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The Ogoni Anti-Corruption Structure and its Relevance to the Nigeria's Dilemma: A Philosophical Appraisal

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I. ABSTRACT

Every society has different ways of regulating the behavior and actions of its people. In the close-knit of Ogoni indigenous society, where life flowed along traditional lines, virtue is rewarded and punishments apportioned to those who violate traditional norms and values. This paper is prompt base on the alarming rate of criminal activities in Nigeria, which is a sharp contrast to the pre-modern era when traditional methods and measures were in used. Lamentably, the strong policies and sophisticated weapons used by the government established agencies and institutions as well as the anti-corruption crusade, by several government regimes had been turned into occasional inter-elites struggles and thus have yielded little or no result. The paper focuses on the Ogoni anti-corruption structure-family and religious sanctions, oath-taking and social sanctions-as well as their relevance to the Nigerian milieu. It adopts the descriptive method as well as the historical and philosophical analysis. The study further advocates for the adoption of the Ogoni anti-corruption measures to achieve a crime/corruption-free society.

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II. INTRODUCTION

The fortune of every nation depends on the kind of people that exist in such society as well as their

degree of adherence to universally acceptable ethical values. About the Nigerian socio-religious and political system, it is the sort of people Nigerians are, their knowledge or state of mind, their values, life-orientation, etc., which makes their politics precarious and unstable; Ignorant people usually means ignorant workings of the system. Likewise corrupt people mean corrupt system.

Consequently, it is no longer news that the Federal Republic of Nigeria is rated among the top most corrupt states on earth. News and reports emanating from the various international media and agencies, including Transparency International and the World Bank, corroborate these claims (Aitufe, 2017). Local media reports and citizen's perception of official corruption in Nigeria is alarming, to say the least. In recent times, corrupt practices have been cited in countless government agencies such as Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN), Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), Nigeria Ports Authority (NPA), Federal Aviation Ministry, The National/ State Houses of Assembly, State/Local Governments, the Judiciary and even the Presidency (Olupona, 2008). It has been observed that corruption is not only a crime but an anti-social behavior. Sadly, there appears a gap between the ideals of morality and the practices of politics in Nigeria.

It is appropriate to State, admittedly, that both past and present regimes have set out to wipe out corruption and recklessness in the operations of government. But such programmes and institutions, targeted at ensuring due process

equity, transparency and accountability (smash, 2009), all for quality service delivery have yielded little or no positive results. They include the Annual National Budget, National Rolling Plans on one hand, and the Federal Character Commission (FCC), National Orientation Agency (NDA), code of Conduct Bureau and Tribunal (CCB and T), Nigerian Extractive Industries Transparency Institute (NEITI), Monitoring and price intelligence Bureau (Due process office), the budget office, Independent Corruption and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) on the other. Such programmes have not been able to minimize or remove the cancerous incidences and practices of contracts scams, contract duplication, looting, advance fee fraud, bank fraud, capital market abuse and related offenses.

According to Aristotle, all men seek happiness, but there is only one way to attain it and that is through morality. However, the question to be asked at this juncture is, how should this “moral values” be acquired today in Nigeria so that the endemic disease of corruption can reasonably be curbed? To what extent has legislation reduced the specter of corruption in Nigeria? And who is “clean” and has the political will and capacity to fight corruption in Nigeria? It is against this background that the paper examines the Ogoni indigenous anti-corruption structure which contains some checks and balances that are intended to promote healthy inter-personal living among members of the community as a prerequisite for the Nigerian milieu. Such control is maintained by the rewards and punishments which are built into every relationship and which are evident in the conferring and withholding of esteem, sanctions and the institutional, economic and moral pressures that underline behavioral pattern. The validity of social norms is understandably greater in smaller and more tight-knit village communities than in the more amorphous conditions of cosmopolitan and industrial age.

III. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Corruption

Scholars of Nigerian Politics in particular and administration invariably comment upon the prevalent of corruption on the part of politicians, civil servants, and category of classes of the state’s citizenry. Despite its prevalence, there is still no common agreement among them as to the conceptual and operational definition of corruption. However, the independent corrupt practices commission (2000) sees corruption as immorality, deprivation, bribery, dishonesty, false practices, debased changes, gratification, and rottenness. Corruption is the violation of the obligation of probity, fidelity, and impartiality in the exercise of a public service, to the detriment of the organization (Agbor, 2009) Diom concluded thus;

Corruption is the result of a conscious act generally for money, performed outside legal, social and moral or spiritual norms: The corrupter and the corrupted violate these norms in a premeditated manner for their concrete or abstract interest (Diom 1999 P. 50).

It is important to know that what is perceived as corruption in the Nigerian society today goes far beyond the limits of the Phenomenon as defined by the law. Within the context of this study, corruption is seen as the conglomeration of anti-social behaviors.

3.2 Punishment

The philosophy and thought pattern of a people constitutes the cultural norms and what could be considered as moral values. In Ogoni the good life does not consist of unrelated good acts; the acts lead into one another, reinforce one another, and form chains of good conduct. To gauge these moral values, defaulters of such indigenous standard were punished. Punishment in a strict sense has three functions. One looking to the past, punishment is retributive, because it pays back the criminal for his crime, gives s/he the just

deserts, reestablished the equal balance of justice which has been outraged. It reasserts the authority of the law giver which the criminal has flouted. As looking to the future, punishment may take two forms. If directed to the improvement of the offender and his rehabilitation as a member of the society, it is corrective; if directed to preventing similar crimes by others, showing by example what happens to offenders it is deterrent (Fagothey, 1976). And ideal punishment should thus serve all parties concerned. It should be retributive-vindicating the rights of the offended; corrective-rehabilitating the offender, and deterrent-forewarning the community at large.

3.3 Sanction

An obligation is a moral necessity, a necessity resulting from the final cause, which is a motive urging a person to act. Such a motive, such a means by which the law-giver uses to enforce his law, is called sanction. Sanction, therefore, means the promise of reward for keeping the law or the threat of punishment for breaking the law, or both; it also means the reward or punishment themselves. Its function is antecedent, to induce people to keep the law and to dissuade them from breaking it and consequent, to restore the objective order of justice after the law has been kept or broken, (Fagothey, p. 134).

3.4 Justice

Philosophers right from the ancient time have all interpreted the idea in diverse ways, positing different criteria as constituting sufficient interpretation of fair treatment. Plato in his *The Republic*, sees Justices (both in political and individual areas as) the basis and the summary of all virtues (Plato, 432/427-348.347 BC as quoted by Ndukaihe, 2017). In occasions whether in the exchange of goods and services or contracts or the societal distribution of means of livelihood (Aristotle 384-322 BC). To the Theologians of the Scholastic era, Justice was understood as the harmony of all other virtues; but its origin was traced to the human nature and the soul which, at the end is rooted in God (the city of God), which

human is always seeking or desiring (Augustine 354-430 AD). Justice Is the property of God: and acting in Justice is the fulfillment of one's obligation towards God. It is one of the cardinal virtues which are acquired *Habitus*, exercised through the relationship with other persons *est ad alterum*, and through the principles of equality *debitum secundum aequalitatem*, (Aquinas, 1223 – 1274; Summa Theologica 11/11.0.58).

In the modern era, a person is refer to as being just, when he does right by the law etc (Hobbes 1588-1679). In other words, Justice is justifiable not only in the will of God, rather/but also in the intellect; not only in the power of God rather also in wisdom. “... *nontantum in voluntate divina, sed in intellectu, nec tantum in potential Dei, sed et in sapientia*” (Leibniz, 1768, iv/3, 272). In a different view, Immanuel Kant, however, sees Justice as a formal principle which is capable of creating social conditions among the people. For him, a just situation is brought about by such a behavior of the people among themselves, which contains such conditions under which everyone enjoys his rights, and this will be seen as a formal principle, with the idea of making it a general rule of life; this is public justice (Kant 1797). Within the context of this study Justice is not only seen as the property of God as in the Ogoni world-view, justice and fairness are seen as the basic virtue for the Ogoni indigenous society and institutions.

