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Activism and the everyday: a cookbook to promote world peace

Abstract:

In 1950, the Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW) published *Cookery around the world*, a cookbook, containing recipes sourced from six million country women, all members of associations of country women in twenty-five countries. Australian country women contributed to this book through their branches of the Country Women's Association (CWA). The ACWW recognised that country women, whether they lived in Australia or Iceland, were 'good cooks', skilled both in the kitchen and in their use of home-grown produce (ACWW 1950: Preface). This book with its collection of global recipes, would, through its recipes, be 'a common bond of friendship with the world' (Preface). Sarah Pink argues that everyday practices (such as cooking) must be understood as part of wider environments and activities. As such, they are the starting point for activism in a series of different contexts (Pink 2012: 28-9). This paper uses recipes from *Cookery around the world* to both unravel the book's intent and purpose in a world recovering from World War II, and link the everyday work of country women to activism intended to achieve global understanding and world peace.

Biographical note:

Jillian Adams completed a Masters in Oral History and Historical Memory at Monash University in 2011. She is currently a PhD candidate at Central Queensland University, researching Australian culinary history post World War II. Her book *Barista: a guide to espresso coffee* published by Pearson Australia is used widely in espresso coffee training in Australia and overseas, and *A good brew: H. A. Bennett & Sons and tea and coffee trading in Australia*, tells the story of social and cultural change in Australia through the stories of people involved in our tea and coffee industries. She has co-edited a special edition of on-line journal *MC journal* and has published papers in numerous academic journals and presented papers at local and international conferences. Jillian is president of the Oral History Association of Australia.

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Creative writing – Food writing – Cookbook – Country Women's Association (CWA) – Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW) – Recipes – Activism

Introduction

In 1950, in the aftermath of World War II, the Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW) published *Cookery around the world*, a spiral bound, green laminate covered cookbook, containing recipes sourced from six-million women, all members of associations in twenty-five countries. The idea behind the making of this book was to build international good will and understanding through finding and promoting ‘all those interests which country women have in common’ (ACWW 1950: Preface). It recognised that country women, whether they lived in Iceland or Australia, were ‘good cooks’ and were skilled in both the kitchen and in their use of home grown produce. Implicit in *Cookery around the world* was both an understanding that country women ‘always exchanged recipes with their neighbours’ (Preface) and the hope that this book, with its collection of global recipes, would serve to introduce its users to the art and culture of many people and provide ‘a common bond of friendship with the world’ (Preface). Australian women sent recipes through their branches of the Country Women’s Association (CWA) and, in so doing, linked the activities of their everyday life and the sensory environments of their kitchens to not only the global environment but also an activism aimed at safeguarding world peace through understanding of domestic consumption.

‘Cookbooks’, writes Marvin J Taylor, ‘are, of course – in addition to recipes – one of the most important places to go see how a culture thinks about its food’ (2012: 13). With this in mind, one can only assume how much thought went into choosing and selecting recipes for this book. More importantly, as Sarah Pink argues (in a contemporary context) everyday life and domestic consumption are at the start of a chain of events through which broader change eventually happens: the everyday is linked with activism (2012). That world peace could be encouraged through shared recipes and an understanding of each other’s homes, kitchen pantries and recipes was a daring undertaking that makes *Cookery around the world* both aspirational and modern in its aims. In its foreword the editors use the words ‘peace’ and ‘understanding’ – words in common use then and now – in the place of ‘activism’, a term more commonly used today. And while the recipes are a source of cultural and social information about the life and times of the women who shared them, the real purpose of the book – through its attempt to link the everyday activities of country women to activism and world peace – was to provide a site for change and a domestic route to global transformation (Pink 2012: 2).

The Country Women’s Association

When I started reading archived copies of *Country crafts*, the monthly newsletter of the Victorian branch of the CWA, my foodie friends, associating the CWA with cookbooks, asked me if I was collecting recipes. Interestingly, I found very few recipes in its pages, at least not until well into the 1950s, indicating that sharing cooking tips was not the organisation’s primary concern in its early years. The first CWA was formed in New South Wales in 1922 followed soon after by the Queensland CWA. By 1928 all other mainland states had formed branches and with Tasmania finally founding a branch in 1935’ (CWA 2013: History).

