Investigating the " Politics of the Local" in Peace Processes:

The Case of Turkey's Peace Process for Solving the Kurdish Issue (2009-2015)

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an investigation on the "politics of the *local[2]*" in peace processes for the purposes of understanding the way norms and ideas regarding peacebuilding diffuse to domestic contexts and the way they are adopted, adapted, rejected, and renegotiated by local actors. Building on recent theoretical interest in "local agency" in both international norm diffusion and critical peace studies research, this study attempts to deepen and broaden our understanding of the local through the recognition of the agency of local actors in respect to their diverse expectations from peace process design. The study is based on the investigation of the politics of the local in Turkey's resolution/peace process that was initiated in 2009 and stalled in 2015, with the purpose of solving the Kurdish conflict. Main findings point to the importance of conflict resolution initiatives in "lesson learning" and "experience sharing" in peace processes.

Introduction: Turkey's Peace Process for Solving the Kurdish Issue

Turkey entered a period of transformation regarding the Kurdish issue in the second half of the 2000s. Signals for this transformation were given by the Turkish Prime Minister Erdo an in a speech he delivered in Diyarbakır in August of 2005 (BBC Türkçe, 2005). This speech was preceded by a call in June of 2005 by a group of 130 intellectuals including writers, journalists, business persons, and artists made to the armed insurgency to end its armed activities and to government officials to realize legal arrangements that would secure a peaceful participation to politics (CNN Türk, 2005). In his speech, Erdo an acknowledged past wrongdoings of the Turkish state towards part of its citizens. Signalling a move away from such wrong doings, Erdo an stated that the Kurdish problem would be solved through democratization, giving the signals for moving beyond military solutions to the conflict. Both Erdo an's speech and the intellectuals' call signalled their expectations for moving towards a political solution regarding the conflict through a negotiation framework.

Turkey's peace process was initiated in 2009 as a national policy for the resolution of the Kurdish conflict. The process started with the Kurdish Opening in 2009, later named as the Democratic Opening and finally titled the Unity and Fraternity Project in 2010. This initial period focused on addressing long-voiced democratic demands of the Kurdish population. These demands involved calls for recognition of Kurdish identity, cultural rights and decentralization in an effort to strengthen local government. Simultaneously, secret negotiations were ongoing between 2008 and 2011 which were leaked to the media in 2011. This initial process was interrupted with the escalation of the conflict in 2011 and 2012 and the return to a security discourse.

The second phase of the peace process resulted in peace talks that commenced in January 2013 after the first visit of a group of Kurdish politicians to the prisoned leader of the Kurdish insurgency. The 2013-2015 process was the first time that an open dialogue channel was created between the different sides of the conflict. During this process, the

The peace process stalled in mid-2015 after disagreements over issues such as the timing of the DDR process, possible third-party roles, issues pertaining to power-

Another central difference between these kinds of peace processes is related to the dynamics of norm diffusion. Scholarship on peacebuilding has debated how third party interventions during the post-Cold War period formed a "channel" through which specific principles organizing social and political life were channelled to post-conflict societies (Paris, 2002). Therefore, the activities of third parties form a platform through which liberal principles such as democracy, human rights, market economics, and judicial structures of a specific kind are projected onto populations. In the absence of such a channel, the question of through what kind of mechanisms such norms and practices might diffuse to the local context remains crucial.

With the purpose of investigating the "politics of the local" in the Turkish case this study is based on single case study design and grounded methodology. The analysis provided in the following sections rests on interview data collected during September 2015-March 2016 in Turkey with high- and middle-level actors who played a role in the Resolution Process in Turkey. The figure below indicates the focus of this study with regards to actors in Turkey.

Figure 1: Focus of the Study with Regards to Actors in Turkey[5]

In a peace process, not all actors can be clearly known from the beginning. While main actors such as party members that participate to the peace negotiation process are well known through the media, other actors "behind the scenes" often do not make any appearance in the media. Many times it may also be difficult to track those actors in the reports and other documents published regarding the process under investigation. For this reason, the snowball technique is also used as a second strategy in getting the names of such actors. The snowball technique is very useful in getting access to 'behind the scenes' actors, as interviewees are often willing to share the contact information of other potential actors to talk with. This is an important issue especially in cases where people to be contacted are retired professionals whose contact information is not available any more. Considering that personal contacts can be kept long after the end of professional relationships, the snowball technique offers the best means for access.

