

## The Hausa Community in Agege, Nigeria 1906 – 1967

Abdulwahab Tijani

Department of General Studies, Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomosho, Nigeria  
E-mail: immamtijani@yahoo.com

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**ABSTRACT** This work is a study of the historical trends that enhanced the harmonious intergroup relations between the Hausa community in Agege and their Yoruba hosts in South - Western Nigeria. The field work conducted which was largely oral interviews as well as secondary sources showed that the Hausa – Yoruba intergroup relations in Agege indicate the fact that intergroup contact between the two did not lead to any recorded violent conflicts. This was possible because of the nature of their commercial relationship and the establishment of social and political institutions that enhanced harmonious intergroup relations.

### INTRODUCTION

*It is thus surely to be expected that societies made up of markedly different cultural communities should have problem in managing their inter-group relations. Since most societies are multi cultural, then ethnic conflicts of one sort or another is likely to be norm (Brown, 1989: 3)*

In the study of intergroup relations, multi-ethnic nations like Nigeria, the idea of intergroup conflicts disemphasized in the words of Brown is quite prominent. This is so because some have argued that social-cultural differences in many African societies lead to ethnic conflicts. From this it shows that ethnic conflict is predominant because “our societies comprise a multitude of religions, ethnic...groups with competing interests, competing values and needs” (Ebijuwa, 2000). Conflict is thus inevitable and natural to most societies.

If conflict is thus inevitable in this sense, what we should be interested in is the historical reconstruction of how societies managed their intergroup conflicts. As Ebijuwa observes:

*This is because societies throughout the world which are stable are not those with an absence of conflict, but rather those which are able to manage conflicts in stable ways (Ebijuwa, 2000: 84)*

In this light, we observe that the historical process of the establishment of the Hausa community in Agege and the intergroup relations between the community and Yoruba hosts between 1906 and 1967 had shown the ability of managing their intergroup conflicts.

This work is therefore interested in the

historical trends that assisted the management of a stable intergroup relations and ability of managing intergroup conflicts between the Hausa community in Agege and their hosts. The study of Hausa community in Yoruba towns by Cohen (1969, 1974) had focused on the organization of Hausa trade across Yorubaland, while Albert (1991) was interested in the reconstruction of intergroup conflicts between the Hausa in Sabo Ibadan and their Yoruba hosts in a comparative analysis with Sabon-gari in Kano. We should therefore go further than this level, to reconstruct how the intergroup conflicts between the Hausa community in Agege and their Yoruba host was managed to maintain a harmonious relations.

Here, the contact hypothesis of ethnic relations advanced by Yehuda (1962) shall be of assistance. The hypothesis is based on the assumption that intergroup contact reduces intergroup tension and prejudice. Yehuda deduce from studies that contacts of close proximity with some frequencies in a social setting or with different individual may produce meaningful communications and therefore facilitate attitudinal or behavioural changes (Yehuda, 1962). Similarly, he observes that Albert opines “that for contact to serve as a factor in reducing prejudice it must be based on equal status contact between majority and minority groups in the pursuit of common goals... if such contact is also supported by social institutions (such as the Law, the community etc.). Its effects on attitudinal change should even increase” (Yehuda, 1962). Similarly, he observes that “Several studies have indicated that friendly contact between members of a majority group

and high-status individuals of a minority group tend to reduce prejudice towards the whole minority group” (Yehuda, 1962).

In this work, we shall therefore construct the historical contact between the Hausa and Yoruba and its effects on the establishment of Hausa community in Agege. We shall also study the factors of trade, religion etc. and the institutions that assist the maintenance of stable and harmonious intergroup relations between the Hausa community in Agege and their Yoruba hosts.

### YORUBALAND

Contact between the Hausa and Yoruba people pre-dates the colonial period. There had been significant migrations of Hausa people into Yorubaland as far as the coastal regions of Lagos since the pre-colonial period. Agege as well as other Hausa settlements in the Yorubaland emerged during the colonial period. This point to the fact that the effects of the colonial situation are important on intergroup relations between the two groups. For instance, it has been rightly observed that the problem of national integration and conflicts started with the formation of the Nigerian state under colonial rule. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the nature of inter-group relations in the colonial period up to the period of independence. However, it is also necessary to understand the nature of intergroup relations in the pre-colonial period to properly understand the role of the colonial experience in the problems of intergroup relations between the Hausa community and their Yoruba hosts (Tijani, 2003).

