

## **Extended Essay**

### **Global Politics**

#### **The Reconciliation Commission in Greenland 2014 to 2017**

To what extent has the Greenlandic Reconciliation Commission been effective in contributing to building positive peace in Greenland?

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## **I. List of Abbreviations**

**GRC** - Greenlandic reconciliation commission

**TRC** - Truth and reconciliation commission

**UN** - United Nations

## **II. List of figures**

Joinet-Orentlicher Model

## 1. Introduction

The role of Denmark as a former colonial power in Greenland characterises the difficult relationship between the two countries. The status of Greenland as a colony was abolished in 1953 when it became part of the Danish kingdom and later, through a consultative referendum on home rule in 1979, Greenland gained greater autonomy from Denmark. In 2009, through another referendum, the Greenlandic citizens achieved self-governance, and thereby the ability to determine rules and law within their own territory, whilst still belonging to the Danish kingdom (Sørensen, 2020).

In 2014, the Greenlandic government, also called Naalakkersuisut, decided to investigate the role of Denmark as a former colonial power. Numerous of the human rights violations that took place during colonial rule were parts of assimilation and centralisation policies. These involved forced sterilisation, forced adoption of children, ban on cultural practices, and loss of native language which led to intergenerational trauma with effects still present today (Sørensen, 2020). This led to the formation of the Greenlandic Truth and Reconciliation Commission (GRC) which was tasked to investigate the role of Denmark from 1953 to 2014 in Greenland (Heinrich, 2023) The main goal of the commission was to investigate how past traumas directly and indirectly impact Greenlandic society and its population in the present, facing internal problems such as alcohol misuse, sexual abuse, youth-rootlessness and suicides (Seidler, 2023). The commission was active between 2014 to 2017 with a budget of 10 million Danish kroner (Sørensen, 2020). The goal of the GRC was to ensure non-recurrence and future positive development within the society and focusing on creating a feeling of common identity and reconciliation moving Greenland closer to achieving positive peace through increasing harmony and reducing traumas from the past (Heinrich, 2023). In order to achieve this goal the commission focused on the impact of colonial rule on historical

development, cultural interactions between Denmark and Greenland, as well as the current internal sociological problems (Rud, 2017). With regard to achieving this goal the GRC used different methods such as citizens meetings, narrative interviews, and sociological investigations in order to gain a wider understanding of the Greenlandic experience and trauma in the process of dealing with the past (Therkildsen et al., 2017). Therefore this extended essay will investigate the research question *To what extent has the Greenlandic Reconciliation Commission been effective in contributing to building positive peace in Greenland?* In order to answer this question the essay will use the Joinet-Orentlicher Model of transitional justice and conflict transformation, through operationalising the effectiveness of TRC's into mainly three variables *The Right to Know*, *The Right to Reparation* and the *Guarantee of non-recurrence*. This essay will argue that the GRC was effective in achieving positive peace in Greenland to a moderate extent, due to its ability to establish the *Right to Know* and the *Right for Reparation*, however the commission was not effective in establishing positive peace through the *Right to Justice* and *Guarantee of Non-Recurrence*.

In order to support the investigation, the essay will rely on primary and secondary research. To gain a wider understanding of the process and impact of the commission, an interview with former member of the GRC and now head of the Greenlandic Representation in Copenhagen, Jens Heinrich, was conducted (Heinrich, 2023). As secondary sources this essay will utilise the official report from the commission 2017, as well as a wide range of news articles and academic journals.

This issue is important to investigate because of an increased international focus on building positive peace through restorative justice by focusing on intergenerational trauma within postcolonial societies (Asadullah, 2022). Therefore, this essay will add to the existing

literature whether restorative justice as a mechanism of peacebuilding is efficient, or if combining retributive and restorative justice is more effective in building peace in postcolonial societies.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

### **2.1: Justice as a mechanism of peacebuilding**

Justice is based on the concept of fair treatment (Murphy et al., 2016). Transitional justice focuses on providing positive peace through recognition of victims, reinforce respect for human rights and modify individual's trust to state institutions (Peace Building initiative, 2009), with the aim of ensuring accountability, serving justice and achieving reconciliation, to avoid repeated conflict (OHCHR, 2021).

