

The Europeans are not good : a Ful?e Mbooku

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“The Europeans are not good”: a Fulbe *Mbooku* Poem of Protest

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The paper presents a Fulbe *mbooku* poem from Northern Cameroon, entitled *Be mboodaay kambe* “the Europeans are not good”. The poem is a poetic expression of protest against the European invasion. It is probably the first kind in which the Fulbe express criticism against the foreign influence.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to present a Fulbe *mbooku* poem of protest against the foreign invasion and loss of Fulbe sovereignty which occurred at the beginning of this century. It appears that this protest poem was sung secretly, to criticize the colonial regime.

The singer, Siddi Yammbaram, most likely composed the poem by himself, for he was the only singer who sang it. The poem was recorded on the 15th of November, 1976 in Maroua by the author of this article. It consists of 164 lines, and the chorus repeats *Be mboodaay kambe* ‘The Europeans are not good’. The meter ◡—◡ can be scanned. The first ten lines of the poem are sung as shown on the next page. (The musical notations were made by T. Sakurai.)

1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Although this poem was sung by a Pullo poet from Northern Cameroon, it contains many names of places occupied by Europeans in West Africa.

Before presenting the poem, we have to take a look at the history of the region around the turn of this century.

History tells us that between 1880 and 1914 the whole of West Africa except Liberia fell into the hands of the European colonizers. The European powers held the Berlin Conference in 1884–1885 and reconfirmed on paper each of their territories on the West African coast. Following the conference, they started the actual military conquest of the hinterland inside the coastal area. Although there were differences of tactics between the powers, they all used both diplomacy and arms in their conquest of West Africa.

The French government practiced a consistent policy of occupying all the territory from Senegambia through Niger to Chad, beginning in 1880. They first extended their influence from Haut Niger to Bas Niger. They occupied Segou in

Be mboodaay kambe

The musical score is arranged in five systems, each with a Solo part (treble clef) and a Chorus part (bass clef). The lyrics are written below the notes. Tempo markings are indicated by a quarter note followed by a number (e.g., ♩ = c. 80). The score includes a triplet in the first system and an 'etc.' marking at the end of the fifth system.

System 1:
 Solo: ♩ = c. 80 (triplet), ♩ = c. 92, ♩ = c. 104
 Lyrics: Be mboo-daay kam-be. Ko mbi-'i-ru-noo-mi be mboodaayi Ko be
 Chorus: 'Be mboodaay kam- 'Be mboodaay kam-

System 2:
 Solo: ♩ = c. 116, ♩ = c. 120
 Lyrics: mbanngi be tefi bal-mi. Ko mbi-'iru-noo-mi be mboodaa-yi. Tu-roo-be
 Chorus: 'Be mboo-daay kam- 'Be mboo-daay kam-be.

System 3:
 Solo: ♩ = c. 126
 Lyrics: yim-be mbada bam-de yim-be-bee mbalaa a-ki-ri. Ra-nee
 Chorus: 'Be mboo-daay kam-be. 'Be mboo-daay kam-

System 4:
 Solo: ♩ = c. 132
 Lyrics: be baa-ba nya" ir-de naa be bo-ro-dde be bor-goo-je. Juul-ni
 Chorus: 'Be mboo-daay kam- 'Be mboo-daay kam-

System 5:
 Solo: too-be juul-nii-be. Nde be mban-ngi be te-fi bal-mi. etc.
 Chorus: 'Be mboo-daay kam- 'Be

Note: The actual sound is one octave lower than as written.

1890 and installed colonies in French Guinea and Ivory Coast in 1893. After vanquishing the Toucouleur empire, Louis Archinard annihilated Rabeh's army in the battle of Koussiri, and reached Chad, although the French were blocked somehow by the British occupation of Nigeria and Ghana. Thus, they achieved their original ambition of establishing a huge territory in West Africa.

As for the British government, they executed a bloody and spectacular conquest, and often met with African resistance. In the case of Nigeria, they first established temporary alliances, and then achieved the submission of the population by force. Lagos was first occupied in 1851, and most of Yorubaland was conquered by diplomacy, with the whole of Yorubaland becoming a protectorate in 1893. Ilorin was occupied in 1894. They established their domination in middle Nigeria in 1900, and started the occupation of Northern Nigeria from Nupeland. They used much armed force to complete the conquest of Northern Nigeria. Frederick Lugard took over British interests in Northern Nigeria in 1900, and conquered the Sultanate of Sokoto when he entered Kano and Sokoto in 1903.

