concerning Javanese culture, the implementation of both subjective axiology and objective axiology are considered related in order that Javanese culture are able to be entrenched in accordance with the values that it contains, either the ones in the myths or the ones in the religions.

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Each culture contains its own values. To make the perceived values unthreateningly powerful and not destroy life, the culture should bring peace and happiness in life. Javanese culture is one of the wealth and the characteristics of a nation and at a certain time it is special pride for the values of life. As stated by JWM Bakker, culture is the creation, enforcement, and processing of human values (Bakker, 1984). This interpretation is a fundamental metaphysical sense, which explicitly expresses the reflection of the culture itself. Substantively, values are major supporting components of culture or civilization. It is impossible to set aside values within culture even though the culture itself changes in meaning due to the development.

To realize the values of Javanese culture, one of the ways that can be done by Javanese society is to build traditions. Ignas Kleden argues that by presupposing tradition and integration, the continuity of a certain cultural identity can be guaranteed, though its development can be assured (Kleden, 1987). Establishing the tradition in the level of cultural axiology means developing ideas expressing the most valuable things in society life, such as the nature of cooperation and mutual assistance.

The value of togetherness of Javanese society is reflected in religious rites, particularly in salvation which is a simple ceremonial banquet. This event is attended by the neighbors so as to intertwine harmony. It also results in the civilization of similarities in the degree, and the one that is also important, prayers chanted. In Javanese belief system in accordance with the culture of the religion followed, there are a variety of beliefs, concepts, views, and values. Such as the belief in the existence of Allah, the belief that Prophet Muhammad is the messenger of Allah, the belief in the other prophets, the belief in the existence of certain gods ruling the universe, and many more beliefs, concepts and views on something else. To maintain order in life, Javanese culture is expressed through various rituals.

For some of Javanese society, puppet shows contain sacred symbols, and the others consider them only as the expression of being happy. It is commonly found that the Javanese society would also love to identify them using

certain puppet characters (Sastroamidjoyo, 1962). Even in order to discover the appreciation of Javanese society towards the divine, in the play of Dewa Ruci, the essence of the wisdom of Javanese society's life is presented. This story is also often called "mistik Bima Suci (the mystical holly Bima)" (Sastroamidjoyo, 1962). In addition, the central figure of this play is Bima. The important sides of the philosophical teachings of Javanese culture associated with the virtues in life and the life of the Javanese expressions such as "*Sura Dira Jayaningrat, lebur Dening Pangastuti*" mean that self-control can be achieved by not to hold grudges, a sense of self-submission to God, justice is in His hands (Sastroamidjoyo, 1962). Those can be described as in any puppet characters, specifically an evil giant that will always be controlled by a knight who always does something good.

Javanese culture is famous for its "*Kawruh* and *Piwulang*" which in the axiological perspective means a way of life that is a noble vehicle containing philosophical values (Purwadi, 2007; Sastroamidjoyo, 1962). Those values can be found especially in the lyrics of *tembang Mocopat* (traditional Javanese songs) that carry a moral message to the public. *Piwulang* or wisdom teachings living in Javanese culture include: Javanese literature, customs, ceremonies, shadow puppets, and other forms of arts.

### **Religious Myths**

We have already discussed the details on religions and myths. Therefore, this part will lead to the definitions of religious myths. For religious people, myths are indeed understood as the delivery of a particular meaning, they also open the opportunity in social actions and religious beliefs. Myths have cosmological relationships which tell how everything happens. The religious dimension of the myths becomes clear when seen as myths that recreate or change people to whom these myths are communicated and change their acceptance capability to carry out tasks according to the newly acquired status.

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In religious myths, myths are understood as something having particular rescuing power. Without myths, people will feel weak or do not have the strength to carry out tasks in the social status. Outside the religious myths, we also recognize the existence of evil myths or immoral myths. The examples of immoral myths are the one telling the stories of humans sucking another human's blood, eating flesh of another human, and a child marrying his/her parents, all of those myths are considered having powerful values if exercised. Such belief is wrong, even are in the immoral category.

A religious myth is neither intellectual contemplation nor a matter of reasoning. Religious myths are more a mental and spiritual orientation used by humans to communicate with The Divine. For example, concerning the creation myths which is the primitive society does not regard as a mean to discover the first cause, primary principles and the basis for the world and human existence. Religious myths express the recognition, guarantees for both human and world existence, as revealed in the symbolic formula by Dhavamony(Dhavamony, 1973). These religious symbols appear or come from different cultures of human needs to live in an ideal world, where people can take part in the life model of gods and supernatural creatures at the beginning of all time, when the universe was born, and to imitate their speech and actions to experience life at the beginning of all things. Religious people realize that the universe means humans' order, and comes from the actions of the divine supernatural creatures.

The religious aspect or the religious expression, according to Eliade, must interpret symbols and myths as religious expressions(Sastrapratedja, 1983). In Eliade's book entitled *The Sacred and the Profane*, Eliade's views on homo religious state that homo religious is the type of humans that live in a sacred nature which is full of religious values and can enjoy the existing sacredness appeared in the universe, natural materials, natural vegetation, animal and human (Sastrapratedja, 1983). This experience and appreciation of the Holiness will further influence, shape and determine their styles and ways of life. Eliade further confirms Eliade's

views on homo religious compared to homo non-religious, or the irreligious people, i.e. the modern society living in the world that has been made sacred, as the way it is, without the perceived and experienced sacredness if you see this kind of life, then life will not be sacred anymore, it changes into the profane life (Sastrapratedja, 1983).