#### **2.1.1: Distributive justice**

Distributive justice considers punishment, if proportionate, as the best solution in response to crimes. If laws are breached, this requires that the offender forfeit something in return (Murphy et al., 2016).

#### **2.1.2: Restorative Justice**

Restorative justice is a system of justice which focuses on rehabilitation through reconciliation, and is argued to be a relational theory of justice (Llewellyn & Philpott, 2014). Looking at restorative justice as a relation emphasises the importance of human connectedness rather than the individual. According to Jennifer J.Llewellyn, violence done to previous generations will therefore automatically affect the traumas of others in a postcolonial society. Therefore, intergenerational trauma is still present within postcolonial

societies today and can hinder peacebuilding (Llewellyn & Philpott, 2014). The racial discrimination and hierarchies of previous colonial powers have led to breaches on human connectedness which is often seen as a determinant in postcolonial societies (Weitekamp & Kerner, 2002). Reconciliation is the main aim of restorative justice, where the goal is to find solutions of opposed ideas, beliefs or needs so communities are capable of existing and collaborate together to seek equity and harmony (Murphy et al., 2016). Therefore, Truth and Reconciliation commissions are often established as integral instruments to provide a clear picture of the past, establish human rights, facilitate peaceful political transitions, and importantly in promoting reconciliation through restorative justice (Mc Leod, 2015). These restorative justice processes require joint leadership, political will, trust building, transparency, accountability and sustainable investment, for a TRC to succeed in building positive peace (*British Columbia, 2013*).

## **2.3 Peacebuilding**

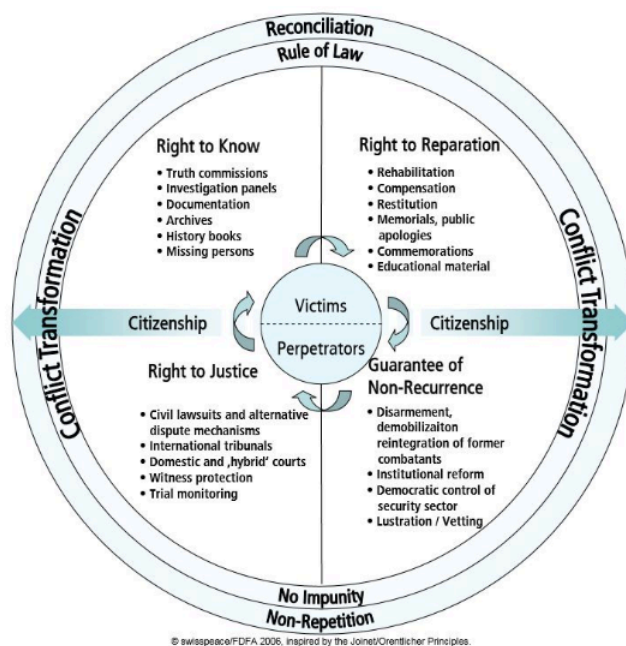
### **2.3.1: Positive Peace**

Positive peace focuses more deeply into sustaining peace, rather than simply reducing or ending violence (Murphy, 2016). The goal is to identify a deeper level of harmony in society where causes of conflict themselves are neutralised (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2016). According to Galtung's peace formula, violence and trauma has to be eliminated and equity and harmony increased in order for positive peace to be built and sustained (Galtung, 2017). TRC's are important in establishing positive peace because deeper causes of historical conflict will, through justice processes, be exposed and investigated so present traumas, conflicts, and inequality can be neutralised (Mc Leod, 2015).

### 2.3.2 The Joinet-Orentlicher Model

Galtung's peace formula can be useful in the process of restorative justice through the Joinet-Orentlicher model. Through its four principles it is seen as a conceptual framework for dealing with the past and combating impunity (Sisson, 2010). Originally the model was drafted by Louis Joinet and later updated by Diane Orentlicher in 2005, developed for the UN Commission of Human Rights Council (Haldemann et al., 2018). Today the principles are widely accepted reference points to the effort of fighting impunity and human rights violations (Joinet & Orentlicher, 2018).

