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“Shaming and Claiming: The Right to Remember and Speak in Mexico and Turkey”

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Shaming and Claiming: The Right to Remember and Speak in Mexico and Turkey

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Introduction

The sun squints around the mountains as we wind our way along the road towards Acteal, young mothers in plastic sandals, grandmothers barefoot, and one young woman with black Converse sneakers peeking out under her hand-woven skirt. It is International Women's Day, March 8, 2012, and women lead the march with chants and songs, hoisting banners, babies, and plastic grocery bags with water bottles and tamales. A few hundred Tzotzils and a handful of international solidarity members and observers walk along the same road where fifteen years ago paramilitaries sped by on their way to a massacre. Now, Acteal residents call out over bullhorns: "We do not forget, we fight for justice. We will not forget, we want our rights!" Their demands pierce the air as the group passes a garbage dump where dogs paw refuse and descend on steep concrete steps to the open air meeting hall of Acteal. One cross for each victim of the massacre rings the hall, their names, birth and death dates inscribed on the white painted wood. In this setting, community leaders pick up the microphone, honor the memory of the people killed in the massacre, and read their communiqué, directed to "all social and political organizations," demanding to live without violence and free to make their own decisions (Las Abejas 2012). This episode of claim-making draws on potent memories of violence to form mobilizing narratives for a community, and shows how indigenous Mexican citizens negotiate the social contract with the state to demand their rights.

This article explores memories of violence and the narratives used to describe them in relation to state policies of minority inclusion or exclusion that influence rights claim-making in Mexico and Turkey. I look to the Tzotzil community in Acteal, Chiapas, Mexico, and Alevi Kurds in Dersim,¹ Turkey, to show that both groups have high mobilization for rights claims but perform their claims differently. Whereas Tzotzils in Acteal use a broad range of artistic and sometimes illegal tactics to claim rights as indigenous citizens, Kurds in Dersim use less confrontational and more institutionalized forms of rights-claiming. I argue that the interactions between memories of violence, narratives, and political, economic, and cultural accommodation for minorities² by the Mexican and Turkish states shape mobilizations for rights claims by each respective group. To be clear, this project looks at ethnic minority *mobilization*, meaning the process through which people organize themselves to make claims, rather than the actual rights *achieved* by mobilizations. The discourses communities use to narrate collective action provide vital information about how people envision themselves as political actors, even if their rights claims are not met.

This article makes two specific contributions to understanding social movements in comparative politics. First, drawing on lessons across contentious politics literature (Aminzade, Goldstone et al. 2001; McAdam, Tarrow et al. 2001; Meyer and Tarrow 1998; Tilly 2002; Tilly and Tarrow 2007) and political psychology literature (for example Abrams and Moura 2002; Mondak 2010; Redlawsk 2006), I craft a holistic view of people as political actors with

¹ Dersim is the name of the town in Zazaki, the language spoken by Zaza Alevi Kurds. The Turkish government, in an effort to make Turkish language dominant in the Southeast, enacted a widespread program of renaming in the 1930s. On December 25, 1935 the Turkish government changed the name from Dersim to Tunceli, and the name people use for the town often signifies their political alliances. As I try to follow local labeling vernaculars, I refer to the town as Dersim.

² Though I discuss Kurds as an ethnic minority in Turkey, many Kurds reject the ‘minority’ label because, as they point out, they are the ethnic majority in southeastern Turkey and envision the region as part of Kurdistan, a homeland for Kurdish people. These Kurds reject minority labels because they see themselves as a separate nation comparable to Basques or Catalans in Spain. Nonetheless, from a statist perspective the minority label applies to Kurds, and I use it in this context.

individual and psychological, but also socially and structurally inspired motivations for action. Second, by considering how political, economic, and cultural accommodations support or constrain minority citizenship experiences of democratization, I participate in the discussion on optimal institutions for multicultural states (Amoretti and Bermeo 2004; Kymlicka 1995). I do this by evaluating the role decentralization and autonomy play in mobilizations for cultural rights claim-making. By assessing different state approaches to minority rights through decentralization, constitutional provisions and education policies, I offer constructive criticism on how approaches to diversity management create different multiculturalisms.

Theorizing ethnic minority rights mobilizations

Ethnic minorities in Acteal and Dersim have both suffered paramilitary and military-led massacres, but they experience different patterns of accommodation—meaning policies and practices of inclusion and exclusion—by the state, and use narratives of violence in distinct ways to communicate their demands. Higher accommodation signifies greater state acceptance of a diverse citizenry, while lower accommodation indicates that citizens face pressures to assimilate in order to access their political, economic, and cultural rights. The model below shows the general argument.