In 1946, to assist women new to rural life, the Victorian Branch of the CWA recommended that the association should produce:

a book to help the town woman and the young, inexperienced woman to cope with the differences of life in the country – not a mere cookery book but a homemakers book, dealing with methods of cooking under country, out back [sic] conditions; laundry where water is scarce; first aid when doctors are far away ... – the thousand things which some country women have grown up knowing, and which are not found in the modern cookery book (Editorial 1946: 93).

But, although cookbooks were produced by branches as fundraisers, cooking and cookbooks were only a small part of the association's manifesto. Historically, the organisation has been a progressive force for women, encouraging mostly women from the country to take an active role in public affairs. Its original intention was to help overcome loneliness and to improve the daily life of women and their families – especially those living in remote areas far from extended family with few or no amenities such as telephones, roads, schools and hospitals (Lovelace 1912: 601), but it also offered support to inexperienced city women who married and moved to rural areas to take up land offerings and soldier settlement blocks.

During World War II, the CWA assisted with Australia's war effort through its local branches, as well as at an international level. Locally, CWA groups worked with the Red Cross and the Australian Comforts Fund, trained women for the Land Army, helped the war effort by making camouflage nets and gloves and knitting garments for soldiers, slippers for prisoners of war and children in Britain and Russia, and making sheepskin vests (Lovelace 2012: 602). At an international level, the CWA encouraged its members to form strong personal links with the Empire and UK women's groups by writing letters, raising money and sending food and clothing parcels. The Victorian branch of the CWA remained sympathetic to all women who were drawn into the war. *Country crafts* continued to publish its monthly newsletter during the war despite paper shortages, and in a regular monthly column, 'Our little world', sub-editor Isobel MacDonald included sympathetic articles on the lives of women in France, Germany and Japan (Stevens-Chambers 2008: 64).

After the war, CWA retained its strong connection to the Empire and CWA members continued to raise funds, send food parcels¹, render fat and make quilts for children. However, a commitment to world peace became its primary aim and the organization recognised that it needed to look beyond Britain. To achieve world peace, much work had to be done at the local level, in Australia. Victorian State President, Lady Sewell, writing in her 1946 editorial in *Country crafts*, revealed her strong belief that world peace started at the local level, and – therefore – the need to increase the membership base in order to do the work:

Now there is peace and so much work to be done to put us all once more on a peace-time basis, we must expand. We must all get new members and to do so we must offer them something worthwhile. Plans to help the women and children among them. ... We want many more children but one pair of hands can only go a limited amount of work, so mothers must be helped – home helps, home dressmakers, home menders. Groups

could each have their own who they could employ constantly ... First of all let us aim at a plan of social pleasure, education, amusement and helpfulness' (1946: 1)

The association was successful in attracting new members and its membership flourished in the post war years when many other women's groups went into decline (CWAA 2008).² In Queensland, for example, membership had swelled to 20,000 by the late 1950s. In Victoria, the CWA saw a rapid growth especially in its suburban branches (78).

Women and world peace

In 1946, Sewell emphasised women's roles in the future: 'The hand that rocks the cradle is as capable of thinking and planning as the hand that guides the plough' (1). She also alluded to the local starting place for the CWA's international role:

May I at the beginning of this year as I did in January 1939 draw your attention to our magazine, 'Country crafts'. This little magazine will, if you let it, draw us together and tell us of each other. It is a means by which we can send love and friendship to each other and above all, it is the only way we have of 'telling the world' of all our doings, our hopes and our aspirations (6).

Women were peacemakers, argued Mary Anderson of the Women's Bureau of the US Labor department:

[they] have certain peculiar contributions to make somewhat different from those of men. Women are more vitally concerned with the welfare of individuals and families, with protecting the weak, healing the hurt, helping the needy, and settling difficulties in the field of human relations (Anderson c1944: 243–4).

Country crafts revealed a range of wartime concerns in its pages. The November 1946 edition contains, for example: articles about rationing and food shortages and recipes for an economical Christmas cake and pumpkin cake; advice on making a patchwork quilt from cloth and clothing scraps; gardening notes and an article containing a message from the Minister of Agriculture acknowledging the extent of work done by country women on their farms (Anon 1946a: 208). A shocking article by Lady Tiphaine Lucas, vice-president ACWW, on the cruel treatment of pregnant women and babies in Ravensbruck Concentration Camp sits uncomfortably amongst these articles (228).