**Figure 1:** The Joint-Orentlicher principles



Source: (O'Neill, 2015)

Reconciliation and restorative justice create the framework for the Joinet-Orentlicher principles which builds upon addressing the truth of past injustice and human rights violations in order to establish and maintain peaceful relationships, thus ensuring the wrongdoings are not replicated is the aim towards positive peace (Llewellyn & Philpott,



2014). The process of dealing with the past is important for the establishment of reconciliation and thereby peacebuilding (Sisson, 2010). *Right to know, Right for Reparation, Right for Justice* and *Guarantee of Non-Recurrence* are the four principles of transitional justice and consist of different peace elements as ways of increasing equity and harmony and decreasing violence and trauma. Therefore, the effectiveness of the GRC will be operationalized through the aspects offered by the Joint-Orentlicher principles.

### **3. Reasons behind the effectiveness of the GRC**

The following section will address two aspects of the Joinet-Orentlicher Model: the *Right to Know* and the *Right for Reparation* that both focus on exposing past traumas and thus repair harm in the present to promote peacebuilding (Sisson, 2010).

#### **3.1 The right to know**

The GRC worked internally in Greenland with the primary aim of facilitating activities covering cultural and societal challenges within society. This was in order to reveal the experienced traumas and violence, for the Greenlanders to know their individual and collective past as a postcolonial society (Heinrich, 2015). The *Right to Know*, as a part of the Joinet-Orentlicher principles, advocates TRC's and investigation panels as a way of reducing trauma and promoting positive peace through reconciliation (Sisson, 2010). These initiatives were to give the citizens a forum in which to express their own experienced or inherited trauma related to the cultural, political, and social violence they had experienced, as a way to break unspoken taboos and traumas, also described as the process of "decolonising the mind" (Heinrich, 2023). The *Right to Know* one's own societal and individual trauma from the colonial past is crucial in reclaiming identity to foster a common ground for development

and reconciliation, as Chairman of the GRC Josef Therkildsen expressed in 2015 *“The Commission works on the basis that a lack of knowledge of one's own history leads to a skewed and inadequate understanding of one's own society and culture.”* (Marcussen-Mølgaard, 2020).

To collect a diverse understanding of the Greenlanders' history and experiences, 33 local meetings and 17 debate nights were organised around the country, 989 people were interviewed for the narrative interviews, of which 58 of these were conducted in depth (Therkildsen et al., 2017).

### 3.1.1 Narrative interviews

Through narrative interviews the Greenlanders got the possibility to tell their own personal stories (Therkildsen et al., 2017). The intention of the interviews was to get a diverse understanding of individuals' traumas and experiences, but also with the aim of creating a new perspective shifting the narrative from being victims to resilience. The interviews were built upon a common specific structure to ensure non-biassed interviews focusing on the personal experience of the past, present, and how to achieve equity and harmony in the future, both for the individual and society (Therkildsen et al., 2017). The narrative interviews and meetings commonly resulted in people expressing their feeling of lack of involvement, as if they were second rank citizens without influence or worth in their own society (Trondheim et al., 2017). The GRC stated that these common determinators could be linked to Danish colonial influence and emphasised that due to the Greenlandic Modernisation Strategy in 1950, which aim was to *“quickly achieve further independence”* (Therkildsen et al., 2017), this had consequences for the society as the citizens felt out of influence and struggled to adapt going from being a hunter society to a modernised society. Cases of forced sterilisation

left women feeling a sense of lost control over one's own body, as well as a lack of trust in the Danish healthcare system. The birthright criteria stated that native Greenlanders should be paid 25% less than Danish employed (Rud, 2017). Furthermore, Danish employed centralisation policies forced Greenlandic citizens to move and caused rootlessness among Greenlanders, these created aspects of cultural, democratic and especially social inequality between native Greenlanders and Danish people whose effects are still present today. (Seidler, 2023).

Listening to individuals' stories, as a way of understanding the past, was a part of reducing personal mental trauma and violence. The interviews were conducted to validate emotional scars, create connectedness and document experiences in the aim of promoting reconciliation and positive peace. Through this the purpose was to develop a common ground of Greenlandic identity and visions for the future. The interviews resulted in deeper investigation reports that thoroughly investigated how common colonial traumas had influenced Greenlandic identity and society in the present. (Therkildsen et al., 2017)

## 3.2 Right for reparation

According to the Joinet-Orentlicher model the *Right to Reparation* implies eliminating and restoring previous violations by establishing harmony and equity through initiatives and institutional legislations ensuring justice (Sisson, 2010).

