

**AUTHORSHIP OF 19TH-CENTURY WOMEN IN LATIN AMERICAN SOCIAL  
THOUGHT: THE PRESS AS A STRATEGY OF SELF-REPRESENTATION**

***AUTORIA DE MULHERES OITOCENTISTAS NO PENSAMENTO SOCIAL LATINO-  
AMERICANO: A IMPRENSA COMO ESTRATÉGIA DE AUTORREPRESENTAÇÃO***

***AUTORÍA DE MUJERES DEL SIGLO XIX EN EL PENSAMIENTO SOCIAL  
LATINOAMERICANO: LA PRENSA COMO ESTRATEGIA DE  
AUTORREPRESENTACIÓN***



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**ABSTRACT:** We address the contribution of *A Família* and *A Mensageira*, founded respectively by Josephina Álvares de Azevedo and Presciliana Duarte de Almeida, to the emancipation of Brazilian women in the 19th century. To understand the themes addressed in this newspaper and magazine, we used bibliographic review and content analysis, along with the concepts of 19th-century press, women, Latin American social thought, and androcentrism. The research findings indicate that both publications were fundamental in defending women's rights, especially regarding education, which was seen as an essential means for women's emancipation. They not only challenged the patriarchal norms of the time but also contributed to the formation of a critical consciousness among women, highlighting the press as a significant space for struggle and self-representation.

**KEYWORDS:** Androcentrism. 19th-century Press. *A Família*. *A Mensageira*.

**RESUMO:** Abordamos a contribuição de *A Família* e de *A Mensageira*, fundadas respectivamente por Josephina Álvares de Azevedo e Presciliana Duarte de Almeida, para a emancipação das brasileiras oitocentistas. Para compreender as temáticas abordadas nesse jornal e revista utilizamos a revisão bibliográfica e a análise de conteúdo e os conceitos de imprensa oitocentista, mulheres, pensamento social latino-americano e androcentrismo. Os achados da pesquisa indicam que ambas as mídias foram fundamentais na defesa dos direitos das mulheres, especialmente no que tange à educação, compreendida como um meio essencial para a emancipação das mulheres. Não apenas desafiaram as normas patriarcais da época, mas também contribuíram para a formação de uma consciência crítica entre as mulheres, evidenciando a relevância da imprensa como espaço de luta e autorrepresentação.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Androcentrismo. Imprensa oitocentista. *A Família*. *A Mensageira*.

**RESUMEN:** Abordamos la contribución de *A Família* y *A Mensageira*, fundadas respectivamente por Josephina Álvares de Azevedo y Presciliana Duarte de Almeida, para la emancipación de las brasileñas del siglo XIX. Para comprender las temáticas tratadas en este periódico y revista, utilizamos la revisión bibliográfica y el análisis de contenido, así como los conceptos de prensa del siglo XIX, mujeres, pensamiento social latinoamericano y androcentrismo. Los hallazgos de la investigación indican que ambas publicaciones fueron fundamentales en la defensa de los derechos de las mujeres, especialmente en lo que respecta a la educación, que se consideraba un medio esencial para la emancipación de las mujeres. No solo desafiaron las normas patriarcales de la época, sino que también contribuyeron a la formación de una conciencia crítica entre las mujeres, evidenciando la relevancia de la prensa como un espacio de lucha y autorrepresentación.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Androcentrismo. Prensa del siglo XIX. *A Família*. *A Mensageira*.

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## Introduction

In this article, we analyze the contributions of *A Família: jornal literário dedicado à educação da mãe de família*, founded by Josephina Álvares de Azevedo (1851–1913), and *A Mensageira: revista literária dedicada à mulher brasileira*, founded by Presciliana Duarte de Almeida (1867–1944), which circulated, respectively, between 1888 and 1897 and between 1897 and 1900. This newspaper and magazine met the following research criteria: (1) founded, edited, and written by Latin American women thinkers; (2) based in Latin American countries; (3) free of charge, with online availability and legible archives; and (4) geographical and temporal proximity.