Going global: the Associated Women of the World and world peace

The Country Women's Association was – and remains today – affiliated with The Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW) currently the largest international organisation for rural women with around nine million members in 70 countries (CWAA 2008). In the post war period the organisation represented six million women (Anon 1950: 4). Through its connection with the United Nations, ACWW had the capacity to play its part in world affairs (Anon 1950a: 399), and work towards achieving world peace (Anon 1951: 7). In her address to the annual meeting of

the ACWW in 1950, Mrs Ruth Buxton Sayre, American farmer's wife and ACWW President since 1947, said:

We have a great deal of power as citizens, as individuals or as organisations. By solving problems in the village we are helping to solve the problems of peace and we must help women to understand that. We have tremendous power as producers and as traders, we also have tremendous power as consumers to influence the economy of the country. It is the mother in the home, in the family, in the clan, who makes the attitudes of a nation, and therefore she has all the power in the world' (1951: 333).

Mrs Sayre travelled extensively, visiting many of the thirty-four ACWW member countries (Hoehnle 2009) and wrote that she had attended many meetings of various societies and, from her discussions with women, she believed that, most of all, women wanted peace: 'They want peace. They tell me in every country I go to. ... The greatest need is to inform the individual member about problems that have to do with international affairs' (13). Sayre understood that there was a world food shortage and countries needed to be assisted to produce enough to feed themselves, but there was also a problem with world trade and if women really wanted peace they needed to understand the logistics of international trade. 'We talk about internationalism and the larder shelf' she wrote, 'we started with the things people knew ... we took it step by step trying to make them understand' (13). One way of realising this power was to unite women through what they knew – their homes and cooking and the larder shelf.

Cookery around the world

In 1950, the ACWW published recipes from member countries in a cookbook, *Cookery around the world*. ACWW saw this book as a way of endorsing its intention to build international goodwill and understanding and to advance the interests of country women. Organisations and individuals from member countries contributed recipes which were selected and tested by a panel, choosing recipes on the basis of ingredients that were readily available and that 'and could be used by housewives everywhere, whether they live in a temperate or tropical land' (ACWW 1950: Foreword).

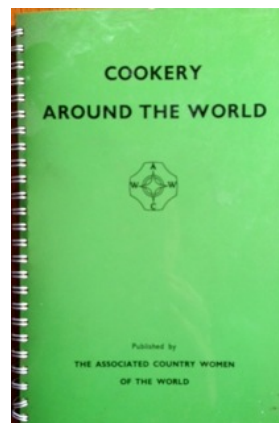


Fig. 1. *Cookery around the world* 1950, cover

Sayre (then President) wrote in her foreword to the book:

For the homemaker there is no one subject that has more of common interest than that of food. The country woman's reputation as a 'good cook' is proverbial. Her skill with the tools of the kitchen and her art in the use of home-grown produce is a source of pride and satisfaction to herself and to her family whether she lives in Australia or Iceland. ... As you read this book you will discover that it is much more than a cook book. It is the art and culture of many people from many generations and many lands. May you treasure its wisdom. And may it be to you a common bond of friendship with the world.

It contained recipes from Australian, New Zealand (a Pavlova recipe), USA, Finland, Natal, Switzerland, Canada, Northern Ireland, England, Germany, Ceylon, Denmark, India, Southern Rhodesia, The Netherlands and Scotland. This book was widely advertised in the *Country crafts* magazine and could be purchased for the relatively low cost of 5/6, including postage.

CWA branches from Australia chose recipes submitted by their members and sent them to the editors, Alice Torma and Elsie Zimmern. Many recipes from Australia-wide branches were selected for inclusion: Cream of Mushroom Soup (11), Cherry Sauce for Christmas Pudding (17), Lobster Cutlets (25), Curried Scallops (26), Meat Roll (41), Savoury Rice with Chicken (46), Potato Nest for Gulash [sic] (50), Caramel Cream Pudding (72), Roman Candles (74), Potatoes Stuffed with Cheese (79), Brown Coffee Cake (95), Chilli Wine (113), Ginger Beer (115), Brine for Preserving Meat (124), Preserved Eggs (128), Candied Peel (128), Preserved Butter (129), Preserved Beans (130) and Cookery hints for Lemons (133). Also included were household hints such as, keeping sandwiches fresh (133), stain removal and washing day and general cleaning hints (134, 135, 136).

