

Academic History and the Future of the Past

Contesting the Current Paradigm of Global Governance and Western Temporal and Spatial Epistemologies through Memories and International History From Below by Example of the UN Peacekeeping Operation in the Gaza Strip, 1956-1967

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Introduction

Within both the humanities and social sciences attention has been turned towards the spatial and temporal dimensions of Western ways of comprehending the world, as well as Western ways of governing. The academic discipline of history in general, with its roots firmly attached to the western nation-state and empire building projects, has been slow to contribute to the larger project of breaking down ethnocentric epistemologies. It seems, however, that International History now by way of empirically founded studies is challenging the state of affairs on a broader scale and is thus taking part in outlining an alternative future.

An outline of a new way of writing International History is presented below in form of a post-colonial reading of the Cold War United Nations peacekeeping operation in the Gaza Strip from 1956 to

1967. Asking questions that challenge the established narrative, of who has the right to speak and with what authority, the primary aim of this article is to move towards an alternative understanding of the peacekeeping paradigm of the United Nations as a performative dimension of the current paradigm of global governance from the ground up. It will be done, as suggested by the two global historians Michael Geyer and Charles Bright, in a way intended to "shatter the silences surrounding global practices, by tracking them, describing them, and presenting them historically and (...) to facilitate public cultures as free and equal marketplace of communication among the many voices of different histories and memories" (Geyer and Bright, 1995, pp. 1058-1059). This will allow us to begin not only to privilege other ways of relating to time, space and history, but also as called for by the literary postcolonial Madina Tlostanova and the semiotician Walter Mignolo in "Global coloniality and the decolonial option" allow us to shift from postcolonial to decolonial.

Academic History, Time and Methodological Nationalism

Reflecting the Judeo-Christian heritage and changes in perception during the Enlightenment 18th to late 19th century Western historians saw time as linear, progressive and as divided into 'past', 'present' and 'future'. The value of history was lessons for the future. However, with the professionalization of the discipline at the end of the 19th century the need to separate itself from other disciplines and to be seen as scientific, historians turned 'fundamentalist' severing the dialogue between past and present. Moreover, the discipline became a product of as well as promoter of the nation state with its Eurocentric and interconnected imperial epistemologies and the 'natural' character of the different nations and their blue water imperialism as well as colonialism in a similar way as geography with cartography and anthropology with its studies of colonial subjects Unstuck in time. Or: the sudden presence of the past (2010), "Geography of War: The Significance of Physical and Human Geography Principles" and "Anthropology and Colonialism".

Twentieth and Twenty-first Century Academic History: **New Horizons**

The temporal and spatial foundations of the historical discipline have been challenged with time. The horrors of the world wars and the threat of global nuclear meltdown have had the unquestioned identi-

fication of temporal progression with societal and cultural progression loose some of its appeal. In the 1990's the study of memory in Europe and the US also gained a boost with Pierre Nora's study on French memorial culture. Memory began pushing aside gender, race and class as alternatives to the nation Unstuck in time. Or: the sudden presence of the past (2010). While utilising memories and oral history have been done for decades in anthropology, African and working class history, the use of these 'temporal attacks' on the political by contrasting official history with memories of lived history is relatively recent. Studies on for instance memory in the South American authoritarian era, transitional justice in South Africa and Sierra Leone and the Palestinians' use of their memories as a potent weapon against the illegitimacy of Israeli policies and discursive practices have promoted critical philosophising on the relationship between academic history, time and the past (as possessing a spectral grasp) State Repression and the Struggles for Memory (2003), History, Memory and State Sponsored Violence (2011) and The Palestine Nakba - Decolonising History, Narrating the Subaltern, Reclaiming Memory (2012).

The spatial lens of history as practiced in academic history departments has also been adjusted. The rise of international organisations with global reach and an 'international community', Decolonisation, the globalisation of the Cold War in the 1960s, the decline of the state from the mid-1970's as argued in *The Rise and Decline of the State* (1991) and European integration also all posed growing challenges to methodological nationalism and ethnocentric epistemologies giving birth to international history among other fields.