The German commander Hans Dominik pacified the Fulbe lamidates in 1902, and completed the colonization of Northern Cameroon, which was later lost to the French and British in World War I [BOAHEN 1989].

In any case, the European invaders did not allow the African authorities to keep their status quo, and forced them to accept colonization. The European colonial administrators were not able to govern the people in every aspect, and looked to local collaborators, namely, the indigenous authorities, to help them govern indirectly. Some local Fulbe *laamiibe*, chiefs, accepted colonial rule in exchange for keeping their traditional authority and various interests as rulers. Incidentally, these chiefs who received authority from the European authorities were never liked by the Fulbe. The Fulbe continued to say:

Laamdo, debbo, jemma, ladde, maayo tagu hoolataako dum.

'One can never trust a chief, a woman, night, a bush and a river.'

The European colonialists were much superior to the African forces due to better logistics and military strength. They had modern arms such as heavy artillery, Gatling guns, and Maxim guns.

In the Diamaré prefecture where the present *mbooku* poem was sung, people still remember the incident which took place at *Ibba Sane* on the outskirts of Maroua, where hundreds of Fulbe warriors perished under the German army with their superior firearms.

Although the Germans won militarily, they were never able to gain the total support of the local people. Many of the local people felt humiliated and thought that the faithful Muslims were dominated by the unfaithful, *heeserbe*. This situation was always intolerable for the Fulbe. The Fulbe commoners¹⁾ were ruled

1) *talaka'en*

by colonial governors and Fulbe chiefs. During colonial times, the Fulbe enjoyed superiority over non-Fulbe (*haabe*) and slaves (*maccube*). They felt resentment, however, against the Europeans (*Nasaara'en*), or white men (*raneebe*). It seems that Mahdism provided the Fulbe with an ideology of protest. It is for these reasons that the present *mbooku* poem was sung secretly among the people.

2. EUROPEANS AS VIEWED BY FULBE IN OTHER *MBOOKU* POEMS

At the turn of this century the Fulbe experienced what they had never experienced before: they were ruled by a foreign force. They thought the end of the world had come. They sang:

En ngarii ragare duniya.
*Ndikka wa'ndu e tammiindu.*²⁾
 "We have come to the end of the world.
 The past is better than the future."

The European colonizers behaved arrogantly, as did their locally recruited servants, who behaved as their masters did. It should be noted that the Fulbe never became their servants. It was the sons of despised non-Fulbe who became servants of the colonizers. The Fulbe never liked the attitude of these servants:

Nasaara nde jogodii goonga.
Gardo fuu kamannadaajo.
Daneejo gooto wilan berni.
*Booyjo wari boo roondan en.*³⁾
 "However, the Europeans are right.
 Every European is a commander.
 One white man can destroy a whole city.
 Even a servant can carry us away."

The *mbooku* singers did not criticize the Europeans and their influence directly. They expressed their criticism in the form of irony. Griots are known to be very talented in this satirical form of expression. After the German occupation, the local puppet Fulbe chief asked the German governor in Garoua to arrest a Musgum chief, and the governor sent his soldiers to pacify the northern part of the Diamaré plain. When the soldiers arrived at Maroua, a griot named Bultu sang the following song:

Bultu yi'i be jobbii be.
"Batuuri suudu teeleende.
Ko mbanngudon walaa nyaamre.
Mari siisi ngidaa siido.

2) Lines 4-5 of *Ee, zamanu wonni* sung by Ardo Mbala.

3) Lines 94-97 of *Duniya jam baago* sung by Ardo Ali Kura.

*Mari karangga be karindii en.
Karangga wari karon nduumti.
Be loowi zamanu suunoore.
Don be njabi ndehon teele.
Nden be ngaddani en gaaye.
Gaaye Garmasa mboodaayi.
Pemmba hoore, njela guugu.
Fusa bernde ba tiinyeere."*⁴⁾

Bultu saw the troops, and eulogized them.
"The Europeans with a house in the water.
Since you appeared, there is no plundering.
They have sixpence coins but do not want to be begged for alms.
They have French pennies but force us to pay tax.
When French pennies came, the rainy season fields were not touched till the
next season.
They made everybody greedy.
Thus, they married Fulbe women.
Then, they brought syphilis to us.
The syphilis which attacked Garmasa was terrible.
It made his head bald, and his penis split open.
It broke his heart like an onion."