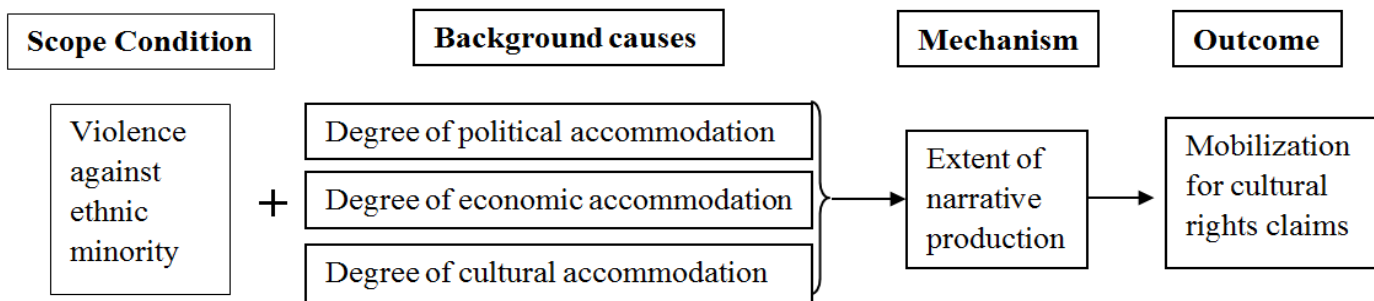


Figure 1. Theoretical model of argument

The background causes represent the exogenous structural confines within which ethnic minority communities operate when determining what to mobilize for and how to make their claims. These causes are institutionalized policies and practices of inclusion or exclusion. Political accommodation signifies the political integration of ethnic minorities, not only through political parties and parliamentary representation, but in state policies regarding the political status of minorities. Economic accommodation refers to the level of economic opportunity for minority communities, including impressions community members have of their potential for economic mobility. Cultural accommodation accounts for Ministry of Education and Ministry of Culture policies that determine how state-sponsored education and cultural projects facilitate or inhibit the formation of culturally aware and diverse citizens. These three background causes interact with narrative to form structural barriers or incentives for communities to make claims on the state to different degrees and in different ways.

Narrative, a technique of public communication that conveys a meaningful message from teller to audience, is the mechanism by which memories of violence are captured and instrumentally used in rights claims. I define a mechanism as the process through which a range of factors relate to an outcome. Mechanisms are not situation-specific, meaning that they will operate in similar ways in a variety of contexts.³ In other words, narratives are the process through which memories of violence and structural practices of inclusion or exclusion fuse to exhibit a causal influence on mobilization patterns.

I look at narrative as a tool by which communities practice *shaming and claiming*—shaming states for past violence in order to claim greater rights. The act of shaming has the potential to spur states to relieve embarrassment by correcting current injustices, while claiming

³ My approach to theorizing mechanisms draws on the discussion in McAdam, Tarrow et al. 2001: 24-25.

shows citizenship as an active relationship where the social contract is open for negotiation. Shaming and claiming is of interest in democratizing countries because states sometimes want to distance themselves from authoritarian legacies and prove to the international community that they are responsive to citizen demands. International recognition as democratically responsive and responsible states can motivate states to address rights claims if they have been publically shamed beforehand. Though the concept of shaming and claiming as strategic behavior appears in literature about criminal justice (Kohm 2009), violence (Ray, Smith et al. 2004), and management (Management Today 1998), the term has not been extended to cover instrumental political behavior in social movements. I therefore develop the slogan of shaming and claiming to describe the instrumental use of memories of violence in rights claims processes, where communities try to induce shame in their states to gain greater state receptivity to claims for special support and protections.

While both cases have experienced targeted state or paramilitary violence and mediocre political accommodation, Tzotzils in Acteal experience low economic accommodation and medium cultural accommodation, while the reverse is true in Dersim, where there is medium economic accommodation and low cultural accommodation for Kurds. Both communities use narratives about past violence to try to shame their states into granting them greater rights, though they perform shaming and claiming with different types of tactics. In the following sections I situate Acteal and Dersim as cases of memory-driven collective action in historical context.

Memory and mobilization in Acteal, Mexico

Acteal lies along a remote mountain road in Chiapas, which, with a population of approximately 3.5 million people, including 1 million indigenous people, is one of the poorest

states in Mexico (Eber and Kovic 2003: 2). Tzotzil has seven known variations of its dialect and is part of the Maya language family, with an estimated 329,937 speakers of Tzotzil concentrated in Chiapas (INALI 2005). Las Abejas⁴ is a Tzotzil, Catholic, non-Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) organization targeted in Acteal's 1997 massacre. Las Abejas advocate non-violent resistance, autonomy, and liberation theology. Las Abejas formed in 1992 in response to an intra-communal conflict over women's right to inherit property (Kovic 2003: 63-64; Tavanti 2003: 4) and are now organized in twenty-nine Chiapan communities (Mesa Directiva de Las Abejas 2012).

