


K-Pop Fans Reading Anti-K-Pop: Religion, Identity and Subjectivity

Okta Nurul Hidayati^{1*} 



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*Corresponding Author:

Okta Nurul Hidayati,
UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta,
Indonesia
oktanurulhidayati@gmail.com

About Authors:

¹ Okta Nurul Hidayati,
UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta,
Indonesia

Abstract

The expansion of K-pop fandom among young *Muslim* women in Indonesia has unfolded alongside the rise of digital *da'wa* that frames K-pop as a moral risk. This study examines how anti-K-pop *da'wa* texts construct the figure of the ideal *Muslimah* and how fans negotiate that framing in everyday practice. Using a qualitative-interpretive approach, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of the book *Pernah Tenggelam* was combined with in-depth interviews with three *Muslim* women fans. The findings identify a configuration of nomination/predication/legitimation and intensification strategies that normalizes a binary opposition between the ideal *Muslimah* and the *K-waver*, which calls for identity repositioning. On the reception side, readers are not passive; they enact contextual moral reasoning through four tactics: content filtering, mapping private-public spaces, aesthetic reading (music/choreography rather than celebrity cult), and management of engagement intensity. These practices yield three dynamic subject positions: selective opposition, conditional co-existence, and hybridization, demonstrating the possibility of coexisting piety and popular pleasure. Conceptually, the study enriches scholarship on the encounter between popular culture and the politics of piety; methodologically, it demonstrates the integration of CDA with audience-reception data; and practically, it recommends dialogic-empathetic *da'wa* design and strengthened media literacy.

Keywords: K-pop; *Muslim* women; Post-Islamism; Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA); audience reception

Introduction

Over the past decade, K-pop has transformed from entertainment into a cultural infrastructure shaping the everyday practices of Indonesian youth (Y. Kim, 2021), including *Muslim* women (*Muslimah*), through consumption, community, and participatory networks in digital spaces (Williams and Kamaludeen, 2017). Fandom has grown so big and visible that it has made its way into the public sphere (Lewis, 2003), including politics, where fandom-style strategies were used to get Gen-Z voters (Muhyi and Sinha, 2025). At the same time, digital *da'wa* discourses that frame K-pop as a moral risk for young *Muslimah* have intensified in tandem with currents of digital conservatism that reinforce a *halal-haram* binary and construct the ideal *Muslimah* through norms of

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embodiment, dress, and social relations (Juliansyahzen, 2023; Oh, 2017). In this landscape, K-pop in Indonesia is not merely entertainment but a site where identity, affect, and solidarity are negotiated concerning local religious norms (Lee et al., 2020).

A substantial body of work has mapped intersections between *Hallyu* and *Muslim* youth piety in Indonesia: Yoon (2019) documents the creative, everyday negotiations of *Muslimah* fans; Oh (2017) highlights the entanglement of *Hallyu* consumption with religious and gendered contexts; and Muhyi and Sinha (2025) document the incorporation of K-pop fandom strategies in electoral campaigns. On religious discourse, Ansor (2016) delineates post-Islamism as the contentious public Islamic sphere in the post-*Reformasi* period, while Yusuf (2025) analyzes *da'wa* communication among urban *Hijrah* communities targeting youth. At the platform level, Juliansyahzen (2023) identifies the ideologization/commodification of *Hijrah* and the predominance of conservative discourse on social media. Nevertheless, few studies simultaneously connect Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of anti-K-pop *da'wa* texts (books/sermons) with the reception of *Muslimah* readers through in-depth interviews; the literature also notes a scarcity of micro, context-sensitive analyses of the religious subjectivity of K-pop fans (Mulya, 2021). This study addresses that gap by integrating CDA and the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) on *da'wa* texts and digital artifacts with qualitative reception data to map the construction and negotiation of the ideal *Muslimah*.

Positioned in this gap, the article combines CDA-DHA to unpack discursive strategies in anti-K-pop *da'wa* texts, together with an audience-reception perspective to understand readers' agency in responding to, filtering, and reframing normative messages (Samaie and Malmir, 2017). The approach is enriched by findings on the commodification and ideologization of *Hijrah* in social media, namely, how popular religious authorities leverage digital platforms to circulate conservative discourse that condenses moral boundaries through highly shareable communicative styles (Juliansyahzen, 2023). Accordingly, the study treats *da'wa* as a textual product and a discursive practice embedded in social conditions that enable circulation and negotiation (Ansor, 2016).

