Sharia and Islamic Studies Review
Vol. 1, No. 1 (2026): July, 55–68
E-ISSN: 3164-8657
Published by: CV. Strata Persada Academia
doi: 10.59631/sisr.v1i1.611 | journals.stratapersada.com/index.php/sisr
Advance Access publication July 31, 2026

Religious Moderation and Islamic Education: Strategies for Strengthening Social Cohesion in a Multicultural Society

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Abstract

Religious moderation plays a strategic role in Islamic education to strengthen social cohesion in a multicultural society. The diversity of religions, cultures, ethnicities, and social backgrounds requires students to understand differences, build dialogue, and develop a tolerant and responsible attitude. This study aims to analyze the relationship between religious moderation and Islamic education in strengthening social cohesion and formulate strategies for integrating religious moderation into the educational process. The study employed a qualitative approach with library research. Data were obtained from academic literature on religious moderation, Islamic education, multicultural education, tolerance, social cohesion, character education, and digital literacy. The analysis was conducted descriptively and analytically through concept identification, classification of educational approaches, analysis of the relationship between religious values and social behavior, and conceptual synthesis. The results indicate that religious moderation needs to be developed as an educational paradigm through curriculum integration, dialogic learning, social experiences, strengthening teacher competencies, institutional culture, and digital literacy. This study proposes a model of Religious Moderation Based on Social Cohesion consisting of religious literacy, critical understanding, dialogical learning, social engagement, and digital citizenship. This model positions Islamic education as a strategic instrument to shape students who are religious, critical, tolerant, and able to build a harmonious social life in a multicultural society.

Keywords: Religious Moderation, Islamic Education, Social Cohesion; Multicultural Society.

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INTRODUCTION

A multicultural society is a crucial characteristic of Indonesian social life. The diversity of religions, ethnicities, cultures, languages, and social backgrounds creates a complex interaction space. This diversity can serve as social capital for community development. However, diversity can also create tensions when differences in identity are understood exclusively. In this context, education plays a strategic role in building the community's ability to understand, accept, and manage differences constructively (Nababan et al., 2022).

Islamic education has a broader responsibility than simply transmitting religious knowledge. It also plays a role in shaping students' attitudes, character, and social orientation. The values of justice, balance, tolerance, deliberation, respect for human dignity, and the common good are principles that can form the basis for developing moderate social behavior. Therefore, Islamic education needs to be positioned as an instrument for shaping a society capable of practicing religious beliefs while respecting the existence of other groups (Iris, 2025).

Religious moderation becomes relevant in this context. Religious moderation does not mean reducing commitment to religious teachings. This concept emphasizes understanding and practicing religion proportionally, while maintaining a balance between personal beliefs and respect for a pluralistic social life. Moderation also rejects extreme attitudes, both in the form of fanaticism that closes off space for dialogue and relativism that eliminates religious principles. Thus, religious moderation can be understood as a religious orientation that allows a person to practice their beliefs firmly while being responsible in their communal life (Wahid, 2024).

The emerging issue is that Islamic education is often oriented toward cognitive mastery of religious material. Learning can stop at students' ability to understand religious concepts, principles, and norms without being followed by the ability to apply these values in social interactions. As a result, religious education does not always produce dialogical skills, social empathy, and the ability to resolve differences. This situation indicates the need to shift the orientation of Islamic education from merely transferring knowledge to simultaneously developing religious and social competencies (Nurjadid et al., 2025).

These challenges are further complicated by the digital environment in which students live. Social media expands the space for interaction, but also accelerates the spread of unverified information, hate speech, stereotypes, and narratives that pit groups against each other based on religious identity. Students not only acquire religious knowledge from teachers, families, and educational institutions but also from various digital platforms with varying degrees of validity. Islamic education therefore needs to develop both religious and digital literacy so that students can critically assess religious information (Zebua, 2023).

Social cohesion is an important goal in this context. Social cohesion refers to a society's ability to maintain social relationships based on trust, solidarity, participation, a sense of belonging, and acceptance of differences. Social cohesion does not require a society to be uniform. Rather, it enables diverse groups to live together through agreed-upon norms and values.

Doi:https://doi.org/10.59631/sisr.v1i1.611

Religious moderation can contribute to this process by providing an ethical framework for peacefully managing religious differences (Hajiannor & Munadi, 2026).