Prior to the 1997 massacre, as a result of the conflict between the EZLN and the Mexican military, Acteal contained 250-400 internally displaced people in a refugee camp, mostly Las Abejas members waiting out ongoing violence. On December 22, 1997, Public Security Police trucks transported PRI militants, some of whom were identified as belonging to the paramilitary group *Mascara Roja*, from surrounding communities into Acteal (see Tavanti 2003: 10 for details). While members of the Zapatista portion of Acteal quickly departed, rightly guessing that any armed violence in the area would make them a primary target, Las Abejas members and their families were divided between those who hid in surrounding ravines, those killed attempting to flee, and those trapped and assassinated in the Catholic church. The paramilitaries opened fire on the community for five hours, eventually killing 45 people: nine men, fifteen children, and twenty-one women, five of whom were pregnant (Speed 2003: 47; Tavanti 2003: 13-14). In addition, paramilitaries hacked fetuses out of the wombs of pregnant women, cut off their

⁴ Divisions exist within Las Abejas and in 2008, they formally split into two groups. The Las Abejas group studied here is a non-governmental organization, while the splinter group took the name Las Abejas A.C., with A.C. indicating that it is a non-commercial government-registered civil organization. Las Abejas A.C. receive government funds and follow a government-led agenda, and has used the deliberate confusion between the names of the two groups to speak on behalf of the non-governmental group, as they did, for example, in a 2012 radio broadcast (Mesa Directiva de Las Abejas 2012). Las Abejas operate independent from the government and seek political and cultural autonomy and justice for the massacre.

breasts, and threw fetuses from machete to machete (cited in Speed 2003: 52). This violence represents a failure of basic human rights protections by the Mexican state.

Las Abejas of Acteal experience a unique combination of narrative production and state accommodation that determine their high level of mobilization for cultural rights claims. Their medium political accommodation includes some respect for legally encoded autonomy but significant harassment in practice when they exercise this autonomy. Economic accommodation is extremely low, with most families operating at basic subsistence levels, and there is medium cultural accommodation—some demands are accommodated and others repressed.

Las Abejas mobilizations for cultural rights claim-making are bound up in memorialization, as seen in the monthly vigils and forums they hold on the twenty-second of every month, as they have done for nearly fifteen years, to commemorate the massacre of December 22, 1997. In addition, there are numerous visual testaments to memories of violence in the community: a memorial column to the victims, banners demanding accountability for the massacre, and the church itself where the massacre occurred, still showing an exterior riddled with bullet holes. Though such heavy memories of violence immortalized in this way can contribute to revictimization (Al-Krenawi and Graham 2012; Kovic 2003: 15; Van Der Kolk 1998), Las Abejas also use memories of violence as fuel for mobilization. Though some Acteal residents, especially direct survivors, may feel revictimized or traumatized by the constant reminder of the massacre, Las Abejas as a group skillfully use memories for shaming and claiming—to induce shame for the state and create receptivity to Las Abejas' rights claims. Their website, for example, has an automatically updating sidebar showing how many days have passed since the massacre. This constant reminder of the violence accompanies readers through articles about grassroots radio programs, the latest Las Abejas choir performance, or calls to

action in solidarity with displaced indigenous people from nearby villages—all are infused with the fact of the massacre.

Mobilization occurs in the community both institutionally and contentiously. First, Las Abejas make institutional rights claims through the courts. After unsuccessfully trying to get Chiapan and then federal courts to hear their case, Las Abejas went to the international level. With ongoing support and representation from the Fray Bartolomé de las Casas Center for Human Rights (Frayba), based in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Las Abejas brought charges against intellectual and material authors of the massacre to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights where it is currently under review.⁵ Despite failed attempts to use Mexican courts, where their cases have been tossed out, Las Abejas continue to use a range of domestic institutional claim-making tactics including monthly letter-writing campaigns and reports by human rights observers several times a year of ongoing harassment in Acteal, which the organization sends to government officials.⁶ All of these written documents reference the 1997 massacre and use descriptions of the murders and their effects on surviving community members to make redress appear imperative—this is shaming and claiming in action.

The second form of mobilization by Las Abejas includes an array of expressions of contentious politics, including marches and sit-ins as well as a rejection of government services. Though the PRI-affiliated contingent of Acteal does not participate in these actions, often the EZLN contingent joins Las Abejas, making a majority of the community mobilized and sharing grievances and resources together, as in the annual Women's Day march referenced in introduction. A unique aspect of Las Abejas' contentious mobilization is their use of locally

⁵ See www.cidh.org/annualrep/2010eng/MXAD212-05EN.doc for summary of the case as it stands in the IACHR (Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2010).

⁶ See home page of <http://acteal.blogspot.com/> for regular letters issued by Las Abejas to various government authorities and civil society members.

based creative forums to mobilize for cultural rights claim-making in ways that memorialize the massacre. Though these artistic endeavors are not explicitly contentious in the classic sense of the term, they are performed outside state-legitimated channels for interest representation. For example, in Acteal Las Abejas have created a choir that commemorates the victims of 1997 through song,⁷ a non-violence-focused youth group, a theater group, and artisanal weavings with the distinct pattern of Las Abejas. One of the lyrics of the choir says, “I cannot be silent, I cannot go on indifferently,” showing how the choir acts as a vehicle for mobilization where people, especially women, use their voices to demand rights and justice (Coro de Acteal 2012). As justice-demanding endeavors, these artistically channeled claims are contentious yet not directly confrontational and are also locally institutionalized. All of these venues show how memorialization of the 1997 massacre plays an active part in the mobilization for cultural rights through the process of shaming and claiming.