Operationally, the study aims to explain how anti-K-pop discourse frames K-pop and constructs the figure of the ideal *Muslimah* through nomination/predication and moral legitimation; and to analyze how *Muslimah* K-pop fans negotiate, rationalize, or resist that framing in their experiences as religious youth in Indonesia's digital public sphere. Conceptually, the study contributes to debates on the encounter between popular culture and the politics of piety through a reception lens emphasizing subjectivity and identity hybridity; empirically, it offers an Indonesian case that links textual analysis of *da'wa* with readers' narratives; and methodologically, it demonstrates the integration of CDA with qualitative reception data to map relations among discursive production, circulation, and meaning-making.

Literature Review

The Korean Wave (*Hallyu*) has evolved from its early focus on television dramas into a global cultural strategy that positions K-pop as its primary expansion engine, particularly in Southeast Asia (J. Kim and Kwon, 2022). Within this strategy, Indonesia is viewed as a new hub of fandom owing to its vast and loyal fan base, where K-pop consumption has fused with the everyday practices of youth. The scale of this phenomenon is confirmed by data showing a surge in *Hallyu* club membership across *Muslim*-majority countries, with Indonesia ranking first, from roughly 232,000 members in 2014 to more than 853,000 in 2016 (Oh, 2017). This mass fandom operates in a digital public sphere that enables large-scale participatory practices and can even be mobilized for political ends, as seen in the adoption of K-pop-style campaign tactics during presidential elections to reach Gen-Z voters (Muhji and Sinha, 2025). Due to its size and prominence, which is largely due to female fans, this fandom has inevitably sparked resistance and counter-discourses, particularly at intersections with religious norms (Sun et al., 2023). Consequently, K-pop in Indonesia transcends mere entertainment, serving as a vital arena for the negotiation of identity, emotion, and solidarity (Yoon, 2019).

Evaluatively, K-pop fandom functions as a fanscape: an arena in which members not only consume popular culture but also actively produce meaning, build communities, and fashion new cultural identities (Ranieses, 2024). Their digital participation, such as translating idol fandom tactics into political support, demonstrates that popular culture operates as a powerful communicative device for mediating social affiliation and reshaping public imagery (Lim, 2022). These practices form an intense affective ecology that, in turn, strengthens a sense of togetherness among fans. However, when the pleasures of popular culture intersect with the growing politics of piety in the public sphere, they enter a complex arena of moral contestation (Oh, 2017). This configuration is particularly pronounced in Indonesia, as the post-*Reformasi* public sphere has experienced heightened visibility of Islam in popular culture and media (Ansor, 2016).

In post-*Reformasi* Indonesia, Post-Islamism does not signify the decline of Islam; instead, it indicates vigorous disputes within the Islamic public sphere, where various entities utilize Islam as a basis for legitimacy (Qodir, 2023). This landscape includes things like women's activism and piety movements, as well as the growing presence of Islam in popular culture, like movies, music, and fashion (Beta, 2019). In parallel, social media has become a digital public sphere where religious discourses, especially *Hijrah*, are produced, disseminated, and contested at scale (Hidayat et al., 2020). Urban *Hijrah* communities skilfully leverage digital platforms to package *da'wa* in adaptive and appealing ways to youth, ultimately fostering lifestyle shifts and greater religious participation (Yusuf, 2025). Consequently, Post-Islamism in Indonesia is far from monolithic; it encompasses a spectrum of expressions of piety that intersect closely with popular-culture consumption and digital citizenship practices (Juliansyahzen, 2023).

A closer evaluation shows that popular digital religious discourse often constructs the figure of the ideal *Muslimah* through idioms of embodied piety, dress choices, and social relations, frequently within a conservative narrative. At the same time, the public sphere in which such discourse circulates also serves as an arena for women's activism advocating more egalitarian interpretations of Islam, indicating that questions of who counts as a proper *Muslimah* are neither singular nor settled but constantly negotiated (Hasan, 2009). Within this context, popular culture such as K-pop can be positioned by some as a moral risk, while for others it is a space of self-expression and affect negotiated by fans. Hence, a shift is needed from a simplistic Islam vs. K-pop dichotomy toward understanding how individuals, especially young *Muslim* women, interpret and filter the competing normative messages and pleasures of popular culture they encounter.