The inhabitants of Agege and other Hausa communities in Yorubaland were ever in contact with their kith and kin back home in Hausaland. They were thus affected by the national power struggle between the elite of each ethnic group in the period of struggle for independence. The Hausa community in Agege was especially more exposed to this power struggle because of their elitist proximity to Lagos the then colonial capital of Nigeria (Tijani, 2003). The inter-group relations between the Hausa community in Agege and their Yoruba hosts are therefore a micro-cosm of the intergroup relations between the Hausa and Yoruba at the national level.

The Orile-Agege Hausa community was established on an Awori farmland. It started as a trading station, where the Hausa traders sat under the trees to buy Kola and sell cattle to the Yoruba

people. The Hausa people from their various residences within Lagos area usually used the present site of Agege as a trade outpost where they bought kolanut from Yoruba farmers. By 1906 the Hausa traders began to build camps in this area and it became a residential trading station (Tijani, 2003).

The inter-group relations during this period i.e. the last two decades of the nineteenth century were so harmonious that the Hausa people were allotted farmlands by some of their host communities (Tijani, 2003). Although they were primarily traders, the Hausa people involved in farming activities partly as a religion, Islam preaches that there is good spiritual reward for farming. Moreso, many of the Hausa people had to feed their wives who were mainly purdah women (Albert, 1994). For instance the Hausa people were allotted farmlands at Ibadan before the colonial period. These were confiscated later when socio-economic conflicts developed between the two groups during the colonial period. Similarly, in Ede they were given farmlands, they even had rights to sell plots of land, after the establishment of Hausa quarter (Sabo) in 1941, but the right was withdrawn before independence when ethnic politics started in Nigeria. In Osogbo, the farmland given to the Hausa trader later became part of the Sabo land, when it was established. In Ogbomoso the farmland allocated to the Hausa traders in 1890 later developed into Gambari town (Tijani, 2003).

During this period, the prominent figures among the Hausa traders in Agege were the leaders of kolanut trade. The Hausa kolanut traders in Agege went into the Awori village to purchase the nuts. According to Jubril Abdullah, such Hausa kolanut dealers, who were also landlords, were called ‘Y’an Baranda’. They were mostly those who had stayed for long period in Yorubaland and could speak.

### Evolution of Hausa community in Agege 1906 - 1967

The Hausa people in Agege first settled in Ota among the Awori people, some of them were in *Ago Awusa* which was said to have been established in the 1930s by Mallam Abdullahi Usman who migrated from Kano. *Ago Awusa* (Hausa camp) was located between Epe and Itoikin in Lagos State. The place is now referred to as ALAUSA in Ikeja, Lagos.

However, the Hausa people had settled in Lagos since the eighteenth century or even much earlier, but available evidence shows that one Oshodi, a Nupe man from Bida in the Northern and Tinubu (Taa nuubu), during the reign of Oba Buraimoh Adele between 1775 – 1780 brought Mallam Ahmad Azare a Hausa Muslim clergy from the North to pray for the success of the Oba. This man was called Tdirisu Nageye. He later became the Sarkin Hausawa (Leader of Hausa) of Lagos between (1843 – 1920) (Tijani, 2003) both Hausa and Yoruba language. And among them were those who had been born in Yorubaland such as Alhaji Halim Muhammad who became the first Sarkin Gambari (Leader of Hausa people) of Agege in 1934, and Muhammad Dogon Kade (Jubriila, 2001).

The colonial environment increased the migration of Hausa people into Yorubaland. This was due to the effects of colonial taxes roads and railway. Such factors as the colonial taxes, roads and railways were factors that encouraged and facilitated the increase in migration of Nigerians generally. The imposition of the colonial taxes and the insistence of its payment with the new coins were the prime movers in the development of migrant wage labour. The colonial taxes and currencies integrated with other sections of the colonial economic policies such as the introduction of cash crops and new European goods. The currency was introduced around 1900 and by 1912, it had become dominant. This was due to the insistence that the colonial taxes should be paid in coins. Taxes were part of the colonial fiscal measures introduced to finance colonial administration and to force the peasants to produce cash crops or work in the mines etc. many people became involved in the labour migration to cash crops producing areas and kolanuts trade in search of money to pay taxes. According to Swindell:

*As the twentieth century developed, labour migration clearly took on new dimension and, from what can be inferred, there was a rapid increase in the volume of migration to meet new levels of taxation and demands for labour in the towns and commercial crop zones. (Swindell, 1984: 14).*

By early 1930s the colonial taxes increased dramatically. This had the effects of increasing colonial migrations. The population of Hausa traders and labour increased in the kolanut producing areas of Yorubaland such as Ibadan,

Sagamu, Agege, Ijebu-Ode and Oshogbo. For example Cohen writes that:

*During the period October – January, when the kola season begins in Sagamu, 50 miles south of Ibadan, and when hundreds of men connected with the kola trader move from Ibadan to Sagamu, between a third to a half of Sabo's prostitutes move with them. In the same way, when the season in Ibadan district starts in January, both men and prostitute return to Sabo. (Cohen, 1969).*

This colonial migration towards Yorubaland was also encouraged by the completion of Ibadan–Kano railway in 1912. There was the movement of kolanut and the European goods to the North, while grains, ground nuts, sheep, goats, cattle and potash were brought by the Hausa and Fulani people into Yorubaland. These goods were mainly transported through the railway. It helped the increase of Hausa traders in railway towns of Agege, Abeokuta, Osogbo and Ibadan. For example after the construction of the rail line to Kano in 1911, the export of groundnuts jumped from 1,179 to 19,288 tons (Nnoli, 1980).

The railway system was supplemented in the 1920s by rapid development of roads as motor transport increased in volume. District commissioners constructed every type of roads from the dusty laterite tract to the modern tarred roads. This continued rapidly till 1939 (Hodder, 1960). These transportation facilities increased the volume of trade between Agege and other part of Yorubaland.

There were also seasonal migrant traders and labourers that left Hausaland during the dry season to Agege and other Yoruba towns for droning and trading (Swindell, 1984). Many of the eventually settled in the Hausa communities in Yorubaland. Due to this increase in the population of Hausa traders in Agege in this period, i.e. 1930s the need arose to appoint a leader. Therefore, in 1934, the first Sarkin Gambari (Hausa leader) of Agege Mallam Haliru, was appointed by Ikeja Native Authority, colony of Lagos (Jubriila, N.D). The appointment of the Sarkin Gambari was in response to the fact that the new community needed a recognized powerful leader. This is rightly observed by Yehuda.

*The effectiveness of inter-racial (ethnic) contact is greatly increased if the contact is sanctioned by institutional support. The support may come from the law, a custom, a spokes person for the community or any authority that is*

*accepted by the interacting group. In many cases, institutional support comes simply from a social atmosphere or a general public agreement. (Yehuda, 1962).*

The choice of the Hausa leader in Agege and other Yoruba towns rested with the indigenous traditional rulers who often consult with the Hausa leaders of trade in the community. In the case of Agege it was sanctioned and given certificate of appointment by the colonial authority (Tijani, 2003). The relationship between the Hausa community in Agege and the Yoruba hosts span the economic, social and political fields.

### **Organisation of Trade**

The main trade items in the Hausa communities in Agege and the other Yoruba towns were cattle and kolanut. This involved a long chain of sellers, dealers, drover (of cattle), commission agents and other intermediaries, many of whom were either Hausa or Yoruba people.

Trade in cattle and kolanut involved a long chain of sellers, dealers, drover (of cattle), commission agents and other intermediaries, many of whom were either Hausa or Yoruba people. There was low level of literacy, and the problem of language communication between the cattle sellers and Hausa cattle dealers and kola sellers on one hand and the Yoruba cattle buyers and kola sellers on the others. There was also the need for credit facilities. On the issue of credit facilities, we agree with Cohen that:

*Because of the lack of a high degree of effective centralization, contractual relations can not be easily maintained or enforced by official central institutions, while modern methods of issuing goods in the various stages of transit between suppliers and retailers are not developed, since the security of properties is not yet very high. (Cohen, 1969: 16).*

All these were technical problems which confronted the Hausa traders in Yoruba towns. (Cohen, op. Cit: 16).