State Accommodation in Mexico: In 1992, Congress updated the Mexican Federal Constitution to include a passage stating that Mexico is pluricultural and has indigenous people who continue their own political, economic, and cultural traditions. Internationally, Mexico signed and ratified Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization (ILO) on Tribal and Indigenous Peoples, which calls for the implementation of safeguards to protect indigenous rights to cultural continuity and consultation in issues that affect their wellbeing. In fact, Article 4 of Convention 169 states that special measures should be put in place to protect indigenous communities and their customs, and Article 28 describes in detail the importance of indigenous language continuity through education (ILO 1989). Though Convention 169 calls for consulting pueblos

⁷ Though the choir is now nationally recognized and tours throughout the country, it is still very much a grassroots endeavor and lyrics explicitly critique the state.

originarios, the technical language is broad, requiring only that consultative processes be adequate and in good faith (Cruz Rueda 2008: 10).

Constitutional reform and ratification of documents like ILO Convention 169 show, at least, that the state understands the norms for democratic states expected by the international community, and at most, that the Mexican state is invested in providing institutional channels to grant pueblos originarios their rights. In fact, Article Four of the Mexican Federal Constitution, which provides, among other things, the right to culture and the right to equality before the law for men and women, was reformed to show compliance with Convention 169 (Cruz Rueda 2012). On paper, Mexico demonstrates high political accommodation of pueblos originarios, or original peoples; in practice, government-enforced violence has quelled originario attempts to claim political rights that have been legally promised.

Though the Mexican state has made progress in electoral benchmarks towards democratic status, it has not yet implemented a system of political accommodation that fully includes ethnic minorities. Autonomy scholar Aracely Burguete Cal y Mayor says, “The citizenry does not find spaces to participate; there is no citizen participation in public decision-making, and participatory mechanisms are defined from above by the government” (Burguete Cal y Mayor 2012). This is not the kind of political landscape that lends itself to high accommodation of minorities, nor to institutional types of rights mobilizations.

In the late 1980s, Chiapan indigenous and campesino organizations began a “slow evolution from demanding a universalistic program of civic and human rights to one of group-specific ethnic rights” (Trejo 2004: 374). In 1998, Chiapan legislators passed a law recognizing communal autonomy and giving pueblos originarios the right to implement *usos y costumbres*, or traditional practices for leadership selection, as occurred in Oaxaca in 1997. Municipal level

political power in the form of *usos y costumbres* has the potential to grant cultural autonomy by legalizing the right to indigenous governance and diminishing political party influence.

However, Burguete remarked that in Chiapas, *usos y costumbres* “doesn’t mean anything, it is like telling you, you have the right to put on a red shirt [referring to *huipils*, or woven shirts, of originario women]” (Burguete Cal y Mayor 2012). In other words, in practice, *usos y costumbres* are superficial rights.

In fact, originarios have long histories of participation in political and cultural institutions within their own communities regardless of state policies. Mexican anthropologist Benjamin Maldonado has written that originario “communal life is precisely an experience of the exercise of power through the participation in the assembly as a superior political organ, and through the completion of *cargos*⁸ and services” (Maldonado Alvarado 2002: 4). Generally, communities want state accommodation to financially or administratively assist their own autonomous management that they have been practicing long before legal recognition of *usos y costumbres*. Federalist institutional design theoretically provides a framework for decentralized governance that can respect community autonomy.

Political accommodation through federalism should give states a more robust toolkit than centralized states to address concerns of local citizens because of the potential to decentralize administrative, financial, and political power. However, the threat of subnational authoritarianism (Gibson 2004; Gibson 2012) makes federalism a complicated solution to governing pluriethnic populations. Federal institutional design does allow more flexibility in accommodating regional needs than central systems like Turkey, but without political will to make decentralization meaningful, or checks and balances to restrain local strongmen, federalism

⁸ Many indigenous communities in Mexico maintain rotating volunteer labor positions, called *cargos* or *tequios*, that facilitate public works and community development without state intervention.

does not deliver cultural rights protections to Mexican originarios. Economic neglect and exploitation in indigenous regions of Mexico show stagnation rather than upward mobility for originarios in Chiapas, even as many Mexicans move into the middle class. Chenalhó remains one of the most economically marginalized provinces in Mexico's poorest state (Tavanti 2003: 48), and rural indigenous people are significantly poorer than their urban ladino and mestizo counterparts (Eber and Kovic 2003: 2; Tavanti 2003: 48).