3.5 The Ogoni World-View

The Ogoni indigenous people, originally known as the Khana people are believed to have migrated from the former Gold Coast (now Ghana). The Ogoni people who currently occupy the Eastern parts of Niger Delta upland are said to have settled in the seven kingdoms of Babbe, Eleme, Gokana, Ken-Khana, Nyor-Khana, Tai, and Oyiigbo, including Ban-goi (special unit). Administratively, Ogoni is made up of Khana, Gokana, Tai and Eleme. The Ogoni speak related, a mutually intelligible language of Khana as the central language and Gokana and Eleme.

The Ogoni indigenous people believe in the existence of two worlds; *bu nyor-ue* and *bu edor* (visible and invisible, or the physical and the metaphysical, or the sensible and the supra-sensible world). Thus, in the Ogoni world-view, there is no sharp distinction between both worlds. Parrinder must have the Ogoni in mind when he writes;

There is no sharp dividing line between the sacred and the secular, material and spiritual are intertwined, the former as the vehicle of the later (Parrinder 1961 P. 27).

The Ogoni indigenous people beliefs in the Supreme Being, this Being is referred to as Kawaa-Bari (the mother of creation). They also belief in *bari* (divinities), *Namate* (ancestors) magic and witchcraft etc. The Ogoni indigenous world-view is co-natural and not something reveal; it is mythical, communal and anthropocentric in nature, as it centered on man. Thus man is important and indeed central in the Ogoni world-view as the center of the created order; man becomes the focal of the universe. This could be further explained using the following diagram:

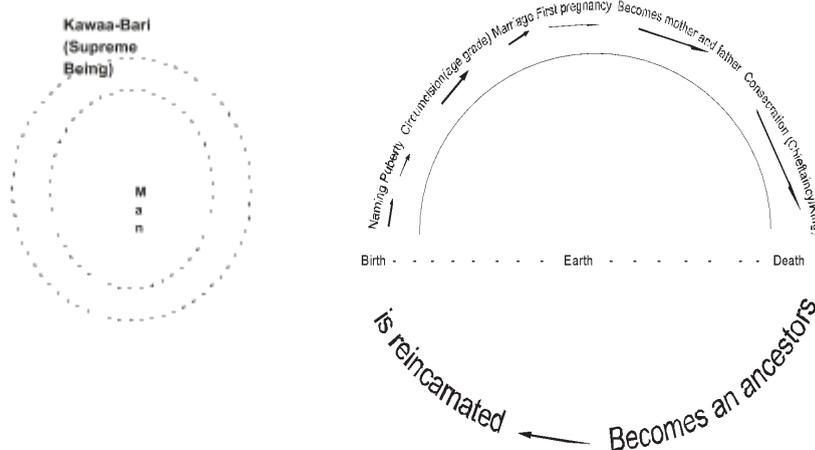


Fig. 1: Ogoni world-view

The Ogoni society believes that moral values are offspring of Religion. It is widely believed that from the beginning the Supreme Being has put law in man's heart and has endowed man with the sense of right and wrong. Man's conscience has always instructed him that there are certain things which he must do in order to have peace and certain things which he must not do, otherwise referred to as taboos or abomination. Thus in Ogoni belief, morality embodies the will of the Supreme Being. It is what the religion morally approves that society approves. On the other hand, it is what Religion condemns that society condemns. Hence, virtues such as justice, righteousness, good moral conduct, good leadership, accountability and honesty were key in their day-to-day (Social, Political and Religious) activities. While immoral/criminal acts such as adultery, stealing, falsehood, selfishness,

disobedience, fraud, the seduction of another man's wife, wickedness and other forms of corruption are altogether regarded as vices.

Since man is continuously being trapped between two powerful forces; social obligation and ethical scrupulosity, how do these people enforce their common morality? In the Ogoni traditional settings; evil is regarded as punishment for the breach or breaking of the religious laws which are also moral laws. In the same view, prosperity is believed to be rewarded for moral uprightness (Ojetayo, 2013). Apart from this fact, the social structure itself contributed a great deal both to the formulation of ethical ideas and the setting up of moral standards (Kudadjie, 1998), as well as the actual enforcement of the morality shared by the community.

As factors that would determine morality, one may mention the values and norms enshrined in their we-feeling and desire for group solidarity, the experiences, common sense of conscience of the individual, the influence of proverbs, wise sayings, folk tales and stories, some of which may be based on custom, experiments, we-feeling, religious ideals (Kudadjie, P. 171). In addition to the influence of these factors and to the sheer influence of the various institutions in the Ogoni society would mechanically and unconsciously make the people do the right and avoid the wrong, those specific indigenous methods will be of interest in the next section of the study.