We seek to elucidate the nineteenth-century press founded, directed, and written by Brazilian women of that period, based on *A Família* and *A Mensageira*, within the context of a broader study that identified 46 nineteenth-century newspapers and magazines in Latin American countries. *A Família* advocated for women's rights within nineteenth-century patriarchal society (Azevedo, 2019), stating that “it is necessary, from now on, to break with prejudice and with the stupidity of men, which has enslaved us to their whims, beginning by clearly and positively establishing the foundations of our rights” (Azevedo, 1888, p. 2, emphasis added, our translation). *A Mensageira* likewise took a stance in favor of women's emancipation, inspiring them through debates on rights and the reformist impetus of gender social roles (Knapp, 2021; Bahia, 1990).

The concepts guiding the analysis are nineteenth-century press, women, Latin American social thought, and androcentrism. The nineteenth-century press constituted a center of intellectual sociability and shared ideological sensibilities among cultural agents in literature, education, journalism, and other fields. This dynamic consolidated networks of influence and loyalty and fostered debates and schisms that reflected the political and social tensions of the time (Sirinelli, 2003). From the struggle over meanings through the press emerged forgettings, meanings, and destabilizations of established power (Le Goff, 1990; Barca, 2021). In Brazil, newspapers and magazines, as spaces for literary publication, contributed to the formation of a literate culture, characterizing them as plural and heterogeneous media (Barbosa, 2007). Nineteenth-century journals and magazines founded by women in Latin American countries challenged traditional barriers and contributed to the emergence of alternative authorships and new perspectives (Ferreira, 2010).

The use of the press as a source for academic research became widespread from the 1980s onward (Luca, 2006), requiring its understanding as an active force in the constitution of historical consciousness (Cruz; Peixoto, 2007), while taking into account editorial partialities and multiple linkages with the political and social context (Samara; Tupy, 2007). Our analysis prioritized the first issues of *A Família* (Azevedo, 1888) and *A Mensageira* (Almeida, 1987b), a methodological delimitation conditioned by the proposed thematic unveiling and supported by bibliographic review (Lima; Mito, 2007), documentary research (Pádua, 2000), and content analysis (Bardin, 2016). By investigating the historicity of this newspaper and magazine, we understand them as agents (Cruz; Peixoto, 2007) of self-representation and of the struggle for the emancipation of nineteenth-century Latin American women, situating them within the transformations of their time.

We adopt a notion of women that implies a social and political construction interwoven with social markers of difference such as race, class, sexuality, age, nationality, among others. “Very provisionally, I would say that a *woman is an individual whose subjectivation occurs within norms and behaviors socially defined as feminine by the cultural context in which she is situated, whether by accepting them or rebelling against them*” (Funck, 2011, p. 67, emphasis added, our translation).

The foundational stage of Latin American social thought (Zea, 1976; Marini, 1994; Martins, 2006), characterized by an androcentric bias and circumscribed by the independence processes from Spanish, French, and Portuguese colonialism between the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Zea, 1964; Ansaldi; Giordano, 2012), rendered invisible<sup>3</sup> the contributions of nineteenth-century Latin American women thinkers (Ruano-Ibarra; Resende, 2022b). The transition from colonies to nations generated an intellectual production devoted to understanding the specific challenges of this social reality, representing the emergence of a field that would be institutionalized in the following century as Latin American social thought (Zea, 1964; Ansaldi; Giordano, 2012). For Ianni (2000), this thought constitutes a process that does not become fixed, as it is influenced by the interplay of social forces and is constantly seeking

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<sup>3</sup> We adopt the terms thinkers, authors, and writers as interchangeable descriptors of authorship in various professions and trades, mainly teaching, literature, music, theater, and political activism. The term writer breaks with the hierarchy between the categories of poet and novelist, among others, which reflect disputes in the nineteenth-century literary field (Infante Vargas, 2008) and implicit violence marked by different coefficients of power (Ruano-Ibarra; Resende, 2022b). The word authorship carries semantic heritage and requires updating, according to Pires and Lima (2020), in light of the developments of cognitive capitalism, such as data sharing on the internet and free access to intangible goods. The term authors legitimizes the enunciation and social function of this intellectual production, carried out by these nineteenth-century women, despite their epistemic subordination (Ruano-Ibarra; Resende, 2022b, 2023).

self-knowledge, recognition, and configuration in the face of the complexity of Latin American societies.