Cultural accommodation in Mexico: Language is a central marker of cultural identity (Blot 2003: 18), and for Tzotzils in Chiapas, state support of minority language is a key indicator of cultural accommodation by the state. For example, the homogenization of language through public education and media serves nationalist projects that prioritize the ethnic majority (See Breuilly's introduction in Anderson 1991; Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1990; Weber 1976). Language rights are part of ethnic minority identity mobilization in Acteal and are used both in the process of claim-making, and as claims themselves. In Acteal, mother tongue language constitutes the basis of nearly all communication, and most information about mobilizations for claim-making is orally disseminated in Tzotzil, with translations into Spanish happening only when outsiders are present, or in written communiqués intended for wide national and international audiences. Language is also an intimate conveyor of intergenerational and intra-communal memory, therefore the persistence of mother tongue usage in Acteal can be seen as positively contributing to the formation of narrative based on memories of violence there.

Indigenous languages have been oppressed in Mexico for generations, though now they are gaining recognition in Mexico and in international solidarity communities as being vital to cultural expression (Vázquez Álvarez 2012; Maldonado Alverado 2010: 13; Meyer and

Soberanes Bojórquez 2010). The General Directorate for Indigenous Education (DGEI), created in 1978-9, grew out of new indigenism taking place in Mexico at the time, where multiculturalism was beginning to be recognized as an asset (Enrique López 2009: 14). The 1992 reform of the Mexican Constitution that acknowledges the multicultural make-up of the country grew out of this momentum. In 1997, the Mexican state solidified its approach to bilingual, intercultural education with the creation of the General Coordination of Intercultural, Bilingual Education (CGEIB) in 2001. DGEI has the mission of ensuring minority languages are not abandoned due to Spanish language dominance in schools, while CGEIB seeks to make intercultural education available to *all* Mexican students, not only indigenous ones. However, the intentions of these institutions continue to be tempered by ongoing racism and underlying commitment to nation-building through homogenization.

Many factors impede implementation of federal and state laws that require bilingual, intercultural education. In practice, CGEIB and DGEI are under the authority of the Secretary of Public Education (SEP) in Mexico, which is heavily influenced by the Mexican National Educational Workers Union (SNTE), a powerful and controversial actor in Mexican politics. At both federal and state levels, SNTE and SEP have failed in commitments to improving education for originarios. The union is not logistically prepared to deliver bilingual, intercultural education due to inadequate training, materials, and assessments of such programs, nor is its tenure system designed to allow new indigenous educators to be placed in communities where their same indigenous language is spoken.

Though there are special colleges for bilingual, intercultural teachers to complete their teaching degrees, because of SNTE's tenure system, which gives the newest teachers the least input into where they are placed, there is no guarantee, or even real probability, that graduates

will be sent to communities that match their linguistic skills. Also, there is minimal development of an actual intercultural curriculum because of increasing pressures on teachers to prepare students for standardized assessment tests. Standardized tests in Mexico relegate intercultural education to the status of extracurricular luxury rather than cultural imperative. Finally, continuing trends of migration and tourism make English proficiency more economically beneficial and culturally prized than indigenous languages.

Chiapas scholar Fernando Lara Piña stated that “language rights are also the right to education, the right to health, and to a dignified life” (Lara Piña 2012). Put differently, the right to learn and use one’s mother tongue indicates a respectful inclusion of minorities by states in a broader array of citizens’ rights. The reality of this inclusion, however, is often problematic. Leticia Pons Bonal, an expert on indigenous education in Chiapas, is critical of SEP programs in bilingual, intercultural education because “as a model, they have tried to impose it...there are study plans, the discourse does exist. But the teachers go to places where they don’t speak the same language... But the union acts as if sending *any* indigenous teacher to *any* indigenous community is enough to foster culturally sensitive education, without thinking about language differences (Pons Bonal 2012). The tolerance of mediocre education for pueblos originarios by SEP and SNTE is sometimes mirrored by the pueblos themselves. Pons Bonal describes how:

if you go to communities where it has been difficult for teachers to arrive,⁹ it is hard for those people to say, ‘we want a different one [teacher],’ because...to have a teacher is better than to not have a teacher, and they don’t want to reject the one who has arrived. (Pons Bonal 2012)

In some instances, community fear of losing a teacher prevents ethnic minorities from advocating for their cultural right to have real bilingual education with teachers who speak their

⁹ This indicates communities that are remote and poorly accessible, and thus it may be difficult for teachers to arrive due bad roads, but also because teachers would have preferred somewhere more urban and are thus reluctant arrivals.

mother tongue. Yet in other instances these communities have “linguistic battles” between Spanish-speaking teachers and their mother tongue-speaking students that wreaked havoc on everyone (Dawson 2004: 57).

In Acteal, Las Abejas members have created their own bilingual school in response to the absence of meaningful bilingual, intercultural education from the state, which pays for a teacher at the Spanish-language primary school nearby (Anonymous 2012). Proudly, Las Abejas representatives described how the government does not recognize the school nor do students receive credits that are transferable to government schools, but the community funds bilingual Tzotzil-Spanish teachers and follow a community-approved curriculum (Anonymous 2012). Also, because the EZLN has created a system of autonomous schools and colleges, students who attend the autonomous school in Acteal are able to continue all the way through a university level education entirely outside the government system (Anonymous 2012). However, the lack of government recognition makes it challenging for graduates to apply their autonomous degrees to jobs in anything government-funded, or even in organizations that are not specifically in solidarity with the EZLN.