The religious view about the world is the world it lives in, the environment where it lives, therefore it is often referred to as the cosmos, which has been organized and formed. It is not the outside world that is not affordable, which remains chaotic and disorganized. The religious world is the orderly world created by the gods in the ancient time in the existing myths.

The meaning that religious myths contain is far deeper than the interpretation and definitions of myths as stories or fairy tales. Religious myths are understood as a story telling the truth and are based on scientific truth. It is true that religious myths are not derived from scientific reasoning in their attempt to find the truth and this is what the most fundamental in religious myths, i.e. myths that have power to reveal the salvation of religious humans within their spiritual. Those matters are different from religious rites. Religious rites are framed in collective identification of a certain group. Myths and rites are dynamic forces which manifestation makes the religious humans able to live the reality of life.

Religious myths in human life can be traced to the development of human life, from the pre-life to life, from life to death. The displacement of these life stages is a system usually characterized with the initiation consisting of a number of rites and oral teachings. The initiation held aims to make the social and religious of a certain person better. For example, we recognize the ceremony, "*tedhaksiten*" or the moment when a baby's feet touches the ground for the first time, growing up, marriage or death. In the views of the homo religious, the conditions that humans change better do not happen on their own. Homo religious realizes that humans change the way they are now because of the events that had happened in the past, as depicted in the myths. For homo religious, myths are stories that are considered true

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and indisputable. What people have experienced in this life is all the events narrated in the myths, even though those myths are spoken in nature, but the truth of these stories have a religious value which the truth is believable.

Following Eliade's thinking about homo religious, the attitudes and methods to study religions are learned. The description of homo religious shows that life means always being faithful to the Holy and believing that in this world there is an Absolute Reality. There are abilities beyond humans' ability. The attitudes and methods in the study of religions that Eliade uses are being careful, being open and sympathy, as well as being respectful in underlying any work performed (Sastrapratedja, 1983). Such things can also be used as a live example in religious myths, which means continuing appreciating the enjoyment of creation which is the basis for all the existence. It can also be said that religious myths do not merely mean explaining the origin of the world or the stages in life. The main objective of the religious myths is the embodiment of what really "Exists", and how to live up the holy reality, in addition to the initiation as what has been stated previously. In the religious myths, people do not only tells about the existing events but also how to retell them.

Still in accordance with Eliade's view on myths, according to Dhavamony, myths are old stories about the origins of the world or the things in the world (Dhavamony, 1973). The characters in myths are gods or something supernatural and heroes having supernatural power. Community or tribal members assume their myths as the truest of all true stories. The truthfulness of the stories is presented many times by the fact that activating myths in the form of rituals enable them to rule over the nature. In addition, the ritual repetition of the stories keeps the myths alive in their minds and souls. The adherents of the myths seem to categorize myths into two kinds of myths or different stories. First, the stories related to events taking place in their daily life. Second, the stories relating to events taking place during the metallurgy period which sometimes is referred to as "the past".

Eliade's view about myths as a picture that represents the truest truth among the true truths need to be reflected because for people living by believing in myths, the questions concerning the appropriateness of a story, belief or an idea about something is not relevant. It means that it does not mean that them believing in myths are unable to raise questions about the meaning of their myths, they do know how to do that (Sastrapratedja, 1983). The discussion of the questions about the meaning of myths often leads to an important marker of the myths for them following the myths. But the questions that they never raise are the basic questions on whether the myths themselves are true or not.

The questions above are philosophical in nature juxtaposing with the thoughts of logos which are straight but dry and abstract, which are different from the minds of the myths that is associative and use different symbols of life. As stated by A. Sudiardja, in simple religions, myths are sacred stories told repeatedly by the community leaders verbally (Sudiarja, 2006). Those myths are accepted spontaneously, naturally and hereditary. It was because the writing culture had not played a role in a social discourse. Furthermore, it is stated that when the culture of writing had become a social discourse, the modern religions started emerging along with their sacred books which replace the role of myths and sacred stories of the past. These holy books were derived from revelation, and therefore they are not synonymous with myths.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Religious Myths in Javanese Cultural Axiology, as described previously, it can be concluded that: both myths and religions in Javanese culture discuss the existence of belief, and forces beyond human ability. Among the functions of myths, it may be mentioned that both the sacred and profane myths can awaken and support humans' life. On the other hand, myths deal with life-saving expressed through certain rituals. Philosophically, myths contain values both as knowledge about cosmogony and theogony. Such knowledge is useful to maintain the harmony of life. In relation to the functions of religions,

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humans believing in religions means having activities involving a lot of complex things, within which they can express their understanding, regret, resignation and so on. Religion can be literally described as praying or worshipping, appealing to God the Almighty that has everything.

In the perspective of Javanese cultural axiology, religious myths contain some values powerful in cultural life. The values of creation and control as well as the processing of human values exist. All the values can be found in Javanese culture. The important point of the philosophical teachings of Javanese culture is the virtues in living the life. These values are expressed through customs, ceremonies, Javanese literature, and other existing forms of arts, such as the shows of shadow puppets and *mocopatan*. The values of togetherness of Javanese society appear in religious rites. The study of Javanese culture is the study of the consciousness in maintaining life wisdom. Javanese cultural values also cover IQ, EQ and spiritual values.

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