3.6 The Ogoni Anti-Corruption Structure

From time immemorial, moral Philosophy has been one of the common practices of the Ogoni indigenous people; considering their co-natural sense of moral good or evil in human acts. The Ogoni moral code is embodied in their *log le doo-nu Kené ké* (customs and traditions). In the various kingdoms of Ogoni, there are sanctions recognized as the approved standard of social, political and religious conduct on the part of individuals in the society and the community as a whole.

The Ogoni distinguishes three types of moral faults; 1) Minor faults which are generally condemned. These include such disapproved behavior as not greeting the elders, laziness, unhygienic habits, gossiping and so on. The consequences of such act may not earn any serious punishment or penalties. 2) Deliberate violation of the morals norms of the society, as well as the flout of laws of the land. Such deliberate act includes insulting one's parents or elders, theft and infidelity. The consequences of this act merit the offender a cause believed to bring some misfortune, suffering and eventual death. 3) The violation of taboos whose infringement threatens the natural order of the very existence of the Ogoni society. Such abominable acts are mainly ritual or religious offences believed to disrupt relationship with man and super natural forces. Killing a kins man,

incest, ritual mistakes, failure to adhere to sanctions, breach of oath, breaking taboos are regarded as abominable and polluting. Its consequences do not only affect the perpetrators alone, but the entire community. This can result to disastrous harvest, famine, thunder, flood and fire outbreak as well as rivers turning blood etc.

3.7 Measures of Crime control

The people's awareness and familiarity with the native laws and customs, the indigenous religion and other sanctions as well as well as the indigenous tribunals with extant anti-corruption mechanism and measures are an indispensable part of the enforcement of moral uprightness and good governance. This section therefore considers some of the Ogoni indigenous measures.

IV. RELIGIOUS SANCTION AS AN ANTI-CORRUPTION MEASURE

In no other sphere of Ogoni legal life does the religion play such a decisive role than in the adjudication of cases and delivery of justice. Thus, in the Ogoni indigenous anti-corruption structure, both human and super natural agencies-deities, ancestors and other spiritual forces- are actively involved, especially in the prevention and detection of crime and corrupt practices. This mystical link between the dead and living forces both in the making and enforcement of the Ogoni traditional laws and customs, before contact with the Europeans, is of importance. The fear of breaking such laws and customs, involving dread punishment by unseen and allegedly powerful element in the traditional religion, provided an affective preventive factor. Thus, making religion the soul of moral law.

Among the Ogoni people, the promise and expectation, coupled with actual experience, of the blessing and protection of the Supreme God and the other spiritual powers for those who kept the moral code, on the other hand, the fear and threat, coupled with punishment and desertion by the spirit-powers kept people doing what is right and avoiding what is wrong. This is a clear

indication why victims of robbery attack would cry to deities to arrest the culprit in a particular fashion.

Where the modern criminal investigation and prosecution department relied very much on finger-prints, the Ogoni traditional investigators placed more premium on *pa-akator* (footmarks) at a time when most people went about unshod, and where such could not be found, the people resorted to divination. Nanu Nwanee (in a personal communication) narrating such incidence in Luawii, the traditional headquarter of Babbe Kingdom asserted thus;

There was a time when a team of arm-robbers storms the house of one Mrs. Ile-u who was the box-keeper (Treasurer) of their age-grade women meeting; and the common contribution scheme known as *Akawo*. The thieves went away with the saving box and two fat goats; leaving their *pa-akator* (footmarks) at the backyard window from where they entered. This woman was able to recover the “footmark” with a calabash and a cried to *gbene-beka* deity to help recover her money. Few weeks later, it was reported that the culprits died one after the other confessing their involvement in the operation.

Religion thus serves as the last hope to humanity. Among the Ogoni people cursing is used to enforce morality in various aspects of life including even marital fidelity. Punishments inflicted are physical illness, death insanity or inability to leave the scene of offence. In the case of adulterers, their punishment includes the inability to separate after the illicit sexual intercourse or impotence. The use of such curses was very effective in enforcing morality in the community.