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It was essential for the Hausa landlords to emphasize his 'Hausa-ness' so as to gain the trust of Hausa a northern dealers, who would entrust their goods and moneys only on to the hands of his kinsmen in a 'strange land', who

live in a highly stable and organized Hausa community. This is because there were needs for trade transaction in an atmosphere of trust, especially where credit facility were required. The cattle sellers sold on credit to Yoruba butchers and there were no documents signed, also there were no bank services or official civil/courts to intervene in the business. (Cohen, 1969).

Similarly, millions of pound months of kola were collected annually by Hausa brokers from various kolanut producing areas in Yorubaland and it was sent to north through chain of intermediaries. This also involved credit arrangements in many of its stages. Hence dealers of cattle and buyers of kolanut needed to rely upon their 'brothers' Hausa landlords, who will provide the necessary trade security for the dealers (Cohen, 1969).

### **Commission Agents**

These agents were the intermediaries in the cattle and kolanut business in Sabo quarters. Most of them were the dealers themselves, they doubled as trade agents. They mediate between the dealers from the North and from the South, they were given a special commission known as 'Laada' in Hausa. The Sabo business landlords usually had many agents commission agents (Yau Kwamisho) who marked for him, while he directs the general affairs of the agency, he is however held responsible for the outcome of the conduct of his clients. The commission agent gets his special fees as commission from the seller either kolanut, he is not paid by the landlord.

The landlord acts as buyer for the kolanut dealers from the North. The dealers often money through other dealers to their business landlords, who is entrusted for the purchase, packaging and transportation of the goods to the north. However, some small scale dealers come down to Yoruba landlords with the landlord, who accompanied his client to the sources of supply to buy kolanut. When they return to the quarters they supervise the packaging and assist him in dispatching the goods the North or actually accompany him.

The kolanut landlords also provide packaging services. They employed skilled workers to pack the nuts in baskets, covered with special leaves and tied with ropes that were either bought from the Hausa rope makers in the Sabo communities in Yorubaland or brought from the North. The parkers were about two shillings paid

for each basket they packed. The chief packer gives his assistance six pence, while the landlord pays the measure (Cohen, 1969). Different Hausa people serve as porters of the nuts to and from the parker houses to the lorry for transportation to the north.

The business landlords employed the services of the transport agents who arrange for Lorries that carries the goods up north. These transport agents were also Hausa residents of Sabo quarters. Some of these gods were sent by rail in railway towns such as Oshogbo, Ibadan, Agege, Abeokuta and Sagamu. At the railway station the goods were entrusted to a transporter's supervision. Such supervisors were part of the team of staff of the landlords. They supervise as well as arrange the necessary way bills for the goods. In case of transportation by Lorries, the lorry commission agents negotiate business and mediate between the driver and the dealers. He also had a team of clients in his service and he is paid by the drivers for his activities. He also runs accommodations for lorry drivers as well as a passenger in transit.

In cattle business, the cattle dealer entrust the sales of his herd to the landlords, with whom he also resides. The landlords serve as commission agents, but the dealers always accompany them to Zango where the cattle are sold. Dealers could not sell directly to the Yoruba butchers because cattle were usually sold on credit. This was where the landlord, who had known the intricacies of trade and customs of Yoruba people becomes relevant. He serves as a sort of guarantor to the dealer. The landlords had clerks who helped as errand boys to collect such money from butchers, the money was kept by him until the dealer was ready to go up to the north for fresh consignment. The landlords' income comes from the commission he received from the cattle buyers. He receives about seven (7) shillings on each cattle as commission in the late 1950s (Cohen, 1969). The Fulani leader was appointed by the Sarkin Hausawa, he controlled the Fulani people employed by the cattle traders to tender cattle. He collects 0commission for his work.

In the kolanut business, the landlords' commission was not fixed. Rather he fixes his own commission which he deducts in bulk from the amount sent to him. But he tries to be lenient in doing this, in order to retain the confidence of his dealers. In both kola and cattle trades, sometimes the landlords venture into buying

and selling with their own capital. Some of them sent their clients to the north to act as their own agents, buying cattle and sending them down south to such landlords.