Cookbooks give many indications of social and cultural aspects of the time in which they are written, and used in this way they are aspirational, confounding, and confusing, but valuable sources of historical information (Nestle 2012, Taylor 2012, Smith 2012). A whole section devoted to homemade soaps with recipes from Australia, USA, Canada, Southern Rhodesia and New Zealand shows that soap making was part of the rural woman's life and reveals the significance of Australian women saving rendered fat for Britain during this time. Other household hints show the resourcefulness of country women and give an indication of the climatic conditions: Australia's hint on how to set colours in new materials and to render them 'sun proof' and fadeless (Australia: 135) is a strong indication of a harsh sun. The USA promoted its reputation for glamour and luxury and included tips on removing lipstick, 'Lipstick stains may be removed from Linen by soaking in milk for half an hour, then rinsing in hot soapy water' (USA: 34). Whilst very few processed foods appear in the ingredient lists, eight pages are devoted to recipes for preserving a range of foods; dairy, fruit, vegetables, meats and herbs using traditional preserving methods; curing, pickling, drying, sauce making, candying, brining and smoking. This was a shared necessity of daily rural life.

The editors of this book had a multitude of editorial decisions to make. Torma and Zimmern wrote in their foreword:

We have had to make a selection ... but we did our best according to our lights. If your particular recipe is not included in this book you may feel sure that it was carefully considered and only left out, either because it was too much like another recipe, or because the ingredients would be impossible to procure by most of our members (ACWW 1950: 6)

Their resulting text is practical with its housekeeping advice and largely ‘cookable’ recipes; educational – it includes recipes with cultural information that may well not have been cooked by women outside of the contributing country; and it is aspirational – it includes recipes that are very distinctively regional and would not have been cooked outside their country of origin. There are many recipes with native and local ingredients such as the cowberry (Cowberry Drink: 111) and cloudberry (Cloudberry in Syrup of Sugar: 65). The botanical name for the cowberry, *vaccinium vitis idoea*, and a more widely available alternative – chopped rhubarb – were included, but not so for the Cloudberry. Despite their commitment to accessible ingredients, there were ingredients that would have been impossible to find such as Grunts (the young of Perch plentiful in Lough Neagh in Ireland) (14), Toheroa for Toheroa Soup in New Zealand (14) and Rampa for the Ceylon Curry (47). Other dishes were included probably as genuine examples of a cuisine rather than a dish with international appeal. These include Midsummer Soup From Finland – milk boiled with rennet for several hours, then allowed to cool and eaten cold (7) and a Green Mealy Soufflé from Rhodesia (58). There are also dishes with limited appeal but with cultural meaning such as Haggis from Scotland (35). An authentic curry powder (for camp life and emergency cooking) from India (110) would be at home in a modern cookbook on Indian cooking but its ingredients would have been difficult to source and the measurements – ‘tolas’ and ‘seers’ – unknown in many cultures. Although some do, other recipes do not attempt to explain what the ingredients are or give substitutes.

Consistency was not imposed, although this was recognised and a table of measurement conversions was included. Measurements from Finland and Denmark were mostly metric whereas Northern Ireland, Southern and Northern Rhodesia all used pounds and ounces, and the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand used spoons, cups and quarts. As cited above, some Indian recipes used ‘tolas’ and ‘seers’ alongside ounces and tablespoons. Most recipes listed ingredients then instructions, but others combined ingredients and instructions together.