International Norms in Peace Processes

This study is interested in the diffusion of norms related to peacebuilding in the domestic context in the absence of an external intervener such as the UN. Here the concept of peacebuilding is used in its broad sense, referring to the process through which parties to a conflict engage in the process of building peace with the purpose of overcoming past divisions. Peacebuilding involves the set of activities undertaken to address issues such as the design of peace negotiation process, political and security issues, and the justice mechanisms that would address conflict-period abuses and deficiencies.

The peacebuilding norms that are addressed in this study include both norms and practices that have long become part of the UN peacebuilding framework and also norms and practices that are increasingly seen as part of a peace negotiation processes. There is no exhaustive list of peacebuilding norms. As Jabri notes, "there are different practices

to *what* is negotiated while process related norms refer to the design of the negotiation process, i.e. *how*

‹ *Gender Mainstreaming*

Gender mainstreaming in peacebuilding is a strategy derived from the gender equality norm that encompasses equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities for women and men. It means that "both women's and men's voices are heard in all decision-making processes at all levels" (Sandole-Staroste, 2011, p. 226). Gender mainstreaming is widely adopted by the UN which acknowledges that "mainstreaming involves ensuring that gender perspectives and attention to the goal of gender equality are central to all activities including policy development, research, and implementation of programs"[7].

‹ *Disarmament-Demobilization-Reintegration*

DDR is a central element in negotiated transitions to peace. It is a comprehensive process that aims at contributing both to immediate security needs and also more generally to stability by engaging with the longer term social, economic, and political integration of ex-

High- and Middle-Level Actors' Perspectives on Peace Process Design

Ideational diffusion is closely related to the actors' effort to situate the peace process in Turkey within international ideas and practices contextualized through references to other cases of peace processes. Almost all interviewees (31 out of 34 interviews) made some kind of reference to other cases of negotiated solutions to peace processes. This means that nearly all interviewees made references to experiences from other cases of negotiated peace settlement and sought to situate part of the ideas and practices they discussed in light of these experiences. The purpose of this section is to analyze which issues were referred to in relation to international examples and discuss the reasons for it. Furthermore, this part also analyzes the question of how the specific ideas that the interviewees situated within international experiences of negotiated peace processes were received (i.e. the mechanisms through which these ideas reached the domestic context in Turkey).

In terms of references to other cases, two cases of conflict resolution and negotiated peace processes emerged as prominent: the case of Northern Ireland and the case of South Africa. References to other cases such as the Philippines, Colombia, and the Basque Country, were made at a minimal level. The table below gives the number of references coded for each case through NVivo10.

Table 1: Number of References to Other Cases and Sources Coded

Cases	Number of references coded	Number of sources coded[11]
Northern Ireland	30	13
South Africa	17	13
The Philippines	6	5
Colombia	2	2
Basque Country	1	1

Table 1 shows that out of 34 interviewees, 13 made references to the Northern Irish peace process and 13 to the South African peace process, five interviewees referred to the peace process in the Philippines, two to the Colombian peace process and one interviewee referred to the Basque country. In terms of the number of references coded, most references were made to the Northern Ireland process with a total of 30 references coded.

Because Northern Ireland is the most successful case and also because it is in Europe it is the case most discussed about but, indeed, it is truly a successful example, it is the most important case to look at while trying to answer the question of how a conflict can be resolved, there is an agreement and also a negotiation process that was initiated by the parties themselves, there are intermediary actors and very well known actors such as Clinton became part of the process. Also, Northern Ireland was the problem of Great Britain, one of the greatest countries in the world. Undoubtedly Sri Lanka, the Philippines, and also South Africa are also important cases but you should consider that the problems of the states or areas that play a critical role in the world system always emerge as crucial problems.13

The Northern Ireland and South African peace processes were perceived as successful peace processes despite the fact that in both countries divisions were not overcome and positive peace did not occur. In the case of Northern Ireland, the existence of "peace walls" separating the two communities in Belfast is frequently referenced as the indicator that the peace process has not been successful in promoting reconciliation between the two communities (Bleakley, 2011; Wilson, 2016). Similarly, in the case of South Africa, while widespread conflict did not reoccur, social tension emanating from the legacy of the apartheid continues (Goodman, 2017; Smith, 2012).