It is important to recognize that this process did not occur in a vacuum, but rather at the margins of dominant Western thought, which tends to disregard the specificities and complexities of Latin American realities. In resistance, the identity of Latin American thought is therefore shaped by its history and geography, which provide the foundations for a more authentic understanding of the region (Carosio, 2017). Latin American thought can be understood as a form of self-consciousness that reflects a commitment—both conscious and unconscious—to record and interpret the historical and social realities of each nation and of the continent as a whole. The diversity of its creations incorporates cultural expressions such as music, poetry, photography, painting, and audiovisual production as equally crucial elements of Latin American thinking. It is a complex and multifaceted field that has developed across different historical stages and in dialogue with global influences (Valdés, 1997; Ianni, 2000).

The guiding question of this article concerns how *A Família* and *A Mensageira* problematized the gender subordination of nineteenth-century Brazilian women. To this end, the structure of the text includes, in addition to the introduction and conclusion, a section contextualizing the contributions of the nineteenth-century press to foundational Latin American social thought, and a thematic analysis section on nineteenth-century Brazilian women in the first issues of this newspaper and magazine.

### **The Nineteenth-Century Press in Latin American Social Thought**

The nineteenth-century press emerged in a context of intense social and economic demands and leveraged its power and influence to advance its own sociopolitical interests. The Catholic Church and nation-states attempted to restrain it through censorship; nevertheless, newspapers and magazines persisted as spaces of intense ideological struggle and social mobilization (Lage, 1985). Following independence from Spanish, Portuguese, and French colonialism, schooling gained momentum, directly influencing public morality and customs (Lustosa, 2000; Faria Filho; Sales, 2009; Mizuta, 2010). By the late nineteenth century, the press assumed characteristics of a phenomenon intrinsically linked to industrialization (Silva; Silva, 2005), producing and disseminating cultural goods. This transition led to the disappearance of some small-scale newspapers and magazines and to the creation of journalistic enterprises equipped with advanced graphic technology (Sodré, 1966). The press accompanied



capitalist development, influencing social behavior (Sodré, 1966), reporting on and producing events (Pallares-Burke, 1998).

The nineteenth-century press contributed to strengthening nationalist sentiment and consolidating republics, acquiring printing equipment, professionalizing production and distribution structures, and institutionalizing services for advertisers and reader subscriptions (Sodré, 1966). In the Brazilian social context of the nineteenth century, where the majority of the population was illiterate, the dissemination of press messages required oral mediation through repetition and reinterpretation (Ferreira, 2010). By delimiting topics and shaping opinions, the press consolidated dominant perspectives, naturalized understandings, and concealed experiences (Sirinelli, 2003).

Josephina Álvares de Azevedo, founder of the newspaper *A Família* (1888–1897), noted that new doctrines spread through the press, which she defined as that which “strikes down error” and awakens dormant consciences, “like a lightning bolt splitting the rock and piercing the ground,” and as a “mysterious force” destined to destroy ignorance, regarded as a “great error” (Azevedo, 1888, p. 1, our translation). The target of this force is ideologies, conceptions, or practices, acting not only in the denunciation of errors but also in constructing new ways of thinking and acting.

On the other hand, Presciliana Duarte de Almeida (1867–1944), founder of *A Mensageira*, had expectations regarding the use of the press: to gather the intelligence of Brazilian women, “the most capable, those of incontestable merit,” and support the blossoming of the talents of women “who are beginning to wield the pen” (Almeida, 1987b, p. 2, our translation).

*May our magazine be like the center toward which the intelligence of all Brazilian women converges! May the most capable, those of incontestable merit, lend us the aid of their insights and enrich our pages with their admirable and beautiful works; may those who are beginning to wield the pen, testing their lofty flight, find here a point of support without which no talent manifests [...] (Almeida, 1987b, p. 2, emphasis added, our translation).*

This metaphor of the magazine as a convergence center for the common goal of women’s intellectual emancipation reinforces the idea of a space for collective and individual expression. Simultaneously, it reflects a legitimization strategy based on selectivity and prioritization of the most capable and meritorious<sup>4</sup>. It also reveals the intent to foster writing by

<sup>4</sup> Among the contributors to *A Mensageira*, we highlight Adelina Lopes Vieira (1850–1923), born in Portugal and naturalized Brazilian, sister of writer Júlia Lopes de Almeida (1862–1934), who also published in this magazine.

promoting a collaborative environment for newcomers. According to Pietrani (2020), the idea of literary sisterhood as a practice of mutual support, recognition, and valorization among women in the literary context manifests, for example, in participation in literary circuits and in citation and dissemination policies that promote other women writers.