### 3.2.1 Public apology

In 2017 the GRC stated seven recommendations, one of which was called: *Wish for an apology* (Therkildsen et al., 2017). The commission's work was mainly focused on internal reconciliation in Greenland, however, the older generation, who experienced first hand violations, expressed the wish for a public apology from the Danish state to take responsibility and show political will in seeking equality, which would help neutralise the causes for conflict (Sørensen, 2020). In 2019 the newly elected Prime Minister, Mette Fredriksen, expressed her concern for the previous role of Denmark in Greenland, whereas former prime ministers had refused to acknowledge Denmark as a postcolonial state or show willingness of participation in reaching positive peace between the two countries (Jensen et al., 2020). In 2019 a historical investigation was established to explore the case of the 22 forcibly adopted Greenlandic children who had been a part of the assimilation experiment initiated by the Danish state called "The Experiment" in 1951 (Jonassen, 2022). After the results were published in 2020, Mette Fredriksen provided a public apology and an economic compensation of 250,000 Danish kroner to the 6 still living "Experiment Children", on behalf of the Danish state (Bernhard & Tiirikainen, 2022). It was important for the Greenlanders that this apology was based on research and historical investigation so the Danish government could understand and investigate what harm this had left within the children, and how this had also affected the generations afterwards (Høeg, 2019). The apology has been discussed within and outside Greenland, but the responsibility taken by the Danish state can be seen as

a beginning of acknowledgement and reconciliation between the two countries, even though not all causes of conflict were neutralised (Dahlin, 2021). The apology started debates and talks across the two countries, which led to an increase in media attention towards the historically complicated relationship between Greenland and Denmark, which gave a sense of acknowledgment for the Greenlanders. (Dohrman, 2023)

The Danish initiated public apology can be seen as effective in reducing violence and trauma in Greenland by validating traumas and actively investigating the past. Even though all causes of conflict were not neutralised, the apology can be seen as an attempt to repair past wrongdoings and show a willingness for further peacebuilding.

### 3.2.2 Educational material

One of the recommendations from the GRC stated that an essential way for Greenland to develop harmony and equity was to produce new educational material. This would help rebuild the Greenlandic self perception, whilst starting a process of eliminating past traumas and violence caused by previously forbidden language and educational material (Therkildsen et al., 2017). The GRC recommended the project “*Greenlands History - told by ourselves*”, supported by chairman Josef Therkildsen stating that “*a well-functioning society requires a population with an awareness of their own culture and history*” (Marcussen-Mølgaard, 2020). The material focuses on strengthening the Greenlandic identity through language, culture, and understanding of history told from a Greenlandic perspective. This was to break postcolonial patterns of Greenlandic language and cultural practices seen as primitive left from the colonial narrative of Danish as being superior. This can especially be seen within the educational system today where the Danish language still creates unequal opportunities and the curriculum is based on Danish history (Sørensen, 2023).

## **4. Reasons behind the Ineffectiveness of the GRC**

The following section will look at the implications of hindered internal and external legitimacy, as well as the lack of institutional reforms by the Greenlandic government after 2017, which all hindered the effectiveness of the GRC.

### **4.1 Internal hindered legitimacy**

The GRC became a hot topic for discussion and negative press within Greenland immediately upon its conception (Marcussen-Mølgaard, 2020). The origin of the GRC was a result of the controversial newly elected leader of Naalakkersuisut, Aleqa Hammond. After 30 years in power for the party Siumut, in 2009 the democratic socialist party Inuit Ataqatigiit was elected with Kim Kielsen in charge, focusing on a good relationship and cooperation with Denmark (Rud, 2017). In 2013 the separatist party Nunatta Qitornai led by Aleqa Hammond was elected to lead the Greenlandic parliament. Thus, the political focus shifted towards a more nationalistic agenda (Rud, 2017). Hammond was criticised for being contradictory, as her motivation behind the GRC was striving towards Greenland gaining independence from Denmark (Breum, 2014). This aim contradicts the origin of TRC's which, through political cooperation, works for reconciliation and building positive peace to increase equity and harmony between both parties. Aleqa Hammonds rethorics was harsh and compared Greenland to South African apartheid, which oppositional political parties and the population found extreme and out of proportion (Christensen & Heinrich, 2015). This was seen through media, citizens, and oppositional politicians' criticism of the GRC revolved more around opinions of Aleqa Hammond as a person rather than on the commission itself. The population argued that the 10 million kroner allocated for the project could have been used more effectively for current societal issues within Greenland. Hammond was later on also accused