International History and Peacekeeping History

International History addresses international relations in a historical perspective, international organisations as well transnational movements and actions and ideas of NGO's and people 'below' the state orchestrated arenas. Powerful critiques of the current paradigm of global governance are offered by the international historians such as Mark Mazower, Marc Frey and Sönke Kunkel, Matthew Connelly and Amy Staples with their studies of the League of Nations (and therefore British imperialism) as the ideological origins and heritage of the United Nations, how the development regime of the 1960s had substantial colonial ties, how the population movement led to human rights abuses and how the ideas and conceptions of 'devel-

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opment' within the World Bank, Food and Agricultural Organisation and the World Health Organisation had a ethnocentric bias and unfortunate consequences still unfolding today. *No Enchanted Palace: The Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (2009), "Writing the History of Development: A Review of the Recent Literature", *Fatal Misconception – The Struggle to Control World Population* (2008) and *The Birth of Development: How the World Bank, Food and Agriculture Organization, and World Health Organization Changed the World, 1945-1965* (2006).

Peacekeeping is part of the current paradigm of global governance, yet it remains less understood what exactly the United Nations Emergency Force in the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip as the first troop heavy operation designated as peacekeeping included. Military and foreign policy historians have only recently begun paying an interest, but so far held onto familiar state, elite and 'technical' narratives ignoring important contributions on gender, performativity and space thereby leaving the later narratives or perhaps even Barthesian myths of the United Nations and the troop contributing countries unchallenged i.e. Australian Peacekeeping - Sixty Years in the Field (2009). This is problematic as the philosopher of history Berber Bevernage has noted that discourses of history are not just neutral descriptions of past and present, but often manifest a dimension of performativity Memory and State Sponsored Violence (2011). Hence, history writing is not only about what is being examined and spoken of, but also what voices are silenced.

Towards a Postcolonial Reading of UN Peacekeeping in the Gaza Strip, 1956-1967

As archival researcher and librarian Jeanette Allis Bastian argues "(...) we live in a global society that retains, maintains and promotes many colonial features. From the dominant voices to the silenced ones, the master narratives to the hidden stories, the marginalized to the main stream, each of us is co-opted and colonized (...)." (Bastian, 2002, p. 270). Postcolonial methodologies on that backdrop allow us to focus on the ground levels of international history and emphasise the centrality of the role of imperialism and colonialism in the everyday life. As postcolonial thinking sees the modern colonial regimes as unfinished business in the sense that they were openended negotiated processes as argued in "The Unfinished Business of Colonial Modernities"), the colonial era itself can perhaps also be

seen as unfinished business as something that has never ended and perhaps never will, at least in the foreseeable future.

Although British mandate Palestine and the Gaza Strip as part thereof and Egypt were never full-fledged official colonies or formal parts of the British Empire, it may be argued that, as imperial historian turning global historian John Darwin has done, many intentions and practices were indeed the same. British dominance of not only the Middle East but also of Central Asia hinged on the British presence in the broader Middle East. Moreover, the British and American post-war planning had British Mandate Palestine as well as Egypt as its centre-piece of the defence plans for the Middle East in case of a Soviet southward attack or expansion just as the British presence in Mandate Palestine ended only in 1948 and in Egypt in 1954, only few years before the UN operation providing an almost unbroken link (Darwin, 1999, p. 160). The UN and the United Nations Emergency Force did not succeed the British that had succeeded the Ottomans as yet another imperial regime in the Gaza Strip, however. The UNEF was nonetheless more than an echo of empire as the imperial past still very much shaping the present. The operation was after all formed after the joint British and French imperially motivated invasion of Egypt in 1956 and the Israeli attempt of annexing the Gaza Strip and to secure and supervise the cessation of the socalled 'hostilities'. 1 Ending 'hostilities', however, was not the only task. The United Nations Suez Clearance Organization that, although often ignored by scholars, was to clean up the Suez Canal as Egypt had sunk several vessels as a means to pressure the British prior to the invasion. It was vital to the European member states (and therefore the US) as their growth economies depended on the canal for trade and the provision of oil. Western states therefore stood for 99.93% of the loans to the UNSCO just as the mandate for UNEF was granted under the Uniting for Peace scheme from 1950 that allowed for the transfer of a matter of international security to the still Western dominated General Assembly from the Security Council where the Soviet Union had the right to veto resolutions.2

