

# **Conflict and Co-operation:**

  

## **FulBe Relations with the Mambila and Samba people of Southern Adamawa**

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### **1 Introduction: FulBe Relations with Agricultural Communities.**

West Africa has a restricted inventory of cattle pastoralists and only two groups that are in part habitually nomadic. The most numerous and widespread are the FulBe [Fulani] who are found from Senegambia to Western Sudan. They have expanded westwards from the Gambia river over the last thousand years. The FulBe are now pressing the limits of the territory that can be exploited through nomadic pastoralism, both in terms of available pasture east of their original homeland in the Futa Toro in the Republic of Guinea, and south to the limits of the tsetse belts, wherever these were located at a given historical period. Two features of their present society reflect this; extensive sedentarisation and an increase in conflict with the agrarian societies on whom they have traditionally depended for their supply of cereal staples. The FulBe and the arable farmers among whom they move have an interdependent relationship, based on the exchange of dairy products for grain, and a market for the animals that must be periodically sold to provide cash for domestic purposes, such as cloth or marriage payments. Moreover, in many regions, FulBe management strategies depend on access to cereal crop residues -something arable farmers permit because of the perceived advantages of manure as fertilizer.

However, in no case are the goods or services the pastoralist has to offer necessary to the farming community, and therefore the pastoralist is under a certain obligation to remain on good terms with farmers if he wishes to continue to exploit the same locale in successive years. If FulBe herders are unable to build up exchange relations with the farming communities, they can only survive by becoming sedentarized, by flexible movement patterns that involve exploiting new arable communities every year, or by intimidation of the farmers. All of these strategies can be observed in operation in Adamawa, sometimes practised simultaneously by different FulBe subgroups.

It is tempting to try and interpret these relations in terms of a type of ecological determinism; the higher the pressure on resources, the greater the conflict between the two groups. However, comparative studies suggest that only by including a broad range of contributing factors can the observed diversity be explained. Theoretical writing has tended to concentrate on arid zone pastoralists in West Africa (e.g. Gallais, 1972 or Nelson, 1973) Apart from Frantz (1975, 1980, 1981a,b), whose work is confined to the reanalysis of previously collected data, there has been little published on the subhumid zone, partly because its colonization by cattle pastoralists is very recent. Comparative material must therefore be drawn from descriptive ethnography. Rehfish (1974:74) & Frantz (1975, 1980) for the Mambila, Prioul (1971) for the Central African Republic, Boutrais (1974), Hurault (1964) for northern Cameroun and Kaberry (1959, 1960) for the Cameroun grasslands, discuss examples of such conflict, mostly from the point of view of the aggrieved farmer, but no attempt is made to fit these into a theoretical framework.

A comparative study in the Nigerian Middle Belt (Blench, 1984b) showed that conflict was least where population was greatest, in the densely settled Hausa areas west of Zaria, and most intense where land was abundant in the regions of the Benue flood-plain settled by Tiv farmers. Clearly, there are a variety of possibilities for the shape of a relationship between farmer and grazier. Ethnographic material that is not referenced contained in this paper was collected during the course of groundwork conducted August to October 1983 and March to June 1984 in conjunction with a **RIM** aerial survey of southern Gongola State. Except for historical occurrences, ethnographic data referenced to other authors has been independently checked in the field.

An interim report (Blench, 1984a) and the full survey report (**RIM**, 1984) tabulates the interviews conducted during the course of the survey and discuss methods and informants in detail. I am grateful to the Federal Livestock Department, Nigeria, to the Project Manager, LPU, and to Resource Inventory Management for permission to make use of the ethnographic data collected under their auspices for this article.

This paper will argue that there are four major elements that determine the relations between herders and arable farmers. These are;

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- a) Dominance relations, both historical and current; the relations of power and authority, both within and between the various ethnic groups and classes.
- b) The production system; in the case of farmers, the crops planted, both for sale and subsistence, modes of land preparation, and the means of mobilisation of labour; in the case of graziers, the patterns of stock management, and the terms of co-operation with arable farmers.
- c) The allocation of economic rights and responsibilities within traditional social and political frameworks.
- d) Belief Systems. Where neighbouring a pastoral group and the agriculturalists do not have the same religion, ideological differences may over-ride mutual economic advantage.