4.1 The Family/Oath-taking as an Anti-Corruption Unit and Measures of Crime control

The three-generation of family in the Ogoni indigenous society includes parents, their married

and unmarried children, children in-law and grandchildren. The Ogoni extended family is thus a large domestic cluster. The most elder male member of the extended family usually acts as the family head. He is assisted by other senior members in the family. As patrons, the elders provide protection, supply economic value, prestige and esteem. They are held in high esteem because they possess the wisdom of the land (nwideede, oral interview 2017). On the other hand, the subordinate members provide loyalty, obedience, free labour and support in the community.

The role of the family in the nurturing and structuring of moral values cannot be over-emphasized. As I cited elsewhere, its centrality as the nucleus of the society as well as the king-pin in the moral-building and punishing immorality is the guiding factor for the Ogoni comprehensive marriage rites (Deezia, 2016). The family therefore serves as the first anti-corruption unit through parental rewards. In the pre-modern Ogoni, parents give gift to a good, reliable child, i.e. to a reliable, honest Son land, canoe and fishing net as well as the dowry for wife may be given; and to a respectful daughter; heavy and priceless beads, wares for trading etc. A son or daughter who is not loose-tongued, well-behaved and has self-control may enjoy the confidence of a parent or elder and may be told family secrets, shown family property, or be given secrets knowledge of herbs or spiritual power.

On the punitive measures, a family may hold a special meeting to talk to a member who is notoriously immoral, in order to advice, reprimand, threatened or renounce him and have nothing further to do with him. This would mean that the family would accept no responsibility regarding the renounced person in case of death, or birth etc. A family or clan may disinherit a member who has brought the family into disgrace. For example, by being a sorcerer, murderer or witch/wizard, or who has dissipated family wealth entrusted to his care.

Among the Ogoni indigenous people, Oath-taking and curses performs the healing functions to the society; it enhances the maintenance of integration, harmonious interaction and mutual strengthening (Deezia, 2017). The practice of Oath-taking in Ogoni consist drinking on small quantity of water, dry gin or palm-wine into which a small handful of earth from either *beegbor* (front of the compound) *nyor kpo ee-teh* (from the town square) or *si a saa* (from the earth – godless). At the family level on parent may swear an Oath or pronounces a curse banning a disobedient and insolent child from his funeral. The son or daughter is not to see the parent when dead, should not attend the funeral, etc. If she/he does, then by the curse-a named calamity -must befall him or her. Such Oaths and curse have the effect of quickly getting the son or daughter to amend his/her ways.

In other words, deities through the institution of oath-taking played a prominent role in the investigation/detection of crime. For instance, the *Bari-aaror* of Luawii is believed to be one of the most effective deities in oath of coronation, oath of inter-communal dispute resolution, and in determining cases of witchcraft. Persons who go contrary to the terms and condition; found guilty; and accused of witchcraft were believed to have endangered the safety and fertility of the community. Hence, criminal investigation, apart from instances when it demanded and received the official attention of the elders and their executives, also took the form of self-help. Detection and punishment of criminals in some areas in Ogoni were left to supernatural powers.

4.2 Social Sanctions as an Anti-corruption Measure

Social sanction is another vibrant unit in the Ogoni indigenous anticorruption structure. As noted earlier, the Ogoni people rewards virtue, sanctions are imposed upon individuals for the violation of the socially approved rules or modes of behaviour which are generally accepted by the society as binding. When an individual behaviour

is subjected to social disapproval, negative sanctions may be imposed upon him.

There are many varieties of such procedures but the common one among the Ogoni people is public disgrace. A person could be publicly disgraced by publicly singing out his evil deeds at community recreational drumming in the evening or at night or during annual festivals on days specially set aside. On such occasions names may be called or the group singing may go to the premises of the person being scandalized and sing to his hearing. Other forms of disgrace are dragging around the town, stripping naked in the town-square and so on.

The society may exclude hardened criminals and the immoral, such as the sorcerers and witches; no one may speak with them or allow them to fetch fire from their house. They are excluded from social inter course or actually ostracize from town or Village. And in a situation where such person is to be rehabilitated or restored back to the village, s/he is forced to swear oath never to back to his/her immoral ways.