The griot eulogizes some of the changes after the the coming of the Europeans, but criticizes the negative results they brought about: for example, the destruction of traditional society by the monetary economy, the spreading of syphilis, etc.

3. EUROPEANS IN THE PRESENT *MBOOKU* POEM

There are few known examples of poems such as this one, expressing a negative attitude and criticism of the European invasion. This kind of song was probably first composed by the Diamaré Fulbe just after the Fulbe confrontation with the German invaders in 1900 at *Ibba Saje* by the Chaanaga river, outside the city of Maroua on the way to Garoua.⁵⁾ By repeating the word *nyaami* 'conquered'⁶⁾ the singer emphasizes the European invasion. He also enumerates different cities in West Africa occupied by them. First he mentions faraway places which he has never visited, such as Gambia, Mali, Burkina Faso, etc., and then the places close to Maroua.

4) Lines 247–288 of *Be ndawran Zigila* sung by Siddi Yammbaram.

5) For detailed account see [MOHAMMADOU 1976].

6) <lit. ate.

4. TEXT

'BE MBOO'DAA Y KAM'BE

by Siddi Yammbaram

- 'Be mbood'aay kambe.
 Ko mbi'iru-noo-mi be mbood'aayi.
 Ko be mbanngi be tefi balmi.
 Ko mbi'iru-noo-mi be mbood'aayi.
 5 Turoobe yimbe mba'da bamde,
 yimbe be'e mbalaa akiri.
 Raneebe baaba nya''irde,
 naa be borodde, be borgooje,
 juulnitoobe juulniibe.
 10 Nde be mbanngi be tefi balmi.
 Zamanu keeke fakataake.
 Famarbe mboya, be mboyni en.
 'Be ngoodi toro, be torri en.
 Ko mbi'iru-noo-mi, be mbood'aayi.
 15 Fii raneebe jaaliibe,
 raneebe burbe wullaandu.
 Ko mbi'iru-noo-mi be jaaliibe.
 Annditee lee be mbood'aayi.
 Nde be mbanngi, be tefi balmi.
 20 Konu darnani be, be mbanngi.
 Kuma,^a be kumi laamiibe.
 'Be loslosnii be nder maayo,
 bunndu Kahfu^b kon tagana.
 Bolidoobe e sey'danji,
 25 kisen naatngo e nder Borno.
 Canndi nde habi bee Raabe,
 be nyaami Raabe, be mba'di hiirna.
 Diiri,^c be ndiirtorii Borno.

a. <French *comment*

b. <Arabic *kahf* cave, cavern, hollow; *ashab al-kahf* "those of the cave". This is the name given in the Qur'an (in the xviiiith *sura*, namely, the *surat al-kahf*), and further in Arabic literature, to the youths who in the Christian Occident are usually called the "Seven Sleepers of Ephesus. According to a legend, in the time of the Christian persecution under the Emperor Decius, seven Christian youths fled into a cave near Ephesus and there sank into a miraculous sleep for centuries. Upon awakening under the Christian Emperor Theodosius, they were discovered and then went to sleep for ever. [*Encyclopédie de l'Islam* 1991: 712]

c. <German name *Dühring*

The Europeans are not good.
What I have been saying is that they are not good.
Since they came out into the world, they looked for arms.
What I have been saying is that they are not good.
5 It is they who made people bend down and made them donkeys.
The people were forced to carry without payment.
The white people are masters with spurs.
They wore red fezzes, and carried blankets.
It is they who torture the circumcised adults again.
10 Since they came out into the world, they looked for arms.
In these days no one can stop the machines.
When these young people shout, they made us cry.
They have money, and they troubled us.
What I have been saying is that they are not good.
15 The story of the white people, the conquerors.
The white men cannot be appealed to the court.
What I have been saying is that they were conquerors.
You should know that they are not good.
Since they came out into the world, they looked for arms.
20 The war made them powerful as they are.
They made fools of chiefs saying: "What?"
They are those who came out of a river.
They were created in the Kahfu cave.
They can talk with Satans.
25 Let us remember the time they went into Bornu.
Archinard fought Rabeh.
They overpowered him and turned towards the west.
Dühring and his soldiers marched into Bornu.