Each of these factors will influence the way the individuals involved perceive a potential conflict, and thus the means they may choose to resolve it. This paper looks at two contrastive examples from southern Gongola State in Nigeria, the relations of the FulBe with the Samba and Mambila peoples, and suggests an explanation for the observed differences in terms of these elements. Map I shows the locations of peoples and towns mentioned in the text.

## **2. FulBe Society.**

The FulBe (singular *pullo*) are the principal pastoralists in eastern Nigeria, and indeed in West Africa as a whole. They can be divided into three types, the *FulBe siire*, urban FulBe, town-dwellers who may or may not own cattle; semi-settled transhumant pastoralists, *FulBe wuro*; and *FulBe na'i or Bororo*. The term Bororo, despite its widespread use, has slightly pejorative overtones and is not used by the people themselves, who prefer *FulBe na'i*, 'cow FulBe', or *FulBe ladde*, 'bush FulBe'. The nomads, who wander with their herds. The standard ethnographies of (Hopen, 1958) often give the impression that the majority are nomads, on arid zone pastoralism, this may be misleading. 'True' nomads constitute only a small fraction of the total FulBe population in West Africa. Some have a permanent home where part of the family, usually with the core of the herd, the lactating females, resides throughout the year. The rest of the family goes away in the dry season by some of the men to a place where pasture is flooded areas. The resident family group may or may not farm, from the sale of surplus animals and the level of profit from the land increases, milk yields may decline as a result of species pasture grasses. This type of transhumance is a variation on the pastoral groups such as the Nuer or some Maasai sections where the

The evolution of sedentary systems of production in Adamawa has been historically bound up with the political dominance of the urban FulBe. Their armies conquered this area in the nineteenth century, and their authority continued in a scarcely attenuated form as a consequence of the colonial policy of Indirect Rule. Islamic rulers and the Muslim Shariya courts continued in power, even in non-Islamic areas, till the end of the colonial era and in some cases beyond it. These facilitated access to large tracts of land for the pastoral groups, often at the expense of the local agricultural populations. Since the colonial authorities drew the greatest proportion of their revenue from the cattle-tax, *jangali*, it was in their interest to tolerate this situation.

Status among both transhumant and nomadic FulBe is correlated with possession of livestock, especially cattle, and comparisons between individuals are characteristically made on the basis of the number and type of animals they possess. The requirement that the herd be as extensive as possible is therefore a significant determining factor in deciding patterns of transhumance and herding strategies. There is a general correlation between the degree of sedentarisation of FulBe, and their observance of Islam. Most FulBe have at least a nominal allegiance to Islam, but its hold on the truly nomadic groups may be slight. FulBe na'i are divided into a number of sections, *lenyol*, that are in principle endogamous, with preferred cross-cousin marriage. This is partly why FulBe have maintained their distinct physical characteristics. Settled FulBe, by contrast, intermarry extensively with local populations, particularly by taking slave-wives as concubines.