The individual may also be made to lose certain social ranks through degradation or pay certain fine. He may be made to suffer from body pain through mutilation or branding. Notorious criminals, adulterers, deducers, etc, are sometimes “made to disappear” on the authority of the king and elders, for such people are considered to be destroyers of society.

Consequently, the Ogoni anti-corruption structure therefore serves as a means of enhancing selflessness, openness, honesty, equity justice and good governance, as well as the maintenance of mutual trust and confidence, peaceful co-existence, social and moral stability.

4.3 Unearthing the Nigerian Dilemma: Towards the Way Forward

Ever since Nigeria came in contact with democratic ethos, beginning from the Tafawa Belewa/Azikiwe regime, the increasing pressure for democratic accountability and transparency in

governance has become a watershed (Maiangwa, 2009) and perceptibly understood as the basis for curbing corrupt practices and other forms of unethical behaviours. However, the purported crusade against corruption is often reduced to “occasional intra-elite struggles, squabbles and back stabbing” (Odekunle, 1986). Nigerian corrupt elite controls the influence on the form, pattern and degree of effectiveness of anti-corruption drive.

Nigeria’s economy, political and religious society today is a standing monument of corruption and inefficiency. Thus, corruption manifest in national ethos, politics, civil society, public and private sectors of business and commerce. Their health/educational system, moral preferences and the whole economic machinery of their society stink and ooze with the stench of corruption. This prevalence of corruption betrays a latent decay in their ethical values and orientation. It shows the futile attempt to build a political society without foundational reference to the religio-ethical principle of justice, transparency, altruism, accountability and a service- oriented notion of leadership. It shows leadership praxis that promotes the selfish interest of a selected few at the expense of the common good which has been acclaimed by philosophers as the essence of the formation of political society (Deezia, 2017).

Consequently, in Nigeria a large scale fraud and corruption have become associated with the public service and economic and social development thwarted in the process; Nigeria’s corporate and external image is battered. While political parties and different administration continue to shift blames. Thus, the question; who is to blame? The systems which Nigerian leaders have operated since independence are not to blame. It is the type of people who operate them, the knowledge and understanding they bring with them. Thus I agree with J. Krishnamurti, in his view that;

The individual is of first importance, not the system and as long as the individual does not understand the total process of himself,

no system whether of the left or right can bring order in the world (Krishnamurti, 1978, p. 16).

Therefore, the intimate connection between knowledge and conduct often stressed by philosophers makes political education in Nigeria a prime necessity. For to act better as Socrates taught thousands of years ago, people have to know better, and if we expect equitable and stable society in Nigeria, Nigerians like other peoples have to know and respect such basics as the nature of the common good, its distinction from private good and such related themes as the nature of the society and so on.

For Nigerians to enjoy enduring democracy and good governance there must be a strong foundation based on the Ogoni indigenous anti-corruption structure that will promote ethical standard in politics, promote human, religious, good social and moral values, as well as accountability, transparency, equitable distribution of material resources and social justice.

There is need to revitalize our family system and pattern it after the indigenous Ogoni family structure, where children are owned by the extended family and the community at large, when it comes to moral building.

Honour and chieftaincy titles should be given, on account of good moral conduct, bravery and good leadership qualities as against the trending culture of praise singing of corrupt community leaders and politicians.

V. CONCLUSION

The yearning for the dividends of democracy and good governance, accountability and transparency, equity and justice in Nigeria has been the goal of the people of Nigeria since independence. Unfortunately, this goal has suffered several setbacks in, first, the failure of past and present governments to govern accountably; and second, the people’s inability to hold government and their leaders to account,

based on acceptable ethical code and conducts that should guide and direct the actions of those in positions of responsibility.

Hence, our discussion thus far, on the need to adopt with the evolving western methods, the Ogoni indigenous anti-corruption structure and measures in the fight against corruption in Nigeria, as the gods are believed to have the ability to end all hostility and crime without fire-arms, and without breaking limbs. In other words, the fear of public ridicule, and harsh punishments involving the loss of one's social rights, positions and privileges, and the fear of the gods of not merely killing the victims only, but by extirpating his entire family, all served as measures of fighting corruption.

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