To summarize, Mexico faces numerous challenges in improving its cultural accommodation of ethnic minorities. These challenges include: addressing the training, curricula, assessments, and placements of bilingual, intercultural teachers, and consulting about the linguistic needs and preferences of pueblos originarios. These same issues may someday be a problem in teaching Kurdish in Turkey, but to date, Kurdish is not allowed in any public school classroom.

Shaming and claiming in Dersim

Turkey, despite the intentions of its founders to create a homogenous nation-state, is ethnically and religiously diverse. Of the approximately 77 million citizens of Turkey, Alevi, who can be ethnically Turkish *or* Kurdish, constitute 10-33 percent (Kaya 2009: 8), while roughly 70-75 percent of the population is ethnically Turkish and 18 percent is ethnically Kurdish (CIA 2011). Dersim has a long history of forced assimilation as part of Turkey's "Turkification" policies, which are measures to incorporate ethnic and religious minorities residing in Turkey's territorial boundaries into a Turkish identity.

In 1937 and 1938, the state brought its Turkification agenda to Dersim, one of the last autonomous regions of the country. With roughly 65,000-70,000 inhabitants in the 1930s (van Bruinessen 1994: 2), official reports document that nearly 10 percent of Dersim's population was killed during a seventeen-day offensive in the spring of 1938, though Kurds say the numbers were considerably higher (van Bruinessen 1994: 6).¹⁰ Unassimilated parts of Dersim's political life stand out as reminders that the community maintains its independence and throughout time has not wanted to submit to Turkification policies (van Bruinessen 1994: 2). In the 1970s, Dersim developed a homegrown leftist movement distinct from larger national social movements (Yıldız 2011), though during the 1980s and 1990s, the Kurdish Worker's Party (PKK) and its calls for separatism dominated Kurdish activism. The PKK was present in Dersim, though not as prevalent as it was (and is) in other parts of southeast Turkey. Since the capture of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan in 1999, more energy has gone into petitioning for democratic autonomy and cultural rights within Turkey, rather than separatism.

¹⁰ In one interview I was told 11,000 were killed in 1938, with more than 50,000 Alevi killed during the 1937-38 period (Çifçi 2011).

Hüseyin Aygün, a leading human rights attorney in Dersim, Turkey, leans forward across his file-laden desk, perched up several flights of concrete stairs overlooking the town's central square, to describe the effect of a 1938 massacre on different generations of Alevi Kurds.

Lots of old people say “we are guilty, we deserved that punishment, so why bring it up again?” This is psychological trauma—instead of accusing the murderers, they accuse themselves. They are afraid to take on the state and have the same thing happen again. It is interesting, and there is a contradiction. *People are afraid, but they still speak.* The third generation is sensitive about this—*grandchildren are more aware of their identity...* Most people believe that since they are Alevis, that is why these things happen to them. “A new ‘38” is the phrase said by people when they are protesting the state—“*are you going to make a new 1938 for us?*” (Aygün 2011, emphasis mine)

Aygün, a dedicated, mustachioed man whose eyes sparkle despite the gravity of his work topics, has published several books on the history of the 1938 massacre in Dersim and promotes memory of 1938 in judicial proceedings as well as daily life. Aygün draws on memories of violence to describe how various members of his community silence themselves or create new rights mobilizations.

The massacre of 1938 in Dersim created a specific and temporally bound incident of remembered violence that Dersimis¹¹ use to push the state to grant greater cultural rights. These memory-fueled narratives often sound like reasons for entitlements—in other words, ‘we deserve rights because something bad happened to us.’ This shaming and claiming process is similar to narratives about violence seen in Acteal and many other violence-affected ethnic minority communities. These mobilizations show how memories of violence can be useful instrumentally both in galvanizing community members to act, and also in shaming the state into permitting claims to move forward. This strong sense of empowerment coupled with the moral imperative for rights protections makes Dersim a compelling microcosm of mobilization in Turkey's southeast.

¹¹ Residents of Dersim.

Dersim's Alevi Kurds exhibit both institutional and contentious claim-making. They support candidates of their own ethnicity and religion in elections and also engage in formal policy negotiation with the central government, demonstrating a high level of institutional claim-making. Dersim residents also engage in unsanctioned behavior constituting contentious claim-making, such as illicitly installing bilingual signs in the municipal building, refusing to comply with language bans demanded by the central government, and offering Kurdish language instruction in a variety of forms. As in Acreal, Dersim's Alevi Kurds are highly mobilized to demand rights from a state that does a poor job accommodating them.

Political and economic accommodation: Politically, some Dersimis have obtained a degree of power within political parties, but they have overwhelmingly downplayed their Alevi Kurdish identity in the process. Several prominent Dersim intellectuals have been inducted into political parties like CHP in hopes of gaining Dersim's vote for that party. Kurds still cannot use their language in political arenas and the centrist politics emanating from the political capital, Ankara, give no institutionally supported regional power to address Kurdish demands. Kurdish political rights are not protected through any decentralized or autonomous arrangement, but the BDP, the main Kurdish political party, is able to win elections and hold office.