### **3. FulBe-Samba relations.**

#### **3.1 Samba Society.**

The Samba Nnakenyare are conventionally known as 'Chamba Daka' in the colonial literature, a form derived from the Hausa pronunciation of their name. In their vernacular 'Samba' refers to the people and 'Sama' to the language. People have been described by Frobenius (1913), Detzner (1923), Migeod Fardon (1980 and 1983). They live along the border of eastern Nigeria today their principal town is Ganye. Some isolated groups live on the (shown in Map I). The Samba have a double descent system, the perceived advantage of which is that individuals can manipulate their kinship networks on both sides of the family to their own benefit. Since a Samba woman can pass on her property to her own descendants, there is a greater incentive for the private accumulation of wealth. As a result, many Samba women are quite rich in relation to their menfolk, and they have well-developed co-operative mechanisms for agricultural labour and other subsistence activities. Politically, the Samba have undergone a number of organizational changes in the course of the last two centuries. During the nineteenth century, when FulBe slave-raiding was based on the Lamelara of northern Cameroun, the historical aspects of this are dealt with more fully in Blench (1983). The ancestors of modern Samba were living in the hills and plateaux of a coherent ethnic group at this period but were a nexus of peoples Lamja, Tola, Dangsa and Dirim. When they descended to the lowlands, Sugu and Mbulo (Fardon, 1983). However, the rapid conquest of the abrogated the traditional authority system and power devolved to local Kontcha, Jada, Kojoli and Toungo. In the late colonial period the FulBe title system and their own, and began to agitate for the present 'capital', Ganye, originally just a market-place without a in importance and with the promotion of a Samba ruler of Ganye to traditional chiefdoms was firmly established. Since Nigerian FulBe in nearly all of their principal settlements. Authority in villages was traditionally enforced by secret societies, (*juup* in the case of men, and *j m* for women). These institutions promulgated the supernatural sanctions prescribed for contraventions of social norms. These societies have tended to lose their authority and disappear close to roads where Islam and Christianity are most prominent, but they have maintained their authority in the remoter villages. Islam was originally introduced by the FulBe in the 1920's, and it commands today a limited allegiance among elder males who needed to succeed within the context of the power structures of the colonial period. Catholicism was introduced shortly after this, and has become more widespread because of its use of the school system as a tool of proselytisation. Although both religions have made a considerable impact on the Samba, neither has excluded the other, nor has traditional religion been eliminated. Tolerance is such that it is not uncommon to find three brothers, two of whom subscribe the two world religions and the third to traditional religion. The diversity of religious practice in Samba society is also reflected in the co-existence of three possible inheritance patterns generated by the requirements of each specific religion. Traditionally, first rights over the property of a deceased were assigned to the mother's brothers. With the advent of Christianity and Islam new inheritance rules were introduced. Christians normally assign rights in property to first sons, while Muslims adhere to Koranic inheritance rules, sharing between sons and daughters. After death Samba respect the dead person's beliefs, both in the administration of funeral rites and the distribution of property. In the past, the Samba were divided into numerous exogamous clans. However, over the last three decades marriage rules have broken down in the face of demands for intra-religious marriage. Samba now prefer to marry others of the same religion as themselves, even if this means marrying FulBe. Sedentary FulBe are willing to take Samba women as wives, although Samba men less commonly marry FulBe women.

#### **3.2 The Samba Production System.**

The Samba are subsistence farmers, and their principal cultivated staple is maize, along with guinea-corn, millet, beans, okra, sorrel, groundnuts, cassava and other minor crops. Their only type of domestic livestock, apart from chickens and guinea-fowl was the goat, but they have owned zebu cattle for more than fifty years now. Cattle are not used as draught animals, nor are they milked on a regular basis, but they are used to manure fields in the course of eating crop residues. Land is freely available throughout most of Samba territory, and traditionally all land was vested in the *Gang*, or chief, who could assign areas of uncleared bush to immigrating strangers. Rights over fallow land were inherited matrilineally, although land left

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uncultivated for longer than a certain period reverted to common ownership. Men and women each cultivated their own fields, and were responsible jointly for the feeding of the family group. Surplus income derived from farming was kept by individuals of both sexes. Both men and women have highly organized collective farming groups, linked with secret societies, traditionally, but often based around churches today. The difficulty of acquiring agricultural labour outside these contexts is the principal constraint on accumulating wealth through agricultural surplus. Samba society is otherwise economically undifferentiated, and traditionally lacked mechanisms for the expression of disparities of wealth.