Islamic education can be a strategic space for building social cohesion from elementary to higher education. Islamic schools, madrasas, Islamic boarding schools, and universities have the capacity to shape students' social experiences. These experiences can include collaborative learning, intergroup dialogue, social activities, citizenship education, and strengthening a school culture that respects differences. With this approach, religious moderation becomes more than just a learning material but becomes part of the culture of education (Muttaqin & Prasetiyo, 2026).

Strengthening religious moderation also requires a pedagogical approach that is appropriate to the development of students. It's not enough for teachers to simply provide definitions of tolerance and moderation. Teachers need to create learning experiences that allow students to confront differences directly and in a focused manner. Discussions, case studies, project-based learning, simulations, dialogues, and social activities can be used to build students' ability to understand different perspectives.(Prihatin et al., 2025).

In the context of a multicultural society, Islamic education also needs to avoid two opposing tendencies. First, exclusivism, which views differences as a threat. Second, an approach that oversimplifies differences and ignores students' religious identities and beliefs. Moderate education must maintain religious commitment while fostering respect for other groups. This balance is an essential foundation for building healthy social relationships.(Nugroho & Ni'mah, 2018).

Based on these issues, this study aims to analyze the relationship between religious moderation and Islamic education in strengthening social cohesion in multicultural societies. This study also formulates educational strategies that can be used to integrate the values of religious moderation into learning, the culture of educational institutions, educator competencies, and students' social activities. This focus is important because strengthening religious moderation requires an approach that is not only normative, but also pedagogical and institutional.(Damopolii et al., 2026).

This research is based on the argument that Islamic education can be an instrument for strengthening social cohesion if religious moderation is implemented as an educational paradigm, not simply as supplementary material. This integration needs to encompass the dimensions of knowledge, attitudes, social skills, institutional culture, and digital literacy. Thus, Islamic education can contribute to the formation of students who are both religiously committed and able to interact constructively in a pluralistic society.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with library research. This approach is used to conceptually analyze the relationship between religious moderation, Islamic education, and social cohesion in a multicultural society. The research does not focus on statistical measurements, but rather on identifying concepts, principles, relationships between ideas, and

educational strategies relevant to the issues under study.(Sari & Asmendri, 2020).The research data sources consist of academic literature discussing religious moderation, Islamic education, multicultural education, tolerance, social cohesion, character education, and digital literacy. These sources include academic books, journal research, education policy documents, and relevant scientific publications. Sources were selected based on their relevance to the research focus, theoretical contributions, and relevance to the context of a multicultural society.(Ibrahim & Mulyani, 2026).

The data analysis was conducted in several stages. First, the main concepts related to religious moderation and social cohesion were identified. Second, the various approaches to Islamic education that can support the formation of moderate attitudes were classified. Third, the relationship between religious values, the learning process, the culture of educational institutions, and students' social behavior was analyzed. Fourth, a conceptual synthesis was conducted to formulate strategies for strengthening social cohesion through Islamic education based on religious moderation.(Fathoni, 2023)The analysis was conducted descriptively and analytically. Each concept was not only described but also compared and linked to educational needs in a multicultural society. The results of the analysis were then used to develop a strategic framework that integrates the dimensions of curriculum, pedagogy, educator competency, institutional culture, and digital literacy.(Nurrisa & Hermina, 2025).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Religious Moderation as a Paradigm of Islamic Education

The study's findings indicate that religious moderation needs to be positioned as a paradigm that influences the entire process of Islamic education. Moderation cannot be understood as a single learning theme. It needs to be a guiding principle in curriculum development, the selection of learning methods, teacher-student interactions, and the formation of the educational institution's culture. In Islamic education, moderation can be built through several key principles. These principles include balance, justice, tolerance, respect for differences, deliberation, and an orientation toward the common good. These principles have pedagogical consequences. Teachers need to guide students to distinguish between beliefs that must be held and social attitudes that must be developed when dealing with people who are different.(Wahyuningrum & Syofiah, 2026).