Contemporary reception studies conceive audiences as active agents who produce meaning based on their experiences and social positions. This view accords with ethnographic findings showing that *Muslim* fans in Indonesia creatively combine piety with a love for K-pop (Yoon, 2019). To analyze counter-discourses such as anti-K-pop narratives, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), especially the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), helps map discursive strategies like nomination (constructing in-groups/out-groups) and predication (attributing positive/negative traits) that are commonly used to frame the other (Samaie and Malmir, 2017). Studies indicate that patterns of negative framing of Islam and *Muslims* in traditional media often become more extreme on social media, which functions as an online amplifier and produces more substantial polarizing effects (Törnberg and Törnberg, 2016). Thus, analyzing anti-K-pop discourse through DHA helps identify how actors and fandom practices are framed within particular moral categories, while viewing readers as active subjects enables analysis of how fans respond to and negotiate those frames.

Synthesizing these three strands, this article shows that K-pop in Indonesia is a complicated place where the joys of popular culture and the politics of piety that are typical of Post-Islamism come together. The extensive, interconnected nature of fandom offers emotional support to fans while concurrently eliciting *da'wa* responses aimed at redefining moral boundaries, particularly concerning the portrayal of the ideal *Muslimah*. Within an ecology of discourse that frequently produces oppositional narratives via nomination and predication, fans face frames that tend toward polarization. Nonetheless, as active agents, they do not merely accept these frameworks; rather, they evaluate them through the lenses of experience, community, and individual values. Consequently, the study transcends a mere Islam versus K-pop dichotomy, advancing an analysis of agency and identity hybridity within Indonesia's digital public sphere.

Method

This study adopts a qualitative–interpretive approach with an exploratory case-study design to examine how anti-K-pop discourse is produced in *da'wa* texts and negotiated

by *Muslimah* fans in Indonesia. We employ Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), specifically the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), to connect the textual level (e.g., books and social-media posts) with discursive practices (*da'wa* networks) and broader social practices (post-Islamist politics of piety). CDA is paired with an experienced literature technique to capture audience meaning-making, enabling a coherent tracing of relations among text, readers, and context. This framework is selected to address how anti-K-pop discourse constructs the ideal *Muslimah* and how fans respond to, bargain with, or reframe that construction.

The data comprise three components. *First*, primary texts, including the book *Pernah Tenggelam* by Fuadh Naim and relevant public materials such as transcripts of anti-K-pop sermons. *Second*, digital artifacts, namely social-media posts from related preachers and *da'wa* communities. *Third*, reception data from in-depth interviews with three *Muslimah* fans selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected via semi-structured interviews, audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim. All procedures followed strict ethical protocols, including informed consent, anonymity via pseudonyms, and secure data storage. Due to the limited number of participants, the study emphasizes narrative depth to examine illustrative variations in subject positions rather than statistical generalization.

Data analysis proceeded in five systematic stages to ensure transparency and depth. *First*, pre-processing, archiving, and normalizing all textual and digital materials. *Second*, segmentation and codebook, segmenting texts and developing a codebook that integrates deductive categories from CDA-DHA with inductive codes emerging from interview data. *Third*, thematic coding, applying thematic coding across the whole corpus to map patterns and tensions between the produced discourse and readers' reception experiences. *Fourth*, multi-level CDA-DHA reading, analyzing textual features (lexicon, metaphor), discursive practices (medium, audience), and social practices (relations to politics of piety and gender). *Fifth*, validation, triangulation of data sources (book, social media, interviews), peer debriefing, and reflexive memoing are used to interrogate the researcher's positionality throughout interpretation.