Similarly, Júlia Lopes de Almeida (1987a), in *A Mensageira*, states that “this magazine, dedicated to women, seems to me to be especially aimed at women, encouraging them toward progress, study, reflection, work, and a pure ideal that ennobles and enriches them, enhancing their natural gifts” (Almeida, 1987a, p. 4, emphasis added, our translation). The emphasis on women as the magazine’s target and on ideals of progress, study, and reflection expresses the limitations imposed by nineteenth-century social norms on intellectual emancipation, while acknowledging the need for critical analysis of the aspirations of nineteenth-century Brazilian women.

Just as women sought intellectual emancipation in the nineteenth century, by mid-twentieth century, the field of Latin American social thought aimed to institutionalize itself, rooted in philosophy and advocating the originality of ideas and the notion of Latin American unity symbolized by Simón Bolívar’s *Jamaica Letter* (1815) (1783–1830). This emphasis on male authorship marginalized the contributions of women such as Manuela Sáenz (1797–1856), engaged in the independence movements of the Iberian colonies in the nineteenth century and in idea production (Ruano-Ibarra; Resende, 2022a). The unveiling of androcentrism in the canon of Latin American social thought gained momentum in the second half of the twentieth century through feminist critique: Where are the women? Challenging the idea that knowledge is neutral and universal, feminisms began highlighting women’s experiences and contributions (Canavae, 2009; Carosio, 2017) and exposing the privileging of male authorship in scientific knowledge production and dissemination, which sidelines or diminishes the importance of women’s ideas (Blazquez Graf, Flores, Ríos, 2012; Baeta, 2015).

### Nineteenth-Century Brazilian Women in *A Família* and *A Mensageira*

*A Família* had influence across various regions of Brazil and abroad; its target audience consisted of women from affluent social classes. With weekly editions ranging from four to eight pages and organized by sections, the newspaper was distinguished by the section titled *A Família*, written by Josephina Álvares de Azevedo, which provided guidance on women’s behavior both inside and outside the home, alongside sections such as *Secção Alegre* and

*Receitas Domésticas*. To remain culturally relevant, it relied on contributors like Maria Amália Vaz de Carvalho (1847–1921), Narcisa Amália (1852–1924), Anália Franco (1853–1919), Ignês Sabino (1853–1911), Revocata de Melo (1853–1944), Presciliana Duarte (1867–1944), Julieta de Mello Monteiro (1855–1928), Júlia Lopes de Almeida (1862–1934), Maria Ramos (?<sup>5</sup>), Maria Zalina Rolim (1869–1961), Maria Clara Vilhena da Cunha (1885–1949), Luiza Thiepont (?), Maria Amélia Queiroz (?), and Adélia Barros (?), who enriched content and disseminated ideas through their social and professional circles (Brilhante, 2022).

Financially, the newspaper relied on subscriptions and advertising, promoting itself through direct participation in social and cultural events. To attract advertisers, new readers, and subscribers, it formed partnerships with influential personalities. In São Paulo, the newspaper maintained a Saturday publication schedule; the relocation to Rio de Janeiro introduced logistical challenges. This move resulted from the transfer of ownership to Companhia Imprensa Familiar in 1891, a decision aimed at resolving financial difficulties and securing greater institutional support, necessitating adaptation to a public sphere still hostile to women's authorship (Hiratuka, 2021).

In contrast, the structure of *A Mensageira* comprised articles, poems, short stories, and chronicles (Martins, 2001), and also included portraits of notable figures of the time, vignettes, and decorative arabesques separating columns. Organized in two volumes, it featured prose and verse texts with fixed sections such as *Carta do Rio*, *Seleção*, and *Notas pequenas*, the latter addressing issues like the founding of nurseries, aid to orphaned children, announcements of future issues, and letters of praise (Zinani, 2021). Initially published fortnightly, it became monthly from 1899 until its cessation on January 15, 1900, totaling 36 issues ranging from 16 to 28 pages.