Moderation also relates to the ability to understand texts and contexts. Students need to understand that the application of religious teachings takes place in a society with diverse social conditions. Therefore, religious learning needs to develop interpretive skills that take into account the moral and social objectives of Islamic teachings. This approach encourages students to understand religion substantively without losing its normative foundation. Moderation-based Islamic education also needs to develop a critical attitude toward extreme religious understandings. A critical attitude does not mean rejecting religious teachings. This attitude aims to ensure that students have the ability to evaluate arguments, understand context, examine

sources of information, and avoid unsubstantiated religious claims. Thus, religious moderation can function as an educational paradigm that connects the spiritual dimension with the social dimension. The success of Islamic education is not only measured by students' ability to perform religious rituals, but also by their ability to build just social relationships, respect differences, and resolve conflicts peacefully.(Muaz & Ruswandi, 2022).

Social cohesion does not form automatically in a society with diverse religions, cultures, ethnicities, and social backgrounds. It requires a continuous social learning process. In this context, Islamic education plays a crucial role in fostering an understanding that diversity is an integral part of social life that must be managed ethically. The values of tolerance, justice, respect for differences, deliberation, and social responsibility can form the basis for developing attitudes in students capable of living constructively in a multicultural environment.(Muttaqin & Prasetiyo, 2026).

Islamic schools and educational institutions serve as social encounters that bring students together with individuals of different characters, abilities, family backgrounds, cultures, and perspectives. This environment provides opportunities for education to foster positive social experiences. Interactions between students can serve as a means of strengthening social cohesion if educational institutions foster a culture that encourages cooperation, open communication, mutual respect, and the peaceful resolution of differences. Thus, the educational environment serves not only as a place to acquire knowledge but also as a space for developing skills for living together.(Yuliana & Sapuadi, 2026).

The learning process needs to shift from an individual approach to a more collaborative one. Students can be involved in group assignments, problem-solving, discussions, joint projects, and collective decision-making. These activities foster communication skills, listening to opinions, sharing responsibilities, and accepting different perspectives. Through these experiences, students understand that group success is not determined by shared identity, but by the ability to build cooperation and achieve shared goals.(Oktavia, 2025).

Social activities also play a crucial role in building social cohesion. Community service programs, community service, environmental initiatives, and humanitarian projects can bring students together with community groups with diverse circumstances and needs. These experiences can foster empathy, caring, solidarity, and social responsibility. Islamic education, therefore, needs to provide greater opportunities for students to apply religious values through concrete actions. Learning should not stop at conceptual understanding but develop into social experiences that shape character.(Fusvita et al., 2026).

Social cohesion also requires the ability to manage differences and conflict constructively. Islamic education should provide students with the opportunity to understand the causes of conflict, develop dialogue skills, express opinions respectfully, listen to differing perspectives, and seek just solutions. These skills are crucial because multicultural societies are not always free from conflict. The goal of education is not to create a society without differences, but to develop individuals capable of managing differences without violence and discrimination. Thus, Islamic

education can contribute to the formation of a society that fosters solidarity, tolerance, and the ability to maintain social relationships amidst diversity.(Razak, 2026).

Integration Strategy of Religious Moderation in Islamic Education

The study's findings indicate that strengthening religious moderation in Islamic education requires an integrative and sustainable strategy. Religious moderation cannot simply be placed as supplementary learning material; it needs to be integrated into the entire educational process. The first strategy can be implemented through integrating the values of moderation into the curriculum. The values of justice, balance, tolerance, respect for differences, deliberation, and social responsibility can be linked to various subjects, particularly Islamic Religious Education, Pancasila Education, civics, history, and social studies. This integration enables students to understand moderation not as a stand-alone concept, but as a value directly related to social and national life.(Rosidin, 2025).

Integrating the value of moderation into the curriculum does not mean excessively increasing the material load. Integration can be achieved through learning objectives, teaching materials, learning methods, case studies, discussion activities, project assignments, and evaluation systems. Fiqh material can be linked to issues of differences of opinion and tolerance. Morals material can be directed toward fostering respect for others. Islamic history material can be used to introduce experiences of coexisting in a diverse society. Meanwhile, the Quran and Hadith can be studied through an approach that connects religious values with issues of justice, humanity, peace, and social responsibility. With this approach, students gain a more contextual understanding of the relationship between Islamic teachings and life in a multicultural society.(Jayadi, 2024).