At times, some landlords bought cattle where it was less costly in the northern parts of Yoruba towns for sale at another part of Yoruba towns where the price is higher especially in Lagos and Agege. However, there were inhibitions to landlords' double dealing as landlords and dealers at the same time. Sometimes their agents that were stationed in the north defraud or escape with the capital sent to them for the purchase of the cattle. Also, dealers would not be enthusiastic to entrust their money to such landlords for fear that he shall use their own money to run his own trade. Again, they believe that he would have less time for the supervision of their own herds (Cohen, 1969).

Similarly, in the kolanut business, the kolanut landlords often act as a dealer. He buys the goods of his dealer as well as his own and sends them together to his dealers in the north for sale. This reciprocal trust helped to gain the confidence of his dealer in the north. As in the cattle trade, such landlords that doubles as landlords and dealers were not pleasing to the dealers. Dealers would suspect that such landlords would use their own money to buttress their trade. Secondly, they would resent the act of competing with them as landlords.

### **National Party Politics in Agege Hausa Community**

The Richard constitution of 1946 led to the regionization of Nigeria. These regions were demarcated into three; each of them was dominated by each of the three major groups namely, the Hausa in the North, the Yoruba in the South-West and the Ibo in the South-East. The Macpherson constitution of 1951 not only preserved regions but also increase their powers. Consequently, the ethnic unions which were formed metamorphosized into three ethnic-based political parties. The Egbe Omo Oduduwa, the Ibo Union and Jamiyyar Mutanen Arewa formed the nucleus of the Yoruba dominated Action group party, Ibo controls (NCNC) and the Hausa dominated northern people's congress (NPC).

The two southern parties, the Action Group (AG) and the NCNC through their activities in Agege and other Hausa communities in

Yorubaland (Western Region) contested for the support of the Hausa communities in the Western Region. This was important if we consider the fact that the population of the Hausa people in the Western Region by 1952 census was 41,000, this did not include those who did not register for fear of taxation or those that were temporary migrants (Cohen, 1969).

Initially, many members of the Hausa community in Agege as well as those in other part of Yorubaland joined the NPC which they saw representing Hausa – Fulani interests within the Nigerian Nation – State. For example in Agege, Mohammed Dogon Kade, who was one of the officials of the Sarkin Gambari (Hausa Chief) was a strong member of the NPC. Generally the NPC enjoyed the membership and support of the rich elderly Hausa people in Hausa communities in Yorubaland. This is because the party holds the powerful; backing of the northern Aristocratic class i.e. the Emirs. Secondly, it had the support of the Hausa migrant from Sokoto province which was the power house of the party (Tijani, 2003).

The Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) which was led by Alhaji Aminu Kano was the major Northern radical party which rivaled the NPC in the North. NEPU had the support of the young Hausa residents of Hausa communities in Yorubaland (Western Regions) including Agege. This was partly because it stood for radical ideas such as demanded for independence and it was against what they perceived as NPC conservative approach to political and National issues. Another factor was that NEPU leadership was based in Kano, thus many Kano indigenes among the politicians in Hausa communities in Yorubaland joined the NEPU. That was why NEPU had large membership among the Hausa communities in Agege and Sagamu, because most of the Hausa in these communities were Kano indigenes (Tijani, 2003).

That also explains why the leadership of NEPU among the Hausa communities in Yorubaland was based in Agege and Sagamu. Again because of the proximity of Agege and Sagamu to Lagos, the capital city of colonial Nigeria where most of the nationalist activities were taking place, these young Hausa men could be enlightened and influenced by the activities of the nationalist. Such enlightened, sophisticated and active nationalist who were

also Hausa leaders of NEPU were Raji Abdullah, M.B Yussuf Yahaya Ada, Ali Dinar and Jubrilla Ayila (Tijani, 2003).