- Peni naatgo nder Borno.
- 30 Peni nyaamgo gasol Looko,
ton ɓe lookanaay duniya.
Nden ɓe nyaami mahol Bidda,
hebi, ɓe mbiddodii duniya.
‘Don ɓe nyaami mahol Burmi,
- 35 hebi Burmi e zamanuure.
Fuuta Tooro ɓe nyaamii ɗum.
Fuuta Jaloo ɓe nyaamii ɗum.
Ton ɓe nyaami Liptaaku,
nyaami Malle ndi mallum’en.
- 40 ‘Be njoofi zamanu hijjoore,
haa jonta ɓe ndeyyaayi.
‘Be njaali ɓe mbili gurel Paali.
Hawsa woyata: “Way inna.”
‘Don ɓe nyaami gurel Ibbi,
- 45 nyaami Maanu Banndeeri.
‘Don ɓe nyaami gasol Gammbi,
Yero Anndiya’en cukɗi,
ɓe yakka gooro ɓe ngama boori,
yaroobe birki ngama siido.
- 50 ‘Don ɓe ta’iri lada yeeɓa,
laddugel Goto waancaan-no.
Nyaami Sokkoto kuɗbaaje.
Ko mbi’iru-noo-mi ɓe mbood’aayi.
Nyaami Sokkoto kuɗbaaje.
- 55 Fii raneɓe jaaliibe.
Nyaami Ikko ngo ajjaari,^d
ton ɓe tappi Kolkolma.
Nyaami Iloori ilam njumri.
‘Be nyaami Kano ngo lantirki.
- 60 Kano ngo buutu saayiji.
‘Be nyaami Gees gese ngoodaa.
Lesdi Gommbi ɓe nyaamii ɗum.
“Ndawanen maa gasol Yoola!”
Mbili Jubayru ɓe ɗali faada.
- 65 Doogo nani ɓe reenaay ɓe.
Doogo doggi dartaaki.
‘Be nyaami Sonyi sonyo bali.
Nyaami Goola ndi Goola taba.
Fali ndi Alla faalaaka.

d. =oldiri

- They first went into Bornu.
- 30 They first conquered Lokoja.
They forced people to be patient.
They then conquered the town of Bida.
They got it and made people move.
Here they conquered the town of Burmi.
- 35 They got Burmi and all the people.
They conquered Fuuta Toro.
They conquered Fuuta Jalon.
There they conquered Liptaako.
They conquered Mali where the learned were.
- 40 They made it easy for people to go on a pilgrimage.
Even now people are too busy to stay at home.
They conquered the small village of Paali and ruined it.
The Hausa cried: "Alas, mother."
They conquered the little town of Ibbi.
- 45 There they conquered Maanu Banndeeri.
Here they conquered the small town of Gambia,
where Yero Anndiya and his company grew up.
They chew kola nuts, and dance the *bori* dance.
They drink fresh milk, dance and play.
- 50 Here the white men crossed the bush crawling stealthily,
where Goto used to wander.
They conquered Sokoto, the city of sermons.
What I have been saying is that they are not good.
They conquered Sokoto, the city of sermons.
- 55 The story of white conquerors.
They conquered Lagos where people used to buy waist beads.
There they made guns.
They conquered Ilorin where honey flew.
They conquered Kano with electricity.
- 60 Kano was a city with inexpensive tea.
They conquered Jos without fields.
They conquered the land of Gombe.
They said: "Let us start early toward the city of Yola."
They killed Laamdo Jubayru and left his subjects behind.
- 65 The tall chief heard them coming but they did not wait for them.
The tall chief ran away but was not able to escape from them.
They conquered Sonyi where the palm leaves made noises.
They conquered Goola which produced tobacco leaves.
The land of the Fali which Allah does not care about.