The second strategy is the application of dialogic learning methods. Moderated learning requires students to share their opinions, ask questions, test arguments, and listen to differing perspectives. Teachers serve not only as conveyors of information but also as facilitators, guiding the dialogue process so that it proceeds openly, rationally, and ethically. Differences of opinion in the classroom should be viewed as part of the learning process, as long as students are able to present their arguments politely. Through dialogic learning, students learn to distinguish between differing views and conflict and understand that differences do not always have to be resolved through rejection or coercion.(Shalihah & El Iq Bali, 2026).

The third strategy is to develop experiential learning. The value of moderation will be more easily understood if students have the opportunity to apply it in real-life situations. Cross-group activities, social projects, community discussions, group work, problem-based learning, and community service activities can be used to build these experiences. Students can confront social issues related to differences in religion, culture, ethnicity, or social conditions and then be asked to formulate solutions based on principles of justice and respect for differences. This type of learning helps transform moderation from abstract knowledge into social skills that can be applied in everyday life.(Prawira, 2025).

Doi:https://doi.org/10.59631/sisr.v1i1.611

The fourth strategy is strengthening teacher competency. Teachers play a central role in shaping the learning climate and influencing how students understand differences. Teachers who have a strong understanding of religious moderation will be better able to manage differences of opinion, prevent stereotypes, and create an inclusive classroom environment. These competencies need to be strengthened through training in multicultural education, dialogical pedagogy, conflict management, religious literacy, and digital literacy. Digital literacy skills are becoming increasingly important as students obtain religious information from various digital platforms. Teachers need to be able to guide students in examining sources, understanding the context of information, distinguishing between fact and opinion, and avoiding content containing provocation and hate speech.(Hamdani et al., 2026).

The fifth strategy is building an educational institution culture consistent with the value of moderation. Moderation will not be effective if it is taught solely through textbooks but not reflected in the institution's policies and behavior. The principles of justice, respect, dialogue, equality, and non-discrimination need to be applied in the relationships between leaders, teachers, students, education personnel, and the community. This culture can be strengthened through fair regulations, student organization activities, dialogue forums, social programs, conflict resolution mechanisms, and policies that allow for proportional differences. In this way, educational institutions not only teach moderation as knowledge but also present it as a social experience. Consistency between the curriculum, learning methods, teacher competencies, and institutional culture is a crucial factor in ensuring Islamic education is able to shape students with religious commitment, dialogical skills, and the ability to build harmonious social relationships in a multicultural society.(Apriani et al., 2023).

Digital Literacy as a Dimension of Religious Moderation

The development of digital technology has transformed the way students acquire, understand, and disseminate religious information. Information previously obtained through teachers, family, books, and educational institutions can now be accessed through social media, search engines, digital videos, online forums, and various internet-based platforms. These changes provide significant opportunities for expanding access to sources of religious knowledge. Students can learn various religious perspectives more easily and quickly. However, the openness of information also presents new problems. The digital space allows for the circulation of false information, excerpts of religious texts without context, hate speech, provocation, and exclusive and intolerant religious content. These conditions demonstrate that access to religious information requires the ability to assess the quality and impact of the information received.(Faruqi, 2025).

Therefore, religious moderation in Islamic education needs to incorporate digital literacy as a crucial competency. Students need not only be able to use technological devices but also be able to evaluate information critically and responsibly. They need to be trained to examine information sources, compare various references, understand the context of a statement, and identify content that has the potential to cause social conflict. These skills are crucial because

religious information in the digital space has varying levels of credibility. Students need to understand that the popularity of content does not necessarily indicate its truth. Similarly, the use of symbols, quotations from verses, hadiths, or religious terms does not automatically guarantee that the information has an adequate scientific basis.(Azis & Rusydiyah, 2025).

Teachers play a crucial role in developing digital literacy as part of religious moderation education. Digital media can be used as both a learning resource and an object of analysis. Students can be directed to analyze news, videos, social media posts, public comments, podcasts, or religious content circulating online. This analysis can include identifying sources, arguments, language use, the context of the information, the purpose of the communication, and its potential impact on social life. Teachers can then direct students to compare this information with more credible religious and academic sources. This approach makes religious learning more relevant to students' lives because the learning material relates directly to the information they encounter in their daily lives.(Solihin, 2025).