of using 100.000 kroner for private use, which again broke the trust and support from the population (Breum, 2014). The critique of the GRC and Aleqa Hammond internally in Greenland lasted through all three years, and divided people either in opposition to Aleqa's political mission, or her personality. This took away focus from the work and initiatives created by the GRC which strived towards a collectively reconciled Greenlandic population, but resulted in the division of supporters, thus affecting the effectiveness of the commissions in the process (Heinrich, 2023).

## **4.2 Externally Hindered legitimacy**

Crucial for restorative justice and positive peacebuilding is political will and joint leadership (*Justice Institute of British Columbia*, n.d.). Naalakkersuisut expressed aspiration for cooperation with the Danish government in the desire for joint reconciliation and investigation of the Danish role as a colonial power. The government of Denmark had no interest in taking part in the TRC in 2013. Former Danish prime minister, Helle Thorning Schmidt, expressed to the press *"We do not need reconciliation, but I fully respect that this is a discussion that concerns the Greenlandic people. We will follow the discussion closely from here."* (Heinrich, 2014). The unwillingness for participation sent a strong political message which upheld the superiority and arrogance from Denmark, by ignoring the responsibility of postcolonial structures still present within Greenlandic society.

Jens Heinrich emphasises the importance of the GRC's internal reconciliation back in 2014, but underlines that Denmark's non-participation definitely made the reconciliation process ineffective due to the lack of responsibility and unresolved power dynamics (Heinrich, 2023). In postcolonial relationships between the oppressor and the suppressed, the existing and

previous power dynamics simply have to be acknowledged to avoid deeper social causes of conflict, in the aim of building positive peace (Murphy et al., 2016).

The lack of Danish political will can be seen as hindered legitimacy for Greenland to achieve positive peace through restorative justice. Looking at the Joint-Orentlicher Model as a restorative justice process, this requires both the offender and victim to participate with joint leadership, political will and cooperation to collectively ensure sustainable peace, equal power balance, and mutual destruction of violence and trauma (Llewellyn & Philpott, 2014). These requirements were not successfully met for the GRC.

### **4.3 Guarantee of non-recurrence**

The *Guarantee of Non-Recurrence* suggests institutional reforms as a way of legislatively implementing restorative justice processes. This can be through institutional reforms of educational programs and structures to ensure citizens' awareness of their human rights, thus avoiding that past wrongdoings are not replicated (Sisson, 2010).

#### **4.3.1 Institutional reforms**

In the process of peacebuilding the results of the GRC underline the importance of clear legislation on language and human rights education as a part of decolonisation, to enable peacebuilding (Therkildsen et al., 2017). These legislations on education would not only be efficient in reducing past trauma, but also increase equity for the Greenlanders to reclaim their native language and history, whilst feeling responsible for the future (Joseph, 2019). In March 2017 the request for institutional reforms regarding education was initiated by Naalakkersuisut which established an expert group focusing on strengthening the Greenlandic



mother tongue and foreign language. In 2020 this work resulted in further recommendations for the government to ensure economic support to the two areas (Carl, 2021). In 2019 Ilisimatusarfik – University of Greenland and Social Pedagogical Institute, stated in their yearly report the importance of securing and developing the respect and education in human rights to empower greenlandic youth, ensure non-reucurrence and eliminate postcolonial traumas caused by human rights violations (Carl, 2021). Even though recommendations were provided, they were ultimately not adopted due to legislative decisions by the Greenlandic government. The lack of action following the recommendations of the GRC’s institutional reforms has been criticised, mainly by Greenlandic citizens. The lack of structural change and political action in meeting these needs for reconciliation within the society after 2017 has therefore made the work of the GRC ineffective in promoting positive peace and ensuring non-recurrence (Heinrich, 2023).