Another point that emerged from the interviews on the perception of success is related to a more general standing on Northern Ireland and South Africa as successful cases. In response to the question of why Northern Ireland and South Africa emerged as primary cases of reference, an interviewee professionally active in the area of conflict resolution noted that this is related to the way these cases are promoted as examples to be taken into consideration in the design of peace processes around the world. According to this view, peacebuilding is a business in itself and both individual actors (e.g. Gerry Adams from the Northern Irish peace process and Roelf Meyer from the South African negotiations) and NGOs become active in designing peace processes in collaboration with other NGOs and governments. Furthermore, the interviewee also noted that:

South Africa is still the major reference source for many peace processes in the world; this is the case that Northern Ireland, Colombia, and the Philippines mostly took as a point of reference […] and you should also not forget that those involved in the peace processes in Northern Ireland, Colombia, the Philippines, politicians, NGOs, and academics all provide consultation services to differ27(e)r82 0 612 conflict

pointed to the emergence of South Africa as a case of "borrowing" for Northern Ireland and then for other subsequent peace processes (Darby, 2003; Guelke, 2004).

Yet another point that emerged from the interviews is that adopting perspectives from completed processes is viewed as more secure in terms of drawing lessons, compared to ongoing processes. The cases of South Africa and Northern Ireland are accepted as having completed the transition from war to peace (in addition to democracy in the case of South Africa) and these transitions are regarded as being successful from different perspectives. South Africa transitioned to democracy in 1994 and the African National Congress (ANC) has been the ruling party since the initial transition. The Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland was signed in 1998 and established a new constitutional status for Northern Ireland that has remained intact until today. Interviewees discussing lessons to be learnt from these two cases have explicitly and implicitly argued on the idea of "completeness" (i.e. that these two examples of peace negotiation processes have reached an end, independently of whether this end promoted the desirable level of intergroup reconciliation). It should be noted that the idea of "completeness" refers to how the interviewees perceive this idea, rather than referencing an objective argument that the peace processes in Northern Ireland and South Africa have been completed.

This is in direct contrast with the cases of Colombia and the Philippines that were still ongoing during the field research of this study. Colombia became a prominent case internationally with the start of the most recent rounds of peace talks that took place in Havana, Cuba in 2012. o7(n)21(2012.)21(o78dd. 72(fi3092 r4dd.)7(ppi)7(ngoi)7(ni)7(t)7(i)7(a)-13(t)7n)2e

Salvador signed in 1992 and the Guatemalan peace process (1994-1996) that led to the signing of the Guatemalan Peace Accords in 1996 are two examples of successful peace processes that did not emerge as cases of reference during the interviews. This reveals that the selection of the lessons to be considered for the peace process in Turkey was made haphazardly rather than in a more rational or fully informed way. At the same time, this points to the need to investigate in a deep manner the dynamics of local actors' selectivity in terms of their perspectives derived from other cases of peace negotiations.

Considering these points, in the following parts, I will focus on two main questions: First, in their references to international peacebuilding processes, which issues did the interviewees refer to? Secondly, why did interviewees select Northern Ireland and South Africa as primary cases of reference?

Main Issues

The majority of interviewees adopted ideas about how a peace process should be designed with reference to the international context. Four main themes emerged in terms of peace process design discussed with reference to experiences of peace negotiations elsewhere: continuity/resilience of the peace process, inclusivitt(t)7(o)-82(t)7(he)-13( )] TJETQq0.0

that any parallelism regarding the background and characteristics of the conflict is not necessary for adopting perspectives and drawing lessons.