### **3.3 FulBe Impact on the Samba.**

The first incursions of FulBe in the Samba area seem to have been via the raids from the Lamidates of northern Cameroun (Abubakar, 1979). Although Toungo was a settlement formed originally from Koncha, the prevalence of tsetse must have made the region unattractive to herders. Oral traditions suggest that the first appearance of graziers post-dates the German occupation (Blench, 1983). Pastoralist movement into the lowland areas of southern Adamawa was not common in the nineteenth century because of the risk of trypanosomiasis carried by the tsetse fly. However, during this period, as the high altitude grasslands began to become overpopulated the increased hunting pressure created by the expansion of lowland Samba and a consequent decline of the principal fly vectors may have made lowland regions more attractive. The rinderpest epidemics that began to sweep across the Sahel from the 1890's onwards (Baier, 1980:130) may also have impelled the FulBe to explore new areas in the hope of preventing infection by isolating their herds, a process that certainly occurred as a result of the rinderpest epidemic in 1983. Although these FulBe originally came as nomads, by the 1930's they had begun to settle because of the favourable conditions. The main pattern of animal husbandry in the area today is transhumance, regular movements of the bulk of the herds to a dry-season pasture, both southeast and west of the Ganye zone. A core herd, with lactating animals predominating, is left at the homestead with most of the family while the grazer or his sons, or hired herdsmen, take the animals to their pasture during the 3-4 months of the dry season. The evolution of this production system reflects the ecological features of the Samba area, with a high population density and scarce water and pasture in the northern parts. Settlement of pastoral groups under these conditions depends on co-operation with local agricultural farmers. If the farmers are willing to define areas where they will allow FulBe to settle and cultivate, and they will in practice probably have to teach them to farm. Among the Samba, a major motivation for the maintenance of good relations is the desire to invest in cattle. This is mediated through an apprenticeship system in the case of the Samba. FulBe with herds larger than can be cared for by the members of their immediate kin networks have to hire herdsmen. Under normal circumstances these may be other FulBe who have lost their herds through disease or other misfortune. Hired labourers are traditionally rewarded with a bull for every six months of work for their employer, as well as rights over the dairy production of the herd they are managing. Together with the loan of animals, this has traditionally been a mechanism for cattleless individuals to rebuild their herds. In the Samba area, however, it is commonplace to hire Samba farmers, particularly young men, to assist with dry-season transhumance. The sedentarization of the nomads that began in the 1930's started this practice because of the increased labour requirements implicit in dividing the productive unit. Favourable conditions for graziers have resulted in less of the catastrophic stock losses that occur in more marginal areas further north, and the relatively high agricultural production in this part of Nigeria has meant that surplus labour is available within the farming communities. The availability of Samba to be hired in this way reflects constraints present within their society on the accumulation of capital through traditional means. The intensive labour requirements, and the co-operative nature of agricultural work in Samba society, prevent the expansion of farms beyond a certain size. Cattle, however, represent a means of accumulating capital without a proportionately increased investment in labour, and allow for an acceleration in social differentiation. Although Samba are attempting to displace FulBe from political power, relations between the two communities are generally good. A low population density has resulted in little competition for resources. Because the herdsmen came initially as clients of the settled peoples, and they were seen as bringing benefits, such as more readily available meat and dairy products they were welcomed. The Samba were available to herd cattle for the FulBe, and thus came to understand their way of life, while the FulBe learnt

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techniques of farming from the Samba. The Samba were tolerant of Islam, some became converts, and married the FulBe. The result has been a partial convergence of the two social systems.

### **4. FulBe Relations with the Mambila.**

#### **4.1 Mambila Society.**

The Mambila people live on the grassy uplands of the Mambila Plateau, and in the adjacent areas of Cameroun. Accounts of their society can be found in Meek (1931) and Rehfisch (1960, 1962, 1969, 1974). Mambila society was originally acephalous and authority was maintained through a variety of masquerades controlled by male secret societies. Magical sanctions operated to prevent the transgression of social norms. However, in the colonial period, village-heads with the FulBe titles *jauro* and *jimilla* were appointed. These positions were ill-adapted to Mambila society, and their incumbents have never wielded the same sort of authority they would have had among FulBe. Although the FulBe brought Islam to the Plateau, as well as to the Samba, very few Mambila have converted to Islam. The reason is probably that the FulBe never conquered the Mambila, but merely established raiding settlements in the sparsely populated uplands. Baptist missions have been established south of the Donga since the 1930's and they have made considerable numbers of converts in a restricted area. Mambila pastors are influential figures in their communities, and their opposition to the FulBe on religious grounds has a tendency to overflow into unrelated topics, such as land rights. A complex multilineal descent system (Rehfisch, 1960) framed within a larger network of clans and sections formed the basis of rules for marriage and inheritance. Traditionally all marriages had to be exogamous with respect to maximal lineages, that is, a man and a woman could not marry if they had any ancestor in common. A solution to the problems this raised, and to the difficulty of finding bridewealth in a society that produced little surplus, was preferred daughter-exchange. This caused the Mambila not to out-marry with other tribes, in contrast to other agricultural groups around Banyo. In particular, they never married the FulBe, both on religious grounds and because of their marital rules. One consequence was the relatively high fertility rate of the Mambila. Percival (1938) concluded that there was probably a rate of annual increase of 2-3%, when census figures were 'revised'. Careful work in the Banyo area in the late 1960's, reported by Hurault (1970:1062) showed a higher rate of population increase in comparison to neighbouring groups such as the Wawa. The LIDECO report (1972:41) estimated a total Mambila population of 43,000 in Nigeria in 1972, basing themselves on a local authority census of 1968. Percival (1938:613) concluded that the total Mambila population in 1937 was 17,127, thus giving an annual growth rate of 2.6% a year. This differential between the Mambila and other populations is attributed by Hurault (op.cit.) to the incidence of venereal disease spread by inter-marriage with FulBe and consequent female sterility.