Despite these limitations, country women must have been excited to find new recipes and ideas for ingredients they had on hand. For Australian women, recipes such as All American Pumpkin Pie from USA (66) would provide a welcome and unusual use for pumpkins, as would other recipes using familiar ingredients such as Rabbit Supreme from Canada (43), Sasaties, using mutton and lemon leaves, from Natal (35), and Gypsy Stew from India also using mutton (35). The Seven Layer Dinner (USA: 54) – which involved simply pouring a can tomato soup over layered potatoes, onions, carrots, uncooked rice, peas or beans and small ground beef meatballs and baking for one and a half hours – was a perfect family meal to prepare ahead of time and have ready to bake on CWA meeting days (often it took a whole day to get to and from a CWA meeting),

There are also some fascinating recipes that give insights into improvised provisions and preserving methods. These include recipes for imitation ginger from New Zealand using carrots, sugar and ginger essence (128), and golden syrup, a sugar product that Australians are familiar with as a syrup in a tin, using sugar, water and cream of tartar (129). They also include descriptions for preserving butter (129), eggs (128) and meats in brine (124) and other pickling solutions (124); and a way to make butter go further (129).

A section on ‘Special festival dishes’ (116-23) explains when and how dishes used to celebrate national and regional events were prepared and eaten. Cultural tips, such as serving May Day Cakes from Finland on 1 May together with a special mead (120), Simnel cake from England on Mothering Sunday, the fourth Sunday in Lent (120) and Ragout de Boulettes from Quebec at the supper following Christmas midnight mass (116). Such recipes provided cultural insights into other women’s lives but I imagine there would have also been great pleasure in the thought of sharing and using recipes from this international community cookbook.

Women would have engaged with this book at many levels. They would have used it – it was a practical and well constructed book with spiral binding so that it could be left flat on the bench and its laminate cover wiped of any food spills. They would have also gained tacit knowledge of the society and culture of other countries through its recipes, ingredients and snippets of information. Elizabeth David notes the ability of housewives to copy, substitute and re-invent exotic dishes in her preface to *Spices salts and aromatics in the English kitchen* (2000). In the period of the East India Company (1600–1873), for instance, she notes:

Housewives made valiant attempts to copy these exotic products; [pickles and Indian chutneys] in country house kitchens and still rooms, cucumbers and melons were pickled to taste like mangoes; elder shoots preserved in spiced vinegar were alleged to taste like bamboo shoots; recipes for lemon pickle hotted up with horseradish and mustard flour, and for ‘India pickle’ of vegetables – the forerunner of piccalilli – occur in most of the eighteenth century cookery books (2000: 10).

Country women would have substituted ingredients, and adapted and annotated their books. In the spirit of recipe sharing, they would have shared these recipes with friends and neighbours transporting regional dishes into the remotest areas of Australia.

My copy of *Cookery around the world* contains original recipes that are so authentic that I am inspired to cook from it. I have no idea who owned the copy of the book that I now own, but the marginalia shows that whoever did cooked from the cakes and biscuits and dessert sections. Tell-tale food splashes on particular pages, some sugar crystals remaining in it, and crosses and a tick against ‘Drop Rolled Oat Cookies’ from the USA (101), and a ‘Black Walnut Cake’, again from USA (91), and a ‘Boiled Cake’ from Rhodesia are more valuable than the recipes themselves. The previous user’s annotations indicate the recipes that she liked, tried or that worked. I like to imagine her baking the Black Walnut Cake, perhaps using home grown walnuts and taking it, for a shared afternoon tea, to a branch meeting of her CWA group. As the

members chatted informally over tea and cakes, she would boast how the recipe was American.³ I wonder if she was aware of its ulterior function.

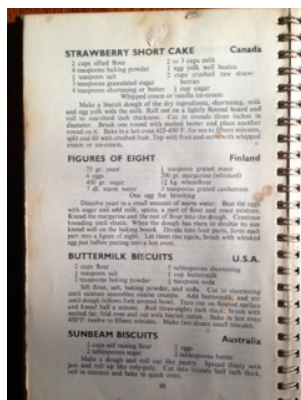


Fig. 2. Stains showing that the recipes on this page have been used.

The book shows the mobility of recipes – how some remain grounded where they originated – and others travelled the globe. Caramel Dumplings from Canada (73) are clearly the Syrup Dumplings of my childhood. A recipe for ‘Wicky Wacky Cake’ (89) is the same ‘Crazy Cake’ that I found in a community cookbook from Alcatraz in San Francisco (Weed: 1995). Some of the recipes have been on a journey of their own: a German Fruit Cake described as ‘about 1870, much used in Maryland’ (87) from USA acknowledges the German population in USA and the recipe for American Prune Cake (87) is listed as a contribution from India – an indication of the mobility of recipes.