In the same direction, another interviewee, a journalist and member of the WPC, pointed to the issue of continuity by arguing how in the South African case the process of dialogue continued despite major tragic incidents. In his words:

> For example the South African Minister of Defense who was one of the primary actors who was in charge of the meetings [during the peace process] was here and during our conversation with him he said that after a great massacre- I think it was the Soweto massacre[18]- Mandela interrupted the contacts but we continued the dialogue and did not detach.[19]

Another interviewee, an academic and member of the WPC, referred to the Colombian peace process that was ongoing at the time of the fieldwork of this study with regards to the continuity of the negotiations. In his words:

> The peace process between the Colombian government and the FARC became stalled six times, the ceasefire was repeatedly broken, but each time they sat again at the table and eventually a peace agreement was signed. I think that this will happen now [for the Turkish case].[20]

The then minister in charge (in Northern Ireland) told me in a meeting in Istanbul that 'if we had decided to proceed in transparent manner from the beginning [of the negotiations], we would have lost government power. […] The South African minister said the same thing. This is the nature (of a peace process).[27]

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also all major political fractions in the process so that to achieve a commonly agreed upon framework.

Another common issue that emerged with regards to inclusivity is the inclusion of societal segments beyond the primary decision makers to the process. For example, an HDP[31] deputy expressed this view by stating, "I believe that the Irish example is very important especially in terms of the civil society's inclusion to the process, so the

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[32] Interview number 15.
[33] Interview number 9.
[34] Interview number 16.

So

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[40] Interview number 1.

In the peace process in Turkey, transitional justice emerged as a primary demand by the pro-Kurdish side to the process. The reason for the prominence of transitional justice and especially of the issue of amnesty and of a truth commission is related to the asymmetric position of the Kurdish side and the position of the Kurdish insurgency. As expected, pro-Kurdish actors demand a transitional justice mechanism that would promote restorative justice beyond retribution and punishment. In the words of an interviewee, an HDP deputy:

> It will be good to have a commission that will have the authority to amnesty, similar to that in South Africa, one that would be authorized to listen to everyone, to have access to all information and in return to have the authority to forgive the wrongdoer.[41]

On the other hand, the Northern Irish case was referred to support the opposite idea of excluding any kind of truth seeking as part of transitional justice. In the words of a journalist and WPC member, "I think it was in [Northern] Ireland, they gave up on this idea. They said 'if we attempt

the formula of amnesty that was used was widely discussed as a point of success. As a journalist long active in the area of Kurdish politics put it:

> For example you know the IRA case is the most successful one, there are these famous letters sent to the leaders of the armed group that gave written guarantees to them, this is one of the most striking examples regarding transitional justice.[45]

From a parallel viewpoint, another interviewee, a journalist and member of the WPC stated "you know, in Britain [case of Northern Ireland] they did not consider the intensity of criminal acts, they decided that everyone would be imprisoned for two years."[46] Yet again from a similar perspective, a journalist and WPC member stated: "For example this is what they did in Northern Ireland- amnesty- we absolutely need to have this in Turkey, too, and this needs to involve both the state and the PKK"[47].

Therefore, perspectives on amnesty have sought to situate the Northern Irish example as a successful case to "look at". This was made with the purpose of legitimizing the view that amnesties are needed for overcoming the past.

‹ *Perspectives on Political Restructuring*

Having considered the ideas and practices on peace process design that were adopted by domestic actors with reference to mainly the experiences of Northern Ireland and South Africa, this section discusses the issues that remained outside of this framework in the interviews. Issues related to constitutional arrangements and issues related to power-sharing, including self-government and decentralization, were discussed widely with reference to domestic conditions in Turkey, the background of the conflict, and the essence of the Kurdish issue. However, at the same time, these issues were also put in the context of global normative frameworks with the purpose of supporting a specific position. This means that rather than references to specific contexts and processes, actors sought to support their positions by referring to universal normative frames such as democracy and human rights.

Perspectives on constitution making were discussed in terms of the conditions in Turkey and the needs of the parties. The majority of the interviewees expressed the view that democratization and constitution making is a wider topic that is not confined to the peace process. A WPC member and academic explained the following:

> For example, we, as professors, said that before initiating constitution-making, there needs to be a facilitating societal and political atmosphere, trust-building

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[45] Interview number 25.
[46] Interview number 28.
[47] Interview number 18.

steps need to be taken, there need to be steps for eradicating societal tensions and political polarization. Only after this we can start forming a new constitution.[48]

Similarly, the issue of self-government is also evaluated within the dynamics of the Kurdish issue in Turkey. An HDP deputy noted that:

> We need to evaluate the issue [of local self-government] not in terms of a partition syndrome but from the perspective of reforming the basis of coexistence- the more

government refer to the democratization of Turkey within the framework of EU standards and the basic parameters of the European Charter of Fundamental Rights, this is not only related to the Kurdish issue. […] In this manner, the AKP's view of the issue is on the basis of humanity, on the basis of international standards, and on ethical basis.[53]

Another interviewee, AKP deputy and later key advisor to the Prime Minister expressed the following view:

Decentralization, local governance, local councils etc. these are the basis of developed societies in the world and also of the 21_{st} century Turkey. So, I perceive

processes outside Turkey. These study visits and meetings provided the platform for sharing experiences between actors from other processes and actors in the Turkish-Kurdish peace process.

When asked for their opinion on how "lessons" can be considered in the Turkish-Kurdish context, the majority of interviewees underlined that no model can be transferred in its totality from any context considering the uniqueness of each conflict in terms of the historical evolution of the conflict and the dynamics special to each context. A common theme that emerged from the interviews is that other examples can provide "learned experiences" that can be considered as points of reference for other cases. Furthermore, other cases can serve as lessons learnt not only in terms of what proved to be a successful idea and/or practice, but most importantly what proved to be unsuccessful so that "not to make the same mistakes" (multiple interviews). In the words of a DPI coordinator:

and research papers on conflict resolution and peace processes with the participation of high- and middle-level actors from Turkey. *Table 6* shows the number of events (comparative study visits) organized and the number of publications (reports and research papers) produced by the DPI from 2011 to 2017.

Table 5: DPI Turkey Program Events and Publications[60]

Years	Events		Publications	
	Comparative Study Visit	Roundtable	Report	Research Paper
2011	1	1	0	0
2012	1	3	7	13
2013	4	4	6	10
2014	4	5	5	9
2015	3	4	5	13
2016	3	4	7	19
2017	1	6	5	5

As *Table 5* shows, the DPI activities were dense especially in the period from 2012 to 2015 (i.e. during the Resolution Process in Turkey). During this period, the organization was active both in terms of the events organized and in terms of the research papers and reports that were produced regarding different aspects of conflict resolution and peace. The number of events reached its peak in 2014 while publications in terms of reports and research papers where mostly produced in 2016. We can see that the organization's activities in terms of its Turkey program lowered significantly in 2017, paralleling the complete abandonment of the process in domestic politics (having been already stalled since mid-to-late 2015).

Information sharing through the work of the DPI was mainly realized through the study visits and roundtables. The DPI has organized study visits to five countries since

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[60] The table was prepared based on information collected from the official website of the DPI. The number of comparative study visits and roundtables were calculated by the author by considerint9lydtaepar e 45(e)-2( )1325(m)-37(p)utht9ltr

its establishment in 2011: Northern Ireland, South Africa, Colombia, the Philippines, and Germany.[61] Each study visit lasted several days and encompassed an intensive program including roundtable meetings, seminars, private tours, receptions, and meals with participants from Turkey and from the country of visit. Involving both formal meetings and informal gatherings, the study visits provided the platform for socialization among participants. [62] Furthermore, the study visits have generally been hosted by the government officials of the country. Embassy representatives have also been present.

Each study trip involved 15 to 22 participants from Turkey while the number of participants to roundtables that were organized in different cities in Turkey reached 50[63] at times. Participants from Turkey included both high-level (i.e. party members, deputies) and middle-level (e.g. civil society actors, academics, journalists, and other influentials) actors. Also, participants of the events (especially middle-level actors from the media) shared the perspectives discussed at the events through media outlets and opinion pieces, [64] adding to the knowledge sharing process. This means that the organization's work was shared with a wide number of individuals who were interested in understanding conflict resolution and peacebuilding

Regarding the organization of the study visits, the DPI Turkey program coordinator noted[67] that the selection of Northern Ireland served practical purposes as the DPI is a London-based institution and therefore most visits were made to Northern Ireland and England. The rest of the visits were limited in number due to logistical concerns and expenses. Trips to South Africa, Colombia, and the Philippines were constrained by the expenses and the larger amount of time needed to organize and coordinate these trips. As a result, both the number of the visits to these countries and the number of actors that participated in the visits were limited compared to the visits to Northern Ireland and the roundtable meetings that took place in Turkey, including Ankara, Istanbul and smaller cities such as Urfa and Van.