Institutional design is also an indicator of political accommodation for minorities in Turkey. PKK militancy for the creation of Kurdistan dominates the popular imagination even though Kurdish strategy has shifted considerably since the 1999 capture of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan (İçduygu, Romano et al. 1999: 993-994). In fact, while a portion of Kurds in Turkey continue to advocate for a PKK-led separatism, many members of the Kurdish intellectual elite now advocate for some type of democratic autonomy within Turkey. Though there are calls for

true federalism, these demands serve more as a radical flank, useful to push towards compromise on some degree of decentralization (Gundogdu 2011). Even as journalists and other members of civil society discuss this option, state leaders are more reticent (Gundogdu 2011). As with any institutional rearrangements, there would be costs as well as benefits to decentralization, though the Turkish government so far has shown itself unwilling to modify any aspect of the centralized system to accommodate Kurdish demands.

To some extent, Mexico's experience with implementing *usos y costumbres*, traditional uses and customs in indigenous communities regarding leadership selection and community services, could provide a model, albeit an imperfect one, for how decentralization could operate in Turkey. However, the Turkish government may reject the wider scope of federal arrangements that Mexico had in place prior to allowing *usos y costumbres* as a local governance tool. Whether pure federalism or a more organic form of decentralization, institutional design change could enhance regional accommodation for minorities in Turkey.

Economically, Dersim remains highly marginalized, though there is a small prosperous middle class and the creation of a university in the city has boosted the intellectual class and economic growth simultaneously. As in Mexico, Turkey's economic growth has not benefited the majority of Kurds. Studies show that historical state neglect of the southeast, combined with the destruction of villages during the civil war and consequential migration to urban centers, have led to much higher unemployment, illiteracy, birthrates, and student-teacher ratios than in the rest of Turkey (Ozturk 2002: 6; TESEV/UNDP undated: 2). The southeast of the country scores lower than all other regions besides the east on Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita, public and private investment, and on human development indicators (UNDP 2004: 16). In fact, detailed comparisons of social and economic indicators between Turkey's western and

southeastern regions show consistent disparities in sanitation, household crowding, and the existence of durable household goods, leading to a situation of “environmental insecurity” in the predominantly Kurdish region (Içduygu, Romano et al. 1999: 1002-1005). Though within the southeast, Dersim as a district scores higher on human development indices, the southeastern region as a whole scores lower than Turkey at the national level (TESEV/UNDP undated: 9).

Cultural accommodation in Dersim: While Dersim’s Alevi Kurds experience medium degrees of political and economic accommodation, unequivocally, cultural accommodation is low. Lacking constitutional protection, recognition, or valorization, Kurds have been culturally marginalized and actively persecuted. This is most visible in linguistic discrimination: Kurdish was historically criminalized and remains subject to restricted use. Residents in Dersim, because of years of assimilatory schooling, are fluent Turkish-speakers able to access state services and educational opportunities. However, taking advantage of such state provisions often requires ongoing suppression of ethnic difference, particularly linguistic difference, showing that moderate accommodation comes at a cost to cultural rights.

There are several reasons why language rights are important for evaluating cultural rights in Turkey. First, Kurdish language use has been perceived as a threat to Turkish state-building and its illegality and restricted use have been stumbling blocks in Turkey’s EU membership application. The Turkish state knows that language matters for cultural continuity of minorities and has targeted language assimilation as a cornerstone of cultural integration. Second, language matters for identity (Bush and Saltarelli 2000; García, Skutnabb-Kangas et al. 2006; Kymlicka 1995; Skutnabb-Kangas and Dunbar 2010; Watson 2007). In Turkey, language rights serve as a highly visible indicator of the larger package of cultural rights that minority communities

demand. Language is not the only way ethnic identity is preserved and passed on, but it has long been accepted as a key marker of culture. Third, language rights are a basic human right, bound up in the right to culture. Democratizing states need to solidify their civil liberties and human rights protections, so the right to language serves as a useful indicator of cultural accommodation of minorities by the state in a transitional political regime.

There are very tangible risks for using Kurdish languages. Kurdish remained completely illegal in Turkey until 1991, at which point it was still illegal to use in any public space connected to the state, for example at utility offices, in city halls, or in schools. Today, use of the letters Q, W, and X, which are common in Kurdish alphabets but do not exist in the Latinized Turkish script, carry prison terms (Anonymous 2011). This example shows low cultural accommodation in Dersim, as well as the community response of people shaming their state and claiming their alphabet. As Kurdish languages are slowly decriminalized, as seen through measures such as government approval for the opening of both undergraduate and graduate programs in Kurdish languages at Artuklu University in Mardin, this ‘crime’ may slowly become obsolete.¹² But for many, persecution for using a letter of the alphabet reinforces the culture of fear that the 1938 massacres created in Dersim.