Conclusions

The notion of securing world peace through understanding different cultures at their most fundamental – through inviting country women into each other’s kitchens – was an inspired piece of activism and international public relations. ACWW’s interest in activism from the everyday continued beyond this book. It organised an essay competition in 1951 on the subject of ‘The rural home’ and asked each national society to promote it:

Please ask your members to include the following: Is your home in town or village or farm? Have you a garden? Describe the exterior of your house. Describe the interior of your house. Tell us something about your furniture. Do you grow indoor plants? Have you gas or electricity? Have you a telephone? Describe your water supply. Do you have a bathroom? Have you indoor sanitation (water closets)? Have you any labour saving devices? Describe your kitchen. Where do you do your laundry? Do you have a television or a radio? Any special reasons for running your home the way you do? Where do the children run and play? Send two photographs (Anon 1951: 381).

In 1948, *Country crafts* initiated a series of detailed profiles of the ACWW member countries, usually in its March edition. This ‘International letter’ was often ten pages long and always included recipes for national foods. In 1948, Finland was the featured

country. That ‘International letter’ included: a message from the Finland Agricultural Woman’s Organization; a description and illustrations of the national flag, the national anthem and national flower; rebuilding after the war and education; an article on Kaisa Kallio, wife of the President of the Republic of Finland; and, an article on the Marttas – the organisation of Finnish housewives affiliated with the ACWW and its magazine called *Kotilesi* (hearth of the home). It also included pictures of a typical Finnish home and information on the teaching of rural domestic science in Finland and a statement about the role of women in Finland:

Political emancipation came to the women of Finland in 1878. A woman could be President of Finland. There is no law against it. With the exception of the Coast Guard, the Police Force, the Defence Establishment and the Ministry, Women are eligible for all offices and professions—and are to be found in most of them’ (67).

The article also included recipes for Viili (cultured milk), Carelian Pies (sweet or savory), Kalakukko (fish pie), Mammi and Piparkaknja (biscuits) and a picture of a Finnish kitchen. These feature articles continued for almost ten years and took many women into the homes and kitchens of other country women worldwide: in April 1952 they went to America, in March 1953 to the Philippines. In March 1954, Canada featured, March 1955 was Indonesia, March 1956 Japan, and March 1957 Switzerland. Recipes were always included in these articles.

Cooking continued to feature in *Country crafts* with articles on international foods appearing in its pages over the next decade. ‘Cook’s tour’ (Anon 1952a: 8-12) included recipes from overseas and an alphabeticised glossary of international cooking terms (13) appeared in the same edition. ‘It’s Spring time now in the Kitchen’ features new and unusual cakes similar to those found in *Cookery around the world*: Honey Roll, Potato Chocolate Cake, Coffee Cake, Prune Cake, Nut Cake, Fudge Cake and Russian Cake (Anon 1952b: 20-1). The nut and ginger layer cake is frosted and layered in the American style and the Russian cake has the unusual flavour combination of walnuts and preserved ginger and, although not the same recipe as in *Cookery around the world*, expresses the same sentiment.

Just as Mrs Sayre in 1947 had expressed her belief in teaching women about world trade using examples from their larders, a decade later in 1957, the Australian Department of Trade and the CWA endorsed the connection between the larder and world trade in its sponsorship of the ‘Best for Britain’ contest. CWA members were encouraged to enter uniquely Australian recipes that showcased Australian foods for their British counterparts. This competition was part of a significant publicity drive to sell Australian food and wine to Britain. This cookbook – of the best Australian recipes – compiled and distributed to British housewives (Anon 1957: 21), although not about international foods and peace, is significant in that it continued the culinary dialogue between women from different countries and promoted an understanding of each other’s lives through the foods that they cooked and ate.

Endnotes

1. Food parcels were made up of approximately two tins dripping, two tins meat, condensed milk, one packet of jelly crystals, one packet of mixed fruit, one tin of jam, 500 grams of

sultanas, one tin of minced mixed fruits, sweets and a little sugar, costing no more than £1 and weighing eleven pounds (Anon 1946b: 251).

2. By 2010, in contrast, Queensland membership had fallen to just 5000 (Lovelace 2012: 610).
3. This would be a sign of her fashionability given that anything from America at this time was highly sought after and fashionable.

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