Roundtables in Turkey focused on specific issue areas with regards to peace processes, including the role of civil society, the role of the media, and the role of women in conflict resolution. Also, several roundtables on how to "get a process back on track" were organized during 2015, the year when the peace process in Turkey entered the period of stalling.

Both the study trips and the roundtable meetings have been crucial in the sharing of ideas, experiences, and practical matters related to the process of negotiations and peacebuilding. As it is noted in the foreword of the reports:

> We focus on providing expertise and practical frameworks to encourage stronger public debates and involvements in promoting peace and democracy building internationally. […] DPI also aims to support and strengthen collaboration between academics, civil society, and policy-makers through its projects and output. Comparative studies of relevant situations are seen as an effective tool for ensuring that the mistakes of others are not repeated or perpetuated. Therefore, we see comparative models of peace and democracy building to be central to the aim of our achievements and objectives. (Democratic Progress Institute, 2012).

The DPI's working principles are central to understanding the diffusion of ideas and practices in the Turkish case. The organization's work is divided into different focus areas of activity including facilitating collaborative expertise sharing, building capacity through mentoring, and strengthening knowledge through assessment and analysis[68]. These focus areas are crucial with regards to the role of the organization as a platform for experience and expertise sharing. As it is noted on its website, the DPI seeks to achieve collaborative expertise sharing through a model whereby:

The participants arntBT/F1 13.50 G7re37.7 235.33 TJETQ EMC7 235.33(e)7(n)21(a)7(s)-.33(e)e37

conflict transformation experts who have practical experience of relevant subjects, and in which bridges are built between different sides of a conflict. (Democratic Progress Institute, 2018).

A similar process of expertise-sharing in the form of promoting perspectives on how political actors in other countries have responded to similar situations was realized through the work of DPI's Turkey Program. Main difference is that this expertise- sharing was not realized as part of top-down design but through a platform that its aim was the practice of 'sharing' at first place. At the same time, the structure of the platform (i.e. directed towards the sharing of experiences of "others" without involving perspectives on the Turkish case) offered the space for local agency to express itself. Turkish and Kurdish actors were able to selectively "learn" from other experiences, by adopting specific perspectives while rejecting others. In this process, they valued information provided by persons of "authority" and they made use of their expertise.

The DPI's focus on the provision of expertise sharing through meetings as an instrument for promoting conflict resolution perspectives is crucial for understanding the selective use of international perspectives by Turkish and Kurdish actors. Personal contact emerged as a crucial factor in the expertise and experience sharing from other cases. Many interviewees mentioned personal communication with actors from other cases while discussing a specific issue or process within the peacebuilding process. For example, a former AKP deputy stated that:

The then minister in charge (in Northern Ireland) told me in a meeting in Istanbul

massacre, I think- Mandela interrupted the contacts but we continued the dialogue and did not detach'"[73].

While referring to different process issues related to peacebuilding, these quotations reveal the importance of personal contact as a mechanism of idea diffusion. In this context, personal contact emerged as crucial because a first-

Turkish and Kurdish actors' references to knowledge acquired through contact with professionals and influential actors from the Northern Irish and South African processes reveals that the process of experience sharing from "persons of authority" had a crucial impact on their understanding of peace process design. Turkish and Kurdish actors did not have the same conditions of knowing, as they had never been part of a "successful" process for negotiated solution to a conflict. They sought to learn from persons of "authority" whose insights they perceived as cru

This paper provided findings from a larger project on the politics of the local in peace processes with the purpose of investigating the use of international norms of peacebuilding in the domestic context in Turkey. The findings pointed to Turkish and Kurdish local actors' selective adoption of international norms and practices with the purpose of supporting their own perspectives on peace process design. The findings reached in this research also pointed to the importance of conflict resolution initiatives in forming a platform for experience-sharing and "lesson-learning" among participants. In the Turkish case, the Democratic Progress Institute's Turkey Program provided such a platform to TurkisW˚ñBT0520053nBT06(urdi)7(s)-6(h)-145BT07(s)-ghTJETQq0.00000912 0 612 792 reW

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