- 70 Lesdi Fali be nyaamii d'um.
 Tuurti ndi sali bunndukji.
 Don nii Limadu kon tayri,
 tuurti be limi guurooji,
 waɗbe kinndigay Duwala.
- 75 Kinndanooɓe maral duniya,
 woyni Duwala nde nootii be.
 Duwala mannga nga tooɓoondu,
 mbaɗannga duniya callallu,
 dulla mbaatnga yaggannga.
- 80 Wi'i Dumnuki^e yaa Marwa,
 kalimaajo lenyol meeden,
 jukoowo jukna nder habre,
 naa be Mbaartuwa goorooje.
 Nanndukon cali may rikici.
- 85 Nyaami Tibaati ndi Bamnyo.
 Nyaami kaado dakam laamɗo.
 Nyaami Jatam laamorde,
 kaado mo tumme teemerre.
 Ko mbi'iru-noo-mi be mboodaayi.
- 90 To be mbonti, be ndartaaki.
 Fii raneɓe jaaliibe.
 Ko hatta raneɓe jaalaago?
 Kambe curaayi piirooje.
 Gudi'en mbili janngirde.
- 95 Barima acci rema zakka.
 Dume ko yamti waynaaɓe?
 Fulbe kabbira don telɓa.
 Laamɗo yaawa ngiton shaayi.
 Nyaami Njatam laamorde.
- 100 Nyaami Ngawndere Abboomi.
 Mbari Abbo be mbaɗi laamɗo.
 Nyaami Maalu be koɗi Durba.
 Nyaami Cammba i'al maayo.
 Nyaami kawye Biibeemi.
- 105 Wari Caamaki Ceeɓoowa.
 Nyaami kawye Biibeemi.
 Wi'i Dumnuki yaa Marwa.
 Garwa be mbaɗi foondannde.
 Wi'i Dumnuki yaa Marwa.

- 70 They conquered the land of the Fali.
They got angry and would not use guns.
Here they crossed the Limadu bush.
They got crazy and counted the cattle.
They made a plot to change the chief of Douala.
- 75 They are those who used to make a plan to rule over the world.
They made the Douala chief suffer, and he answered them.
The Douala chief was a big man with a tuft of hair,
who used to bind the people with chains.
He did not care about powerless well-dressed men.
- 80 They told Dominik to go to Maroua.
He said that he had a talisman against us.
He was a boaster during fights.
He fought with the people of Bertoua where kola nuts were produced.
The kola nuts which looked the same cannot be distinguished even by
clever merchants.
- 85 The white men conquered Tibati of the land of Banyo.
They conquered the pagan with a chief's lie.
They conquered Jatam where a chief lived.
The pagan chief had a hundred drums.
What I have been saying is that they are not good.
- 90 When they got angry, no one dared to stay with them.
The story of the white conquerors.
What could stop them from conquering?
They did not stop airplanes.
The white blacksmiths destroyed our schools.
- 95 The farmers stopped hoeing to pay zakkat.
There is no need to mention the cattle herders.
The Fulbe men sighed with "Alla is great" and shouted.
The chief hurried, and his eyes became as red as tea.
They conquered Njatam where a chief lived.
- 100 They conquered Ngaoundere which Abboomi ruled.
They killed Abboomi and installed another chief.
They conquered Maalu and stayed overnight at Durba.
They conquered Chamba by the river.
They conquered Biibeemi which was just a bush.
- 105 They killed Chaamaki of Cheeboowa.
They conquered Biibeemi which was just a bush.
They told Dominik to go to Maroua.
They fought the Fulbe fighters at Garoua.
They told Dominik to go to Maroua.