The British Empire also made itself present in other ways than by providing the larger part of the intellectual inspiration for the predecessor of the UN, the League of Nations and invading Egypt. The troops of the British Empire had only left Egypt two years before after several decades of military presence. Both the Canadian and Indian troops that took part in UN operation, it should not be forgotten,

came from armies modelled on a combination of British imperial and later military doctrine. The Indonesian contingent also brought the traditions of the Dutch colonial military force, which for many years dictated attending and putting out colonial 'fires' rather than offensive capabilities something that continued under both Japanese occupation in the second 'World War' and the rising American influence from the mid-1960's The Armed Forces of Indonesia (1996). The Dutch imperial reverberation was manifest in conversations in Dutch between Indonesian officers and Dutch UN observers investigating incidents on the armistice demarcation line.3 The memoirs of the (Canadian) UNEF Commander reveals that UNEF, although at inconsequential levels, nonetheless came to depend directly on and support the (albeit weakened) British Empire as the UN force bought vehicles, petrol, oil, medical supplies directly from the British invasion force, most of which appears to have come from the British bases on the crown colony of Cyprus. The UNEF, while taking over the Gaza Strip for a short while as the Israeli occupation forces were moving out, was also trying to get hold of British and American manuals for military governments from the final war years Between Arab and Israeli (1962). These manuals built on earlier British imperial or American 'overseas' experience. Moreover, UN records reveal that the maps for the operation came from the British on Cyprus.4 The critical historians of cartography James Akerman and Matthew Edney emphasize how one cannot distinguish between the cartographic practices of nation-states and empire, how maps are highly partial and hold persistently ideological meanings as well as how they empower their users to discipline and construct territory "Introduction" & "The Irony of Imperial Mapping" emphasizing the need to reflect further on the use of imperial maps by the United Nations Emergency Force. As the geopolitical origin of the invasion of Egypt and the UNEF and its initial supplies were all the same, it is safe to say that this path dependency gave the UN presence a hybrid character.

Several speeches on Days in the Gaza Strip⁵, UN publications and memoirs of higher political and military staff have found that UNEF brought peace to a troubled region by performing a buffer function on the Armistice Demarcation Line (ADL) (i.e. 'Peacekeeping and Peacemaking', although Israel and Egypt were allowed build up strategic momentum through renewed war plans, the militarisation of populations and landscapes with fortifications, exercises involving large parts of society, defence lines and mine fields

and the build-up of forces and strike capabilities through the procurement of American, French and Soviet weaponry as well as wage a proxy war in Yemen. Egypt, however, long had Israel lower on its list of priorities than the destruction of Anglo-American regional influence in its struggle for regional hegemony. This plus the fewer encounters that could lead to war gave UNEF an impression of success, but the UN was helpless if intentions changed as events in 1960 with an intense force build-up and the war in 1967 showed in "Guns for Cotton? Aid, Trade, and the Soviet Quest for Base Rights in Egypt, 1964-1966", "Wall and Tower", "The Plan", Britain and the Yemen Civil War, 1962-1965 (2010) and "The Soviet Union and the Outbreak of the June 1967 Six-Day War".

Moving from 'big' to 'minor' history of the UNEF, the post-colonial anthropologist Ann Laura Stoler has noted that minor' histories are not trivial, nor iconic, but marking a differential political temper and critical space *Along the Archival Grain – Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense,* (2008). They are, as noted by the anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughad and the sociologist Ahmad H. Sa'di, 'pregnant with meaning' (Abu-Lughad and Sa'di, 2007, p. 2).

In UNEF sport and PR events, in which the different troop contingents would compete in sports that were in fact promoted globally by the British Empire over the 19th century Games and Empires: Modern Sports and Cultural Imperialism (1994) and especially the Canadian and Indian troops during polo games or boxing matches⁶, the UN troops, discursively constructed by the UNEF commanders as soldiering for world peace, brought the imperial structures with them at these events. As another reverberation of the British military or rather imperial practice, the UN force hired primarily Palestinians and Palestinian refugees for unskilled labour with less security and often difficult working loads and hours. This lead to conflicts, some out of cultural misunderstandings and others from downright racism that had the 'lesser' Palestinian guards working more than UN regulations permitted. In one case it came to a direct conflict and something that could be translated as a strike by Palestinian guards or batmen as they were called against six day work weeks with 10-12 hours of work pr. day. In another case a Palestinian worker was shot when a large group consisting of several hundred workers waiting outside the UN camp in Rafah had been motioned in by the truck drivers without having informed the Indonesian guards. Responding in accordance with camp regulations a worker was shot although

he most probably, along with everybody else, followed a practice established in 'the time of the British'.⁷