## **5. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the GRC**

The principles of the Joinet-Orentlicher Model provide a guideline to eliminate postcolonial trauma and violence within a society, whilst increasing equity and harmony when building positive peace. The commission was successful in meeting the two first principles. The *Right to Know* was internally successful for the reconciliation of individuals. Through initiatives such as panels, narrative interviews and investigations citizens had the possibility of sharing personal experiences and traumas. The commission was effective in collecting these stories and thereafter pointing out common problems within the Greenlandic society, and thereby creating recommendations for the government on how to tackle these problems as a postcolonial society (Therkildsen et al., 2017). The *Right to Reparation* was effective through the initiative of new educational material focused on native language, culture and history, as well as the Danish state fulfilling the wish for a public apology to the “Experiment Children”. By reducing violence through reclaiming history, language, and Danish acknowledgement this also increased harmony and equity for the Greenlanders feeling validated and connected to native identity. However, the GRC was not fully effective in building positive peace due to the lack of action and legitimacy from governments, both internally and externally. (Heinrich, 2023).

Evaluating the effectiveness of the Joint-Orentlicher principles, the absence or retributive justice can be evaluated to have caused further ineffectiveness in reaching positive peace, due to the commission not managing the principle of *Right to Justice*, and *Guarantee of non-recurrence*. The absence of distributive justice hindered the commission in being effective, because no civil lawsuits, international tribunals or domestic courts took place during the work of the GRC (Andersen, 2021). The absence of retributive justice undermined the process of justice for the Greenlanders’ remaining trauma giving no legal closure, due to no prosecutions of individuals or legal trials to account Denmark for past violence (Pugh,

2019). Thus, the absence of retributive justice also led to the lack of harmony, due to unresolved violence within the relationship to Denmark still remaining its position as the enemy in the eyes of the people. Many academics advocate that within postcolonial societies a hybrid utilisation of both restorative and distributive justice would have been more effective in achieving positive peace (Pugh, 2019). As a postcolonial state, a holistic approach would have been more effective in achieving stable peace and reconciliation through restorative measures to ensure harmony by political, cultural and democratic stability, combined with retributive measures securing the absence of violence by holding the oppressor accountable through legal trials and lawsuits to promote a feeling of justice (Pugh, 2019) .

Looking through the Joint-Orienchler model, the GRC has been effective in the two parts of the *Right to Know* and the *Right to Reparation*, but failed in achieving the *Right to Justice* and *Guarantee of Non-Recurrence*. The evaluation of the effectiveness of the commission states that a utilised combination of both restorative and retributive justice would have helped succeeding in creating positive peace in a postcolonial state as Greenland, dealing with trauma from former human rights violations (Pugh, 2019).

## 6. Conclusion

This essay has examined the effectiveness of the Greenlandic Reconciliation Commission from 2014 to 2017 in building positive peace in Greenland using the principles of the Joient-Orentlicher model. The GRC was partly effective in building positive peace in Greenland. Investigating the *Right to Know* and *Right to Reparation*, it was found that the GRC managed to increase equity and harmony by establishing initiatives where individuals could express unresolved trauma, collect experiences of human rights violations, and investigate the relationship between previous colonial violations and current societal problems, mostly with roots in lack of identity. The intention was for Greenlanders to feel an equal stake in society with the aim of personal reconciliation as a way to neutralise deeper social causes of conflict and past trauma (Heinrich, 2023). However, the GRC was not effective in succeeding within the principles of the *Right to Justice* and *Guarantee of Non-Recurrence*, due to lack of action following up upon the recommendations stated in 2017, as well as hindered legitimacy both internally in Greenland and externally from Denmark. Due to restorative justice being a relational theory of justice, the absence of the “offender” in the process of reconciliation hindered the effectiveness of achieving positive peace.

Through examining the four principles, the evaluation states that for the GRC to have succeeded, a holistic approach combining restorative and retributive justice would have been more effective in achieving justice and reconciliation in a postcolonial society as Greenland. Keeping Denmark legislative accountable through civil lawsuits or trials would, through retributive justice processes, have been more effective in neutralising all deeper causes of conflict and achieving positive peace within Greenland.

Examining the result of the GRC through the four principles of the Joint-Orentlicher Model, the commission's ambitions of reaching positive peace and reconciliation through merely using restorative justice were hindered due to lack of legislative action on institutional reforms after 2017, as well as the lack of political will and legitimacy, both internally within Greenland and externally from Denmark. Therefore, the GRC was not entirely effective in building positive peace within Greenland.

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