With this crop of leadership in Agege, NEPU made efforts to enlighten the Hausa communities in Yoruba town about their rights as citizens with equal rights as others and about the need to support the movement towards independence. Some of them traveled with the secretary of NPU, Western Union branch, Alhaji Abdullah, in their of not only the Hausa communities of other Yoruba towns but also to the north to enlighten their people about the need for independence in 1953. In Sagamu, the group was warmly received and money was contributed to help carry their mission to other Hausa communities in Yorubaland. They also gave other forms of assistance to their brethren in other Hausa communities, for example, the NPC in Sabo Ibadan District Officer in 1949 to complain about police harassment and extortion of money from the Hausa prostitutes in Sabo and the distortion of evidence by Yoruba interpreters in the courts due to their inadequate understanding of the Hausa language. They requested for ‘mixed courts’ headed by Hausa judges to handle cases as in northern Nigeria (Tijani, 2003). These requests were not granted. Some Hausa leaders of the NPC in Sabo Ibadan became spokesman for the community seeking the attention of the British officials to lodge complains and petitions. According to Jubrilla Abdullah many Hausa youths who were leaders of NEPU were jailed by the Action Group government in the 1950s for flimsy reasons such as tax evasion. Many others fled to Ghana (Tijani, 2003)

### **Party Politics in Agege Did Not Go Without its Vagaries**

Similarly, the tussle for the post of Sarkin Gambari of Agege in 1954 was affected by vagaries of party politics. The post of the Sarkin Gambari became vacant because of the death of Sarkin Gambari Haliru in 1954. Mallam Muhammadu Sansani was made the Sarkin. This displeased Muhammadu Dogon Kade who was the (Waziri) Administrative secretary of Haliru. He wanted the office of Sarkin Gambari, he therefore threatened the life of Muhammadu Sansani, who left after seven days in office. Dogon Kade then assumed the office of Sarkin Gambari Agege. But because he was not literate,

he could neither collect taxes nor labels on railway he therefore brought Abass to assist him in all these (Tijani, 2003).

Abass was a young man and a member of NEPU, therefore the youth proposed Abass as the Sarkin while the elders supported Kade because he was a member of NPC. This divided the Agege Hausa community into two camps. Alhaji Jubrilla who was the Hausa councilor in intimidated the district officer about the problem. The district officer called for a plebiscite to decide the matter. There was a slight scuffle on the day of the plebiscite and the elders left, and Abass won. He was consequently made the Sarkin Gambari of Agege.

Dogon Kade was not satisfied, he joined the Action Group, and through his friend Ajayi Akerele, he masterminded the jailing of many Hausa youth in Agege for tax offences. In 1956, Dogon Kade was made the Sarkin Gambari of Agege by the elders, he resided at Isale Oja, while Abass resided at Zango as another Sarkin Gambari. Since then there has been two Sarkin Gambari of Agege (Tijani, 2003).

The political climate in 1950s and 1960s was not devoid of bitterness and political victimization of members and supporters of rival parties, while supporters of ruling parties were rewarded with posts and provision of social amenities. This led circumstance Hausa communities in Yorubaland in the best of their interests supported the ruling party in Western Region. The NPC and NEPU continued their activities in Hausa communities and some Hausa traders whose economic interests were not seriously jeopardized by remaining within NPC and NEPU remained. The NPC and NEPU members among the kolanut merchants maintained their moral and financial support for their respective parties which was because they had to continuously prove to their northern customer dealers that they were true Hausa and worthy of trust by the dealers (Cohen, 1969).

On the other hand, the cattle merchants were apprehensive about the thousands of pounds worth of cattle, which they sold, on credit to Yoruba butchers. Therefore a good number among the cattle merchants joined the Action Group, while some of them joined the NCNC. At this period, the NCNC was a serious rival to the Action Group in the west especially in Ibadan, Ilesha and Osogbo. However, in Agege, Sagamu Ijebu – Ode and Abeokuta most of the Hausa traders remained with the NEPU for reasons

discussed above. Most of them were kolanuts dealers and also most of them were indigenes of Kano, the northern home base of NEPU.

The confused state of politics in Western Nigeria, which eventually culminated into national political crises between 1960 and 1967, NEPU allied with the Action Group and the NCNC in a grand alliance. This secured the lives and properties of the Hausa residents of Agege, Sagamu, Ijebu-Ode and Abeokuta where the Hausa residents were mostly NEPU members (Tijani, 2003).

From the foregoing, we observe that the challenge of grouping with the problems of intergroup relations should concern historians. Historians should endeavour to reconstruct the factors that assist societies to manage their intergroup conflicts. The Hausa – Yoruba intergroup relations in Agege had indicated the fact intergroup contact between the two groups had not produced any recorded violent conflicts. This had been made possible by trade and commercial relationships: social and political institutions which had been used to manage their intergroup differences.

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