The imperial pasts were present in the everyday encounters between the UN soldiers and locals at the ADL. The mental geographies of the UN troops clearly built upon western orientalist works such as Napoleonic and British Mandate era surveys and encyclopaedic works influenced by imperial and orientalist discourses and by Israeli Zionist narratives as the Palestinian historian Nur Masalha and post-colonial Edward Said have shown The Palestine Nakba -Decolonising History, Narrating the Subaltern, Reclaiming Memory (2012) and "Permission to Narrate" and much less Palestinian efforts to re-constitute what the heritage specialist Beverly Butler has named a 'remembered presence' of their own histories "Othering' the archive – from exile to inclusion and heritage dignity). These images and practises were present in the information material which the Danish Army supplied its troops with8 just as a Canadian officer found Arabs 'emotional, irresponsible and volatile' and Israel a 'dynamic Western-type State' in his memoirs.9 Swedish UN troops called locals 'Ali Babas' as well as adopted Israeli discursive practices of calling most Palestinians fugitives. The notion of infiltrators was also common, even the Burmese and pro-Israeli Secretary General U Thant, educated by the British when Burma was still a British colony, used this term in a public UN report.¹⁰ Danish troops in one case also took at face value the story of an Israeli farmer near the ADL arresting three Palestinians without a shred of evidence of their alleged crime. 11 Often, young Palestinian refugee children, Bedouin youngsters fetching grass for their camels in lands that used to be either owned by their families or problem free to use, new watchmen lost on their patrols or workers with nightshifts wandering home were also arrested by the Danish and Brazilian troops. 12 On the other hand, Israelis were frequently not arrested for similar actions and even taken into Israel against regulations by Finnish UN troops in a few cases of mine injuries. 13

On several occasions, however, these narratives and mental geographies were contested: When young Palestinians boys would cross over the ADL from Israel and speaking of hopelessness and despair or when a 20-year old Palestinian woman from one of the refugee camps near Gaza City would come to cross the ADL hoping to commit suicide by UN troops to escape her marriage to a 50 year old man with no means and no cheerful future, most probably hav-



ing been person of certain influence, but no longer so in the refugee camp. As the UNWRA began arranging trips to the refugee camps for the UN troops to demystify the refugees, sympathies were gradually forwarded. Charities were held, although in some cases by staging boxing matches, once again making present British imperial practices. Some of the UN officers investigating ADL incidents were in some instances also direct in their reports on Israeli policies or lack thereof in the relatively frequent incidents staged from surrounding Israeli kibbutzes.

What should be clear with regard to archives from these examples is that, as the archive researchers Terry Cook and Joan Schwartz argue, " (...) archives are not passive storehouses of old stuff, but active sites where social power is negotiated, contested, confirmed" (Cook and Schwarz, 2002, p.1). Just as imperialism and colonialism were in part performed through record keeping "Reading Colonial Records through Archival Lens: The Provenance of Place, Space and Creation", the archives of UNEF are in this sense an expression and function of itself. The records hold both a deliberating capacity due to the presence of these stories and a marginalising capacity being part of the dominant European/north American bureaucratic archival paradigm related to its imperial predecessors along with cartography and surveying. Moreover, what has been reported and what has not? Reports involving Scandinavian troops seem to be more reoccurring than those of Latin American troops perhaps reflecting a somewhat weaker 'Weberian' mentality on incident reporting. Translation is another issue. In one case a hand grenade thrown by an Israeli kibbutzim into a Palestinian home near the ADL was translated into merely having made 'noise' when it exploded and almost killed a young Palestinian doing his homework.¹⁷ Over the past decade critically and post-colonially minded archivists have in fact begun promoting privileging other sources and histories over those the archives can provide if warranted i.e. "Excluding Archival Sciences: Oral History and Historical Absence".