Results and Discussion

Counter-Fandom Discourse: Anti-K-Pop *Da'wa* in the *Pernah Tenggelam* Book

Analysis of the *Pernah Tenggelam* book shows discursive strategies that systematically construct K-pop as a moral and spiritual threat to *Muslim* identity. This discourse aligns with a stance of complete opposition commonly adopted by conservative *da'wa* groups; K-pop is positioned as a pleasure that leads one away from piety and thus ought to be abandoned (Mulya, 2021). The delegitimation of fandom is built through an irreconcilable binary between *Muslim* identity and Korean culture deemed misaligned with religious norms (Isa and Reissner-Roubicek, 2024); the construction of the other is reinforced by statements that the two should not walk hand in hand, a pattern frequently

used to police in-group/out-group boundaries (Samaie and Malmir, 2017). The *Dehallyusinasi 2.0* event opens at the performative level with Korean greetings/singing, humor, and up-to-date idol references that bind audience affect (Field Observation, 2024). The audience is dominated by *Muslimah* women wearing large hijabs and community identifiers. At the same time, the ticket package features religious–environmental branding like tote bags and slogans that strengthen moral legitimation and in-group formation (Field Observation, 2024). At the platform level, a related *da’wa* account underscores this persuasive frame through the tagline ‘*Embrace without hitting*’, provide solutions without berating. Accordingly, the book’s narrative operates as an ideological instrument that consolidates anti-K-pop discourse and culminates in a call for identity repositioning (Juliansyahzen, 2023).

The rhetoric can be read as a discursive practice aimed at hegemonizing meanings of piety in the Islamic public sphere (Hasan, 2009). Using the CDA–DHA framework, one observes nomination (in-group ideal *Muslim/Muslimah* vs. out-group *K-wavers*), predication (negative attributions such as hedonistic, not *shar’i*), legitimation (appeals to authority/popular preachers), and intensification/mitigation to underline the urgency of *Hijrah* (Juliansyahzen, 2023). The discourse also produces a moral-panic framing, whereby K-pop is represented as a threat to moral order, and digital platforms often act as an online amplifier that replicates/sharpens such framing (Törnberg and Törnberg, 2016). Its effectiveness lies in offering identity certainty amid post-Islamism’s plural and competitive dynamics (Bayat, 2013). Thus, the text functions as a spiritual guide and a political instrument of discourse seeking to dominate interpretations of what it means to be a *Muslimah* in an era of global popular culture (Handayani, 2021).

Reader Responses: Negotiating Identity among *Muslimah* K-Pop Fans

Building on the textual analysis, the interview data show that the anti-K-pop narrative is not received passively but is met with negotiation, resistance, and diverse forms of subjectivity. Informant N rejects moral reductionism: “*Watching dramas does not define that people who watch Korean dramas are people who lack religion*” (Interview N, 2024), and affirms a filtering stance: “*What I can take I take and what I cannot I throw away*” (Interview N, 2024). Informant IR stresses aesthetic–performative appreciation by saying, “*The song is good and their behaviour is funny,*” while also saying, “*Before, I used to stalk often; now it is rare*” (Interview IR, 2024). Informant R exhibits fluctuating commitment: “*Sometimes I can recognize it, but at other times it resurfaces*” (Interview R, 2024). These responses, which range from critical resistance to moderation to oscillation, show that the audience is active and filters messages through their own experiences, communities, and values (Yoon, 2019).

Table 1.

The informant's response before reading the *Pernah Tenggelam* book

No	Book Topic	Informant 1 (N)	Informant 2 (IR)	Informant 3 (R)
1	Idolization of K-Pop	What I like the most is that through drama we can imagine the culture, characters, and products produced from that era.	The song is good and their behaviour is funny.	I prefer drama, sometimes there are sad and funny... the actors are handsome
2	Boy hug scene with boy (shown with picture)	There should be a limit if it is like that in my opinion is not normal.	If it is really intimate, it is a bit strange, but if it is a brother, that's okay	-
3	Benefits of watching Korean dramas	back again to ourselves we want to return to which position. For me and other friends who take English literature or education, it will provide very useful lessons.	Refreshing	I just want to watch it when I have free time, if I do not, I do not watch it
4	The individualist attitude spans <i>Hallyu</i>	Personally, I do not think so, because the individual is a choice. so maybe one day he will break away from his individualism or become a social person and I think he is also too bigoted if we associate religion with someone's change.	Agree, because if you are alone you have your own activities like watching dramas or videos	Agree, because usually a person when he is alone he must take advantage of his free time by looking for activities that are useful for him
5	Opinions about drama lovers	Watching dramas does not define that people who watch Korean dramas are people who lack religion, it does not define that they lack faith. If it is a religious issue, as long as we do not follow the culture, and take lessons and goodness from it, why not. God also commands us to learn. And I think learning can come from anywhere, if there is such a medium we can use it.	It depends on the person, if you think it will be imitated or become a new culture, you cannot. But if you take it, it is fine. Like, adding to the spirit of the songs are motivating or something. I have learned the alphabet even though I did not continue.	Actually, I understand that watching it does not necessarily have any benefits, but that lust is... it is hard to reduce.