Written by *mensageiras*, women writers enriched the magazine with diverse perspectives, expanding its reach through their networks and affiliations with other media outlets. Among these contributors were Revocata Heloísa de Mello (1835–1944), Guiomar Torrezão (1844–1898), Adelina Lopes Vieira (1850–1923), Ignês Sabino (1853–1911), Julieta de Mello Monteiro (1855–1928), Júlia Lopes de Almeida (1862–1934), Maria Clara da Cunha Santos (1866–1911), Ibrantina Cardona (1868–1946), Áurea Pires (1876–1949), Francisca Júlia (1871–1920), Myrthes de Campos (1875–1865), an early female lawyer in Brazil (Zinani, 2021), and the French contributor and suffragist Eugénie Potonié-Pierre (1844–?).

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<sup>5</sup> Incomplete information was marked with a question mark.



The magazine offered an annual subscription for twelve thousand réis, while single issues sold for one thousand réis. Representation and distribution were meticulously organized both in Brazil and abroad, including Chile and France. In Paris, Madame Blanche Xavier de Carvalho (birth and death dates unavailable) served as the formal representative. In Brazil, sales points included Casa Garraux and Livraria Brazil in São Paulo, and Júlia Filippone's music shop in Rio de Janeiro. The poet and columnist Maria Clara da Cunha Santos (1866–1911) acted as the representative in Rio de Janeiro. This distribution network solidified the magazine's presence in the contemporary publishing market (Barp; Zinani, 2019).

Although predominantly authored by women, the magazine sought “the contribution of distinguished gentlemen, noble and devoted cultivators of the art of the word” (Almeida, 1987b, p. 2). The inclusion of male authors (Knapp, 2021) aimed to strengthen dialogue about women's insertion into the public sphere. In the first issue of *A Mensageira*, Silvio de Almeida (1867–1924) wrote in the text titled *Cartão de Parabéns* that the “Brazilian woman no longer limits herself to the simple role of exclusive companion of the home but ventures into the press and books, to live with us not only the life of the body but also the superior life of the spirit” (Almeida, 1987b, p. 10, emphasis added, our translation).

Both *A Mensageira* and *A Família* examined the social position assigned to Latin American women within gender roles. Traditional nineteenth-century press often focused on themes such as marriage, motherhood, and domestic care. *A Mensageira* linked women's rights to the happiness and strength of nations:

*The strongest, most practical, most active, and happiest peoples are those where women are not mere ornamental objects; where they are guided through life's vicissitudes with a profession that supports them in times of struggle, and a solid foundation of notions and knowledge that perfects their moral qualities* (Almeida, 1987a, p. 3, emphasis added, our translation).

The magazine's critique is emphasized through this contrast between “stronger, more practical, more active, and happier peoples” (Almeida, 1987a, p. 3, our translation), who recognize and value women's full potential, and those who treat women as ornaments. Strong and happy nations are not built on the oppression of women; access to solid knowledge embodies the claim for the right to education. The following excerpt illustrates the effort to challenge women's socially imposed roles:

To achieve the magnificent result of knowing how to live, and more importantly, teaching children to live well, I believe women must be prepared for life, like a shepherdess in the field, with clear and perfect understanding of

her responsibilities. *An ignorant or frivolous woman cannot be a perfect mother* (Almeida, 1987a, p. 4, emphasis added, our translation).

This citation reaffirms motherhood as women's responsibility, including teaching their offspring. The pursuit of self-improvement for motherhood becomes a strategy within the broader claim for women's right to education, although still linked to the duty of educating the family. The analogy to shepherding emphasizes the need for training to fulfill these familial roles. This call for nineteenth-century women's educational formation is disruptive, as it challenges dominant thought that reserved this right for men.

The *Notas pequenas* section in the first issue of *A Mensageira* addresses São Paulo's first philanthropic maternity hospital, exclusively maintained by women and directed by physician Maria Renotte (1852–1942):

*We, women living in São Paulo, have the humanitarian duty to assist as much as possible this institution, where the working woman, vulnerable and unprotected by fate, finds—during the most delicate days of her existence—the comfort and support that we have constantly in our own homes* (Almeida, 1987b, p. 16, emphasis added, our translation).