Conclusion: The Use of Memories as Subaltern Voices in International History?

Although reading the UN records and published memoirs against the grain as done here reveals quite a bit, these cases nonetheless strongly indicate that it is more than warranted to turn to the Palestinians, both those originally living in the Gaza Strip as well as those

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having been forced to leave their homes from 1948 onwards becoming refugees and the Sinai as well as the various groups of Negev Bedouin. It is not a question of giving them permission to narrate, but rather ask if they are willing to speak and share their own histories. Alas, it is not only about what the archives do and do not speak about; it is also about how we help the 'other' voices get heard. An old Palestinian woman when interviewed by the sociologist Ahmad H. Sa'di tellingly asked him "How can those without lips whistle?" (Sa'di, 2008, p. 385). This is a serious question that needs to be reflected upon.

As worrisome as it is, the implication of not understanding what UNEF, as the first operation in the UN peacekeeping paradigm, has exactly included, is that we most probably do not understand the current operations fully either. History as a discipline hence cannot afford to ignore memories and oral history testimonies from 'within' and especially 'below', whether in regard to UNEF and beyond. The document fetish of historians, still dominant to this day, has left huge gaps in our understanding of the current paradigm of global governance as we have not yet overcome the silences of the archives. In fact, we see memories and other ways of relating to time and experiences as practiced all over the world and academic history as practised globally in history departments as complementary rather than contradictory; it is not a question of academic history or memory, but academic history and memory. Memories and oral history interviews have in fact been used in studies of peacekeeping (i.e. "MR. UNIFIL" reflects on a quarter century of Peacekeeping in South Lebanon". The UN oral history project also has contributions from top staff involved in the peacekeeping operations in Gaza, Congo and Cyprus. Yet more and different voices need to be heard on the backdrop of an increase in respect for knowledge based on experience less than perceived authority. Despite the difficulties this might entail.

The post-colonial approach to International History and UN peace-keeping utilising memories and oral history interviews therefore holds potential, especially as most of the UN peacekeeping operations have taken place in former European colonies in Africa and Asia and mandate areas in the Middle East. 18 By turning to the memories of those who have been 'peacekept' (or those who have been 'developed') we may begin to know and understand more of how time and space and perceptions of these operate differently around the world as well as how the current paradigm of global governance

works in everyday life and thereby open an alternative future. Just as we accordingly need to acknowledge that academic discourses are therefore not neutral descriptions but carry manifestations of performativity, we also need to face that the challenge of changing what we don't know is anything but unproblematic.

Notes

- 1 UN Resolution 999, 4/11/1956
- 2 UN A/3719
- 3 Investigation report from UNMO to Chairman, Egyptian-Israeli Mixed Armistice Commission, 14 June 1957, in file Complaints and Investigations April 1957 to June 1957, in series Political Affairs EIMAC Area Files Gaza Strip -, EIMAC Funds, S-0375, United Nations Archives
- 4 Outgoing message from Nelson to Moe Info Byford, 8 February 1957, in file Israel Administration of GAZA, in series Political Affairs - EIMAC -Area Files - Gaza Strip, EIMAC Funds, S-0375, United Nations Archives
- 5 Speeches by UNEF Commanders on October 24 1964 and 1966, in file Public Information – United Nations Day, 1964-1966, in series S-0530, UNEF Funds, S-0530, United Nations Archives
- 6 See note 4 and Message from HQ Signal Troop to Public Information Officer, 19 December 1964, in file Visual Material, 1964, in series S-0530, UNEF Funds, S-0530, United Nations Archives
- 7 Incident Report by Chief Admin. Off. Assistant, 27 July 1957, in file 1778-0000-148, in series Local Staff Regulations General Policy, UNEF Funds, S-0530, United Nations Archives and List of Terminated Staff + Annex III from RAfah and El Arish from Chief Personnel Ass. Rafah to Chief, Civlian Personnel, 26 November 1965, in file S-1773-0000-0188, in series General Administration/Disciplin, 1964-1967, UNEF Funds, S-0530, United Nations Archives
- 8 Jensen, T. and B. Grøsfeld, 1959-1966. *Dansk Soldat i Gaza*. Forsvarets Velfærdstjeneste Folk og Værn: København
- 9 Swettenham, J. *Report no. 78: Some Impressions of the UNEF, 1957-1958.* [online] Available at: http://www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/dhh-dhp/his/rep-rap/doc/ahqr-rqga/ahq078.pdf
- 10i.e. Investigation report from UNMO to Chairman, Egyptian-Israeli Mixed Armistice Commission, 27 August 1957, in file Complaints and Investigations July 1957 to December 1957, in series Political Affairs - EIMAC -Area Files - Gaza Strip -, EIMAC Funds, S-0375, United Nations Archives and Investigation report from UNMO to Chairman, Egyptian-