Note. Pseudonyms are used (N, IR, R). Responses were collected before reading the *Pernah Tenggelam* book and come from semi-structured interviews (Indonesian), transcribed verbatim and rendered in English with minimal edits for readability. Ethics: informed consent, anonymization via pseudonyms, secure data storage. Source: Author's interviews (2024).

Table 2.*The informant's response after reading the Pernah Tenggelam book*

No	Book Topic	Informant 1 (N)	Informant 2 (IR)	Informant 3 (R)
1	Idolization of K-Pop	Actually, I am not a fan of Korean dramas as told in this book, I have never posted photos of who.. So what I can take I take and what I cannot I throw away, it does not affect my faith	Before, I used to stalk often, now it is rare because I do not have time and I'm not in the mood	I have read about the prohibition, sometimes I can realize it but sometimes it comes back again
2	Boy hug scene with boy (shown with picture)	-	-	If it is me, I would not be affected, but maybe the other people could be
3	Benefits of watching Korean dramas	back again to ourselves we want to return to which position. For me and other friends who take English literature or education, it will provide very useful lessons.	-	Back to the person
4	The individualist attitude spans <i>Hallyu</i>	..there are indeed scenes that are not in accordance with Islam but they also show that life has principles, and the way we can help. For example, drama entitled Teacher Kim teaches that all patients are equal. When we learn about the culture of other countries we must be open minded, respect each culture that exists	If follow their culture, I can not	If I watch a drama, I just watch it but come back again, do you want to take advantage of it or what?
5	Opinions about drama lovers	The point of the book is not to exaggerate anything. If I, as a consumer, I will admit that the culture is different so it is just a kind of entertainment, we also would not forget to pray on time.	If they do plastic surgery I do not like it	Often get satire from friends why do you like Korea

Note. Responses were collected after reading *the Pernah Tenggelam* book using the same interview protocol and pseudonyms (N, IR, R). Table 2 preserves the same topic prompts as Table 1 to enable before/after comparison; statements of change are self-reported. Ethics: informed consent, anonymization, secure storage. Source: Author's interviews (2024).

Further analysis emphasizes that fans' responses constitute contextual moral reasoning rather than mere acceptance or rejection. Informant N intentionally distinguishes Korean cultural landscapes from local norms when discussing sensitive topics, opposing the universalization of *da'wa* claims; Informant IR interprets the book mainly as a warning against excess (while maintaining fandom); Informant R exhibits a discipline-relapse pattern typical of platformed culture (Interviews N/IR/R, 2024). This negotiation corresponds with fandom studies that perceive fans as agents who construct

hybrid identities, merging piety with popular enjoyment, rather than conforming to a singular discourse (Mulya, 2021). Socially, decisions are influenced by relational factors (parents/peers) rather than solely by doctrinal adherence, highlighting everyday contingencies that defy simplification (Oh, 2017).

Subjectivity and Agency: Reaffirming Hybrid Identity

The synthesis of discourse analysis of the *Pernah Tenggelam* book by Fuadh Naim and reception data reveals a gap between prescribed and lived religious identities. On one side, the book advances a rigid discourse of exclusion, constructing a binary opposition between the ideal *Muslimah* and the *K-waver* (Samaie and Malmir, 2017). Conversely, informants' experiences show inclusive and hybrid practices: they weave piety with fandom pleasures through selective uptake, contextual delimitation, and value redefinition (Mulya, 2021). Moments of negotiation are evident, for instance, when informants respond to warnings on sensitive issues by emphasizing self-defence and meaning-filtering rather than adopting absolute prohibitions (Interviews N/IR/R, 2024). Thus, textual clashes do not automatically erase pleasure; they are redirected into a contextual ethics of consumption.