- 110 Dumnuki waɗi fuunaange.
 Fii raneɓe jaaliɓe.
 Barki barki ɓe culmaaki.
 Babarki Ayya pehel keeke.
 Babarki baaba Karraaru.
- 115 ɗali layɗo e saabeere,
 naaɗi piyi mo maaraaje.
 Muuka ɓe ndoondi gertoode.
 Muuka maayru monee bolle.
 Annditee lee ɓe mboodaayi.
- 120 ɓe ngari Miskin ɓe ndeemaaki.
 Bone malaajo kollan-mi.
 Fijji mbooku ndillan-mi.
 Galjo yoo, waɗanam jabre.
 Kayre woni gimol mbooku.
- 125 Katuwal waɗi jalnaare,
 meemi leebura kaɓɓaado,
 yaabi winnde saakiingo.
 Naati Caanaga konu somi,
 comko cifanii haɓre.
- 130 Tayri duunde njaareendi.
 ɓunndu Baali ko mbaali.
 Habaru heewti nder Marwa,
 kiiri yeynugo haa jenngi:
 "Jawmu ɓaaru fuu tookna."
- 135 Marwa tookni kurol muudum.
 Tammo ban kabe kooseje.
 Tugga koppi ɓe ngoorna kuri.
 Jaka Nasaara haɓataako.
 ɗara galnodi labbon mum,
- 140 tammo ban kabe fuunaange,
 kabe Hayaatu waɗ-noo ɗum,
 caamna ngorgu, nguboo sewngo.
 Ibba Saɗe ɓe canngin-no.
 Kofiingel hofi ansar'en,
- 145 neebaay nii ɓe piyi bunndukru.
 Njaawi, ɓe njowi kolkolma,
 njooɗi mayruwa dow maɓɓe.
 Siddi Geereme ɗon saydi,
 caydinoodo e foondannde.
- 150 Marwa doggiri gal Zayka.
 ɗara doggiri dow Makabay.
 Nyannde nden boo mi ɗon waali.

- 110 Dominik came to Diamaré.
The story of the white conquerors.
They were too busy with killing to wash their faces.
The village of Babarki had Ayya who cooked with a metal pot cover.
The village of Babarki had Karraaru's father.
- 115 They left the village head in the field,
lifted up their arms and hit him with hands.
They took away a deaf man's chickens.
The deaf man died of grief without saying a word.
You should know that they are not good.
- 120 They came to Miskin but did not take a rest.
I will tell you the troubles caused by the cursed man.
I will tell you the story in *mbooku* singing.
Galjo, please sing in chorus.
That's the very *mbooku* song.
- 125 What happened in Katuwal makes me laugh.
They insulted the laborer who was forced to carry things.
The white men reached the market place.
They went into the Chaanaga river and got tired.
They were hindered by the river but thought how to fight.
- 130 They crossed the sand hill.
They stayed overnight at the Baali well.
The news about them reached Maroua.
The chief announced from the evening till late at night, saying:
"Let every archer poison his arrows."
- 135 The Maroua people poisoned their arrows.
They thought it was just like attacking the hill pagans.
They knelt down and sent the arrows at the white men.
Actually they were not able to fight the white men.
The Dara men sharpened their spearheads.
- 140 They thought it was just like attacking the people living in the east.
They thought it just a fight of Hayaatu's days.
They tried to gallop on horses and throw spears.
The white men camped at Ibba Saje.
The one who knelt down took position among the Sara soldiers.
- 145 Soon they shot the guns.
Hastily they shot the machine guns.
They poured machine gun bullets over the Fulbe warriors.
Siddi Geereme became a martyr on the spot,
the victim of the confrontation against them.
- 150 The Maroua warriors ran away toward Zayka.
The Dara warriors ran up to the Makabay hill.
On this day I was sleeping.

Cemtudum wadi keeddid'am,
doggani wari meemi-mmi.

155 O wi'i-mmi: "Ngorgi, war ndoggen.

Woodi ngaska ngi'-noo-mi.

Njemma tawen ka naaten ka."

"Alla wadi mi semtaayi.

Miin mi naatataa ngaska.

160 Habre habannde haa Miskin.

Koo yaadu mi daara nde."

Ko mbi'iru-noo-mi be mboodaayi.

Marwa doggiri dow Zayka.

'Be mboodaay kambe.

A shameful thing happened to my neighbor.
He came to me running, and touched me.
155 He told me: "My friend, let us run away.
I found a cave.
Let us go to find it, and go into it."
"As is my character, I do not feel ashamed.
I will not go into a cave.
160 The war is taking place in Miskin.
I can run away from them even on foot.
What I have been saying is that they are not good.
The Maroua warriors ran away toward the Zayka hill.
The Europeans are not good.

CONCLUSION

After the European conquest, the Fulbe were suppressed by German rulers and their puppet chiefs. Despite this, the Fulbe found a way to express their protest against the Europeans by singing the *mbooku* poems. It seems that they might have been severely punished if they had been found singing these songs by the local authorities. But the *mbooku* singers kept singing the songs of protest in secret until recently, as seen in the the present example.

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