Israeli Mixed Armistice Commission, 31 December 1957, in file Complaints and Investigations July 1957 to December 1957, in series Political Affairs - EIMAC - Area Files - Gaza Strip -, EIMAC Funds, S-0375, United Nations Archives and Office of Public Information, 1967. Report of the Secretary General on the Withdrawal of the United Nations Emergency Force. Office of Public Information: New York, p. 14

- 11 Investigation report from UNMO to Chairman, Egyptian-Israeli Mixed Armistice Commission, 2 May 1957, in file Complaints and Investigations April 1957 to June 1957, in series Political Affairs EIMAC Area Files Gaza Strip -, EIMAC Funds, S-0375, United Nations Archives,
- 12 Investigation report from UNMO to Chairman, Egyptian-Israeli Mixed Armistice Commission, 13 May 1958, in file Complaints and Investigations January 1958 to June 1958, in series Political Affairs - EIMAC - Area Files - Gaza Strip -, EIMAC Funds, S-0375, United Nations Archives, Investigation report from UNMO to Chairman, Egyptian-Israeli Mixed Armistice Commission, 18 February 1959, in file Complaints and Investigations July 1958 to April 1959, in series Political Affairs - EIMAC - Area Files - Gaza Strip -, EIMAC Funds, S-0375, United Nations Archives Investigation report from UNMO to Chairman, Egyptian-Israeli Mixed Armistice Commission, 29 April 1959, in file Complaints and Investigations July 1958 to April 1959, in series Political Affairs - EIMAC - Area Files -Gaza Strip -, EIMAC Funds, S-0375, United Nations Archives and Investigation report from UNMO to Chairman, Egyptian-Israeli Mixed Armistice Commission, 29 April 1959, in file Complaints and Investigations July 1958 to April 1959, in series Political Affairs - EIMAC - Area Files -Gaza Strip -, EIMAC Funds, S-0375, United Nations Archives
- 13Investigation report from UNMO to Chairman, Egyptian-Israeli Mixed Armistice Commission, 8 June 1957, in file Complaints and Investigations April 1957 to June 1957, in series Political Affairs EIMAC Area Files Gaza Strip -, EIMAC Funds, S-0375, United Nations Archives
- 14 Investigation report from UNMO to Chairman, Egyptian-Israeli Mixed Armistice Commission, 7 March 1958, in file Complaints and Investigations January 1958 to June 1958, in series Political Affairs EIMAC Area Files Gaza Strip -, EIMAC Funds, S-0375, United Nations Archives and Investigation report from UNMO to Chairman, Egyptian-Israeli Mixed Armistice Commission, 28 October 1958, in file Complaints and Investigations July 1958 to April 1959, in series Political Affairs EIMAC Area Files Gaza Strip -, EIMAC Funds, S-0375, United Nations Archives

15See no. note 5

- 16Investigation report from UNMO to Chairman, Egyptian-Israeli Mixed Armistice Commission, 22 September 1957, in file Complaints and Investigations July 1957 to December 1957, in series Political Affairs - EIMAC - Area Files - Gaza Strip -, EIMAC Funds, S-0375, United Nations Archives
- 17Investigation report from UNMO to Chairman, Egyptian-Israeli Mixed Armistice Commission, 27 June 1957, in file Complaints and Investigations April 1957 to June 1957, in series Political Affairs EIMAC Area Files Gaza Strip -, EIMAC Funds, S-0375, United Nations Archives
- 18http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/resources/statistics/factsheet. shtml (last accessed 04/07/2012) and http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/operations/financing.shtml (last accessed 04/07/2012)

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