#### **4.2 The Mambila Production System.**

Although the Mambila people may have originally been swidden farmers on the uplands, for many years now, cultivation has been densest along the river valleys, particularly on the banks of the Donga, which cuts across the southern part of the Plateau from east to west. The silt brought down by the rivers means that the land in the valleys is exceptionally fertile and can be cultivated year after year without serious degradation of the soil. Because of the high altitude, diseases such as onchocerciasis, present in many river valleys in Adamawa, do not constrain such cultivation and this has stimulated population increase. The Mambila living today in Cameroun moved there during the course of this century in search of new farmland. The Mambila agricultural calendar is set out in detail in Rehfisch (1974:22) and has been retained up till the present, although maize has displaced guinea-corn as the dominant cereal staple and Irish potatoes have become popular as a tuber crop. Typical farm plots for the Mbamnga area are mapped in the LIDECO report (1972). The long wet season in Mambila (April to December) means that many systems of intercropping that would not be possible in lowland areas become practical. The system most favoured by the Mambila today is the intercropping of maize with tubers, particularly cocoyam (*Colocasia esculenta*), rizga (*Solenostemon rotundifolius*), and sweet potato. After the maize is harvested, these tubers continue to grow, and can

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normally be harvested in the following dry season in February or March. One implication of this is that there is no time of year when it is practical for the cattle to graze on crop residues, for the land is in continuous use. A similar system is described by Hurault (1964) for the Banyo area, and it is safe to assume that the principles of high-rainfall grasslands agriculture had been established by the ancestors of the Mambila-Vute before the settlement of the Plateau. The other unusual feature of Mambila agriculture is the planting of 'yom' (*Tephrosia purpurea*), a shrub whose leaves can be used as a green manure. It provides firewood and the leafy branches, rotted down, fix nitrogen in the soil and thus renew the fertility of land. Commonly, a patch of land is planted with cultigens one year and 'yom' the following year, though more complex cycles are used in some areas (LIDECO, 1972:83). It is attractive as a browse for cattle, but if they enter a field of yom, they kill the plants by eating the leaves. Economically, Mambila society was undifferentiated. Although there were craft specializations and a division of labour between the sexes (Rehfisch, 1974), this did not permit the accumulation of stored capital. Blacksmiths and weavers, who were always men, did not follow their profession to the exclusion of farming, while women regarded potting and basket-making as spare-time activities. Rehfisch (1962) showed that in the 1950's through the institution of competitive gift-giving any considerable surpluses of agricultural produce were used up in feasts. Such feasts helped to forge a nexus of interpersonal alliances and these were part of the traditional mechanism holding Mambila society together. Since the 1950's, the broad changes in the national economy have made a considerable impact on Mambila society. Schneider (1955:125) argues that the opening of the cola route from the grasslands to Yola in the 1920's was a channel for innovation on the Plateau. Certainly it acted to make both Hausa and European trade goods more widely available. The construction of the escarpment road in the immediate postcolonial period was of greater importance, since it enabled agricultural surpluses to be marketed in other areas of Nigeria. The productivity of maize has allowed farmers to market their surpluses and to accumulate capital, invested either in livestock or in manufactured goods.