This approach can develop critical religious literacy, namely the ability to read and understand religious information critically, contextually, and responsibly. Students not only question whether information uses religious sources, but also assess who conveys the information, the basis for their arguments, the context in which they convey it, and the purpose of the communication. They also need to consider the social impact of the information. Content that encourages respect, dialogue, and cooperation can be understood as part of constructive religious communication. Conversely, content that encourages hatred, discrimination, violence, or hostility requires rational and ethical criticism. With these skills, students will not easily accept information directly and will not disseminate content that they have not verified.(Hikmah & Hadi, 2026).

Digital literacy thus becomes an integral part of religious moderation in Islamic education. Education needs to equip students with the ability to use technology intelligently while considering the moral and social dimensions of every digital activity. Strengthening digital literacy can be directed at developing students as critical, polite, responsible technology users who respect differences. They are not only required to avoid disseminating information that has the potential to cause conflict but are also encouraged to produce digital content that supports dialogue, tolerance, solidarity, and respect for diversity. Thus, Islamic education can expand the practice of religious moderation from the classroom to the digital space and make students actors who contribute to strengthening social cohesion in a multicultural society.(Azis & Rusydiyah, 2025).

Based on the analysis, this study proposes a model of Religious Moderation Based on Social Cohesion, consisting of five interrelated components. First, Religious Literacy, which strengthens religious understanding so that students have an adequate foundation of religious knowledge and are not easily receptive to fragmented religious information. Second, Critical Understanding, which develops critical thinking skills to understand differences of opinion, compare arguments, examine sources, and understand the social context of an issue. Third,

Doi:https://doi.org/10.59631/sisr.v1i1.611

Dialogical Learning, which provides space for students to express their views argumentatively, listen to differing perspectives, and maintain ethical communication.(Astutik & Hadi, 2026).

Fourth, Social Engagement, which is the application of the value of moderation through social and collaborative activities that build awareness, solidarity, and responsibility towards society. Fifth, Digital Citizenship, which is the development of students' abilities to become responsible digital citizens by using social media ethically, avoiding the dissemination of provocative information, and contributing to constructive public communication. These five components form an educational mechanism that moves gradually from knowledge to action. Religious knowledge forms the foundation, critical thinking guides understanding, dialogue builds communication skills, social engagement transforms values into practice, while digital citizenship extends the application of moderation to the digital space.(Putri, 2025).

This model demonstrates that strengthening social cohesion cannot be achieved solely through the delivery of material on tolerance. Education requires a systematic, contextual, and sustainable process. Students need to understand religious values, experience interactions with differences, develop social skills, and apply these values in real life. Thus, Religious Moderation Based on Social Cohesion positions Islamic education not merely as a means of transmitting religious knowledge, but as a space for character formation, dialogue skills, social solidarity, and civic responsibility. This model enables students to maintain religious commitment while building just, tolerant, and constructive social relationships in a multicultural society.(Suriadi & Sriwahyuni, 2025).

Implementing a social cohesion-based model of religious moderation requires Islamic educational institutions to strengthen their curriculum and educator competencies. Curricula need to be evaluated to ensure they are not solely focused on cognitive outcomes but also incorporate indicators of attitudes, dialogue skills, and social skills relevant to life in a multicultural society. At the same time, teacher capacity needs to be strengthened through training that encompasses religious moderation, dialogical pedagogy, multicultural education, conflict management, and digital literacy. This way, teachers will not only master religious material but also be able to create inclusive and responsive learning that addresses student diversity.(Zainudin & Sohib, 2026).

Educational institutions also need to develop a more comprehensive evaluation system to measure the success of religious moderation education. Evaluation should not be limited to knowledge tests; it should also consider students' abilities to argue, collaborate, respect differences, resolve conflicts, and use digital media responsibly. Furthermore, strengthening moderation requires partnerships between schools, madrasas (Islamic schools), Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), families, community organizations, and local communities. This collaboration can be realized through social programs, community dialogues, cultural activities, and civic education, so that the values of moderation gain support from students' diverse social environments.(Zainudin & Sohib, 2026).