These negotiation mechanisms can be understood through subjectivity and hybrid identity lenses: fans do not submit to a single discourse but exercise agency to enable the co-existence of piety and pleasure. This negotiation unfolds within a fanscape, where communities and platforms facilitate joint meaning-making and social support for take–reject–adapt strategies. In CDA terms, polarizing nomination/predication is met with reframing, idols are repositioned as aesthetic objects (music/choreography), while moral standing is safeguarded through self-regulation. The result is a contextual moral rationality that combines ethical demands with the effect of popular culture (Farias et al., 2021).

This phenomenon cannot be separated from Indonesia's post-Islamist landscape, in which the public sphere is an arena of contestation among diverse expressions of piety. Fans' critical responses to anti–K–pop discourse signal a shift in authority in the digital era: preachers no longer monopolize authority. However, it is negotiated by connected, informed audiences (Juliansyahzen, 2023). The findings show how global popular culture, such as K-pop, catalyzes young Muslims, especially women, to participate in public debates on morality, gender, and Islamic identity. The principal contribution is to demonstrate that, amid conservative dominance and platform amplification, there exist grassroots practices of agency that affirm the possibility of hybrid, critical, and modern Muslim identities.

Conclusion

The findings show that anti–K–pop discourse in *Pernah Tenggelam* book operates through a configuration of nomination/predication/legitimation strategies that produce

a stark opposition between the ideal *Muslimah* and *K-wavers*, reinforced by intensification of the urgency to *Hijrah* and replicated across media, book text, onstage performativity, and digital *da'wa* platforms. On the reception side, *Muslimah* fans are not passive recipients; they enact contextual moral reasoning through four main practices: content filtering, mapping of private–public spaces, aesthetic re-framing (music/choreography rather than celebrity cult), and management of engagement intensity. These practices yield three dynamic subject positions, selective opposition, conditional coexistence, and interlacing/hybridization, which underscore that piety and popular pleasure are not inherently mutually exclusive but are negotiated across context, community, and lived experience.

Conceptually, the study contributes to scholarship on the encounter between popular culture and the politics of piety by proposing a model of piety–pleasure negotiation pivoting on three levers: personal filters applied to content and context; spatial mapping (private/semi-private/public) as a tactic for maintaining dignity; and aesthetic construal that separates appreciation of the work from doctrinal claims on identity. Theoretically, integrating CDA-DHA with an audience-reception perspective enriches readings of gendering piety within contemporary platform ecologies; methodologically, combining a three-part corpus (text, stage, platform) with in-depth interviews demonstrates how to link discursive-strategy analysis with micro-evidence from readers' experiences. In practical terms, youth-oriented *da'wa* communication is likely to be more productive when it avoids totalizing moral panic and adopts dialogic-empathetic framing (recognizing audience agency, offering calibrated guidance), accompanied by media-literacy interventions in schools/communities to strengthen skills in filtering content and interrogating authority in digital spaces. At the platform/community policy level, the findings indicate the need for curation guidelines that reduce polarization and foster safe, dignified cross-position dialogue.

This study is limited by its small sample, narrow platform, and temporal coverage, and a localized/networked focus that does not fully represent Indonesia's demographic diversity or fandom subcultures; it also bears the researcher's positionality, mitigated through reflexive memoing, peer debriefing, and brief member checking. Future research could expand participants (across cities, gender, degrees of religiosity); conduct longitudinal pre/post exposure studies of *da'wa* discourse; compare cross-platform (YouTube/Instagram/TikTok) and cross-text *da'wa* corpora; and combine computational methods with digital ethnography to map shifts in framing and reception over time. Replication across *Muslim*-majority/minority settings and comparison with pro-fandom religious discourses would sharpen our understanding of how *Muslim* youth negotiate piety, pleasure, and cultural citizenship in the platform era. The study thus closes by affirming that reader agency is key to understanding Islam-K-pop dynamics in Indonesia, not as a dichotomy, but as an ongoing process of hybrid identity formation that is reflective and responsible.

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