### **4.3 FulBe-Mambila Relations.**

Percival (1938, cited in Rehfish, 1974:11) dates the origin of the FulBe chiefdoms on Mambila to as far back as 1875. Although raiding may well have occurred even earlier than this, the establishment of permanent hegemony probably only dates from the immediate pre-colonial period and may have reflected the need for more pasture, after the rapid degradation of the highlands in north Central Cameroun (Boutrais, 1974). Clearly, it would have been to the advantage of FulBe chiefs to stress the antiquity of their settlement to the colonial authorities, in order to stress their legitimacy as rulers of the Plateau. Interviews in Dorofi and other towns in the southeast indicated that the first groups of nomadic pastoralists to reach the grasslands from Cameroun were the Rahaaji clan, who arrived in about 1900, only a few years before the Germans. Twenty years previously, the more militaristic FulBe *siire* groups from Banyo were seeking to extend their boundaries. Mayo Ndaga, Warwar, Mbamnga and Nguroje, chiefdoms dating from this period, were formed originally as slave-raiding bases. The ruler of Banyo surrendered to the Germans in 1901, and shortly after this, several German expeditions reached the area (Rehfish, 1974:11). The grasslands were reconquered by British and French forces in 1915-16, and after 1919 came under British mandate. The slave trade ceased, but the dominance of the FulBe was maintained because of the lack of effective supervision by the colonial authorities. Even when permanent authority was established, the colonial policy of boosting the authority of Islamic elites meant that the administration of justice remained in their hands. One result of this has been three-quarters of a century of bad relations between the two groups. Mambila informants complained to Migeod (1925:164,166) in 1923 about FulBe allowing their cows to trample crops, and he observed at the time that the laws were written in such a way as to favour the cattle-owner. The destruction of the plant *yom* was a particular grievance, because without it the fertility of the land could not be maintained. Rehfish (1974:16), also reports this situation, and matters remained the same until recently. Since the return to civilian rule in 1979 the rise to power of the Mambila in Local Government has altered this pattern. The Mambila see themselves as the owners of the land, and the FulBe as intruders. They have been using the authority of the Government to abrogate Certificates of Occupancy issued to pastoralists, and obstructing their annual movements to the valley of the river Donga. Even so, the accumulated frustration of seventy-five years has resulted in a number of violent conflicts between the farmers and graziers, and this tension will continue whilst other factors remain the same.

## **5. Conclusions.**

### **5. Contrastive Elements of Farmer-Grazier Relations.**

Competition for resources in the Samba area and on the Mambila Plateau is at very similar levels. Water is relatively scarce around Ganye -although the Plateau has a high rainfall, there is considerable pressure on the land in the river valleys from farmers, and this creates a comparable effect. Pasture is scarce in Ganye, because of the lack of water. On Mambila, the high stocking rates have degraded the land to such an extent that ordinary pasture grasses have disappeared. In both places, crop residues are potentially available to graziers; but only in the Samba area are cattle allowed access to them. Nevertheless, relations between pastoralists and agriculturalists show the contrastive patterns exemplified in this paper. When FulBe-Samba and FulBe-Mambila relations are compared, divergences are apparent in each of the four categories referred to in the introduction. The pastoralists who entered the Ganye area came as clients of the Samba, asking permission from the local chiefs to graze their animals. On the Mambila Plateau, the FulBe *na'i* entered in the wake of authoritarian rule by the outlying settlements owing allegiance to Banyo, who regularly raided the Plateau for slaves. Towns were established without reference to the local population, and during the colonial period, political authority and the judiciary remained in the hands of people seen as interlopers by the Mambila. The farming systems of Samba and Mambila are extremely different. In one case, a profitable relationship has evolved, where the cattle eat crop residues and manure the farmer's fields. In the other case a system of valley cultivation, intercropping, combined with a green manure, means that the invasion of crops by stock can be a disaster for the farmer. Among the Samba, the religion of the pastoralists is widely tolerated if not subscribed to, while to the Mambila, Islam is associated with repressive rule. One of the most common ways for exchange relations to build up between two groups of different means of subsistence is

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the exchange of wives. The Samba are willing to marry into the FulBe and vice-versa, whereas, on the Plateau, almost no intermarriage takes place between mutually antagonistic groups.

This suggests that no single cause can account for the specific state of farmer-grazier relations in any given area. Instead, a nexus of interrelated factors combine to determine relations in each situation.

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