The next implication relates to cultural development and institutional policies. Religious moderation must be reflected in daily practice through fair policies, respect for differences, prevention of discrimination, and rejection of identity-based violence. Educational institutions need to provide transparent conflict resolution mechanisms and provide equal treatment to all students. Consistency between the curriculum, teacher competencies, evaluation systems, social partnerships, and institutional policies is crucial for ensuring that religious moderation does not remain a learning concept but develops into an educational culture capable of strengthening social cohesion in a multicultural society.

Challenges of Implementing Religious Moderation

Despite its great potential for strengthening social cohesion, the implementation of religious moderation in Islamic education faces conceptual challenges. Differences in understanding the meaning of moderation can lead to diverse interpretations. Some may view moderation as a compromise with religious principles, while others may understand it too generally, thus losing its religious substance. This situation suggests that religious moderation needs to be explained proportionally, emphasizing the relationship between commitment to religious teachings and respect for a pluralistic social life.(Ibrahim & Mulyani, 2026).

The second challenge relates to educator competence. Not all teachers have sufficient experience and skills in implementing multicultural education, dialogical pedagogy, diversity management, and digital literacy. These limitations can impact the quality of religious moderation instruction. Teachers are not only required to understand the concept of moderation, but also to be able to manage differences of opinion, prevent stereotypes, build open communication, and guide students in dealing with various religious information. Therefore, improving educator competence is crucial for the successful implementation of moderation.(Awalia, 2025).

The third challenge stems from students' social and digital environments. Values acquired in educational institutions can be confronted with conflicting information and narratives from family, community, and social media. Digital spaces allow students to quickly access religious information, but not all of this information is adequately grounded and contextualized. Provocative content, hate speech, and exclusive narratives can influence how students perceive other groups. Therefore, moderation education requires a connection between the school environment, family, community, and digital spaces so that the values developed in education are not disconnected from students' social experiences.(Suriadi & Sriwahyuni, 2025).

The fourth challenge relates to evaluation systems. Moderation cannot always be measured through written tests because it relates to attitudes, interaction skills, and social behavior. Educational institutions need evaluation instruments that can capture changes in attitudes and behavior more authentically. Observations, portfolios, social projects, reflections, discussions, and performance assessments can be used to assess students' abilities to respect differences, collaborate, resolve conflicts, and communicate ethically. More comprehensive

evaluations allow educational institutions to assess moderation not only as knowledge but also as social competence manifested in action.(Muhtar & Thoib, 2026).

These various challenges demonstrate that implementing religious moderation requires a sustainable institutional approach and educational ecosystem. The responsibility for moderation cannot be placed solely on Islamic Religious Education teachers. Principals or institutional leaders, teachers, students, education personnel, families, and the community need to have a mutually supportive orientation. Educational institutions also need to develop policies that encourage dialogue, prevent discrimination, manage conflict fairly, and strengthen digital literacy. With this approach, religious moderation can evolve from a normative concept into an educational culture capable of shaping students to live peacefully, justly, and constructively in a multicultural society.(Armayanti & Nasution, 2025).

CONCLUSION

Religious moderation plays a strategic role in Islamic education, strengthening social cohesion in multicultural societies. Moderation cannot simply be viewed as a learning material. It needs to be developed as an educational paradigm that influences the curriculum, teaching methods, teacher competencies, institutional culture, social activities, and the use of digital technology. Islamic education can strengthen social cohesion through the development of religious literacy, critical thinking, dialogic learning, social engagement, and digital citizenship. These five aspects form an educational process that connects religious knowledge with the ability to live together in a diverse society. With this approach, students not only understand Islamic teachings normatively but also are able to apply them in just and constructive social relationships.

The Social Cohesion-Based Religious Moderation Model proposed in this study places religious literacy, critical understanding, dialogical learning, social engagement, and digital citizenship as its primary components. This model emphasizes that moderation must move from knowledge to experience and action. Its success depends on consistency between learning materials, pedagogical practices, institutional culture, and the social environment of students. Thus, Islamic education has a significant potential to become an instrument for strengthening social cohesion in a multicultural society. However, its effectiveness requires institutional support, improved educator competency, the development of a diversity-responsive curriculum, and the strengthening of digital literacy. Future research can empirically test this model through fieldwork in Islamic schools, madrasas, Islamic boarding schools, and universities to determine its impact on students' tolerance, dialogue skills, social solidarity, and digital behavior.

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