Describing the postpartum period as “the most delicate days” reinforces patriarchal arguments of female fragility, which, according to Federici (2017), legitimized women's subjugation and loss of control over their bodies and childbirth experiences, transferring these to male medical authority. Paradoxically, the notion of childbirth as a natural female role strengthens the erroneous social expectation of innate maternal predisposition. Additionally, positioning themselves as privileged women with comfort and support functions as a call to humanitarian aid for working and unprotected women through the maternity hospital, revealing awareness of class hierarchies and social inequalities. However, this nineteenth-century discourse reflects elite women's paternalism and charity, masking structural causes of inequality and denying agency to impoverished social classes.

Conversely, the newspaper *A Família* questions the educational role attributed to women as mothers. The following passage recognizes motherhood's importance but simultaneously deems it insufficient. The reflection extends to suggest that women's education can serve society in diverse ways:

Some agree that women should be educated to be good mothers. This is fair. But beyond this duty, what shall we do with a solid education that can develop in these or those special aptitudes useful to society, especially when we have no children to raise? *We are not mothers every day, and sometimes never* (Azevedo, 1888, p. 2, emphasis added, our translation).

Highlighting women's aptitudes beyond motherhood challenges the patriarchal norm by claiming the right to transcend the domestic sphere. This claim aligns with the idea that "the principle of strength is man, the principle of order is woman" (Azevedo, 1888, p. 1, our translation)—that is, women's domestic order is a delegated responsibility from men to govern families.

It is evident that *A Família* and *A Mensageira* acknowledge women's roles in the domestic space as wives, mothers, and caregivers but differ in how they articulate the need to transcend these boundaries. While *A Mensageira* advocates preparing women for domestic roles and emphasizes that "an ignorant woman [...] cannot be a perfect mother" (Almeida, 1987a, p. 4, our translation), *A Família* questions restricting preparation solely to motherhood, stressing that "we are not mothers every day, and sometimes never" (Azevedo, 1888, p. 2, our translation). There is thus some convergence in criticizing women's confinement to motherhood, albeit with different approaches.

The self-representation of women sought in these publications is that of autonomous subjects aiming to surpass the home and imposed domesticity. However, this image is not constructed unambiguously. In *A Mensageira*, women, though anchored in motherhood and care, are portrayed with intellectual capacity and activism toward building just societies. Education is fundamental to prepare them for motherhood without implying rupture or expanded horizons. The predominant expectation is that women be educated to perform their social roles better. Conversely, *A Família* envisions women recognized for their capacities to contribute beyond the family sphere. Women's representation is based on aptitudes that transcend reproductive capacity, constituting a refusal to be reduced solely to motherhood.

## Final Considerations

The analysis of the first issue of the newspaper *A Família* (Azevedo, 1888) and the magazine *A Mensageira* (Almeida, 1987b) revealed their purpose as spaces for reflecting on the patriarchal subordination of Brazilian women in the nineteenth century. Both publications addressed women's emancipation through the claim for the right to education, which until then had been a prerogative of men and some elite women. *A Família* emphasized the importance of education for women's emancipation, while *A Mensageira* focused on the necessity of education to improve women's performance as mothers. Despite these differing emphases, both shared the demand for women's right to education.

The theme of education as a strategy for women's emancipation in both studied editions reflects the aspirations of literate elite women in nineteenth-century Brazil to break free from domestic and patriarchal confinement. They criticized patriarchal subordination by appropriating writing and later disseminating ideas through newspapers and magazines. *A Família* and *A Mensageira* exemplify, within the context of research identifying 46 nineteenth-century newspapers and magazines across Latin American countries, the demand for women's rights in the region.

Although our analysis prioritizes the claim for education rights, *A Família* and *A Mensageira* also addressed other topics such as the press, slavery, men/manhood, the right to work/profession, and political rights—issues of interest to Latin American social thought. By questioning gender roles, these nineteenth-century Brazilian women writers interpreted and documented their understanding of their social reality. In the twenty-first century, reaffirming their contributions, we echo *A Mensageira*'s assertion that great nations “value the full potential of women” (Almeida, 1987b, p. 3, our translation).

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