As of this writing, Kurdish remains illegal for any political act or communication, and those who violate this ban are frequently jailed. Though the Turkish government decriminalized the non-political use of Kurdish in public to some degree in 2006, it is still prohibited to teach Kurdish in public schools, even as an elective language class. Both the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the Republican People’s Party (CHP) have shown some willingness to consider Kurdish elective classes, but neither will consider general public education in Kurdish. Kurdish-

¹² Many interviewees also mentioned AKP allowing the opening of TRT6, the first Kurdish-language television station, though lacking constitutional protection the station could be closed at the whim of the government. Furthermore, they note that the content focused only on culture, with no space for political discussion in Kurdish.

language public education would require a constitutional amendment: Article 42 of the Turkish Constitution declares that public education must be provided in Turkish. This Article has recently been debated by Turkish and Kurdish public intellectuals as in need of revision if or when the Constitution is updated.¹³ As it currently stands, Article 42 also makes it impossible to open private schools with general education curricula in Kurdish languages, though as mentioned above, privately funded Kurdish language classes for adults are now allowed. Thus many Kurdish families find themselves in a difficult position with regard to the education system, wanting to pass down their language but lacking institutional reinforcement through either public or private schools.

Multiple interviewees expressed the impact of Article 42 on their family life. For example, Vahap Coşkun, a law professor at Diyarbakır's Dicle University and a language rights activist admitted that, "in my family, my children and parents can't understand each other well because my kids speak Turkish, from going to school, but my parents didn't go to school so they only speak Kurdish" (Coşkun 2011). Despite Coşkun's professional commitment to Kurdish languages, he described how, when his children became school-aged, there were no Kurmanji options for them. They became immersed in Turkish at school and with their friends, and gradually lost their ability to communicate in Kurmanji in the home (Coşkun 2011).

One line of argument Kurdish language rights activists advance is that denial of mother tongue education undermines another constitutional provision—free and equal access to education for all citizens. However, activists have so far not developed a uniform argument about why mother tongue education is so important. While democratic liberalization, in conjunction

¹³As of this writing in October 2013, the Constitution is currently under review and Article 42 is targeted for revision.

with the bid for European Union membership, opens the dialogue about multiculturalism in Turkey, memories of ethnically targeted violence continue to influence minority behavior.

Language and memory intertwined: The interdependence between memory and cultural (non)accommodation is evident in the language politics movement in Dersim. Over tea, two young women discussed how their parents' memories of violence led their parents to try to assimilate by using Turkish in the home. These women, as adults, decided to join the mobilization for language rights by teaching at the newly established Dersim branch of Kurdî-De, which offers free Kurdish (Zazaki) language classes to the community. One woman reflected: "At the beginning of our participation, my father and mother were afraid for me to work at Kurdî-De, but I explained the importance" (Anonymous 2011). The teachers also provided important reflections about how language connects to their broader identities.

We are a bridge between generations, between our mothers and our generation. When my mother went to school she spoke Turkish but only spoke her mother tongue [Zazaki] at home. But for us, we also speak Turkish at home so our relationship to our mother tongue is more deliberate. *When we speak Zazaki, we feel ourselves differently. When we listen to our songs, listen to our grandmothers, we feel ourselves differently. Everything begins and ends with language. Language is our existence, our culture, our traditions. We cannot represent ourselves fully in Turkish.* (Anonymous 2011, emphasis mine)

Dersimis respond to state pressure for assimilation by performing their identities and rights claims in many ways. Language is a powerful manifestation of Kurdish identity for the teachers, yet they encounter barriers of fear people in Dersim have to overcome in order to access this rich identity trove.

In particular, there are divergent generational responses to claims for language rights, as is evident in Kurdî-De classrooms, where the majority of students are in their twenties. Younger activists reassert the right to their mother tongue while older people tend to be much more

cautious about the risks associated with reclaiming the linguistic aspect of their identity. For Alevi Kurds, the 1938 massacres are linked to contemporary violence against Kurdish people through both the civil war and language criminalization. Memories of 1938 are explicitly mobilized in rallies and petitions for linguistic rights in the community as seen in Aygün's earlier quote about "a new '38'" (Aygün 2011). These examples show how Kurdish cultural activists are highly mobilized in using narrative about collectively held memories of violence as they engage the democratizing state to demand increased rights.

Though the last decade has seen a steep decline in the number of casualties from state-PKK combat, previous violations are not easily forgotten. In Dersim, the legacy of the 1938 massacres were refortified by the violence in the last several decades, casting an enduring threat of attack by outsiders on the community. This sentiment was captured best by a municipal staff member in Dersim:

People here still feel attacked by the government; they don't feel like the threat has ended. In our houses, all of us grew up with stories of the massacres and transmitted them to the next generation. Memory has always been a part of our cultural rights movements. (Kahraman 2011)

As mentioned above, personal vignettes about divergent generational responses to memories of violence have been seldom recorded, in part because Dersim is far from intellectual centers of research and the topic is fraught with conflict. How people respond to memories of violence and translate them into their political behavior across generations in Dersim is an ongoing drama. Though Dersim does not necessarily present a level of mobilization higher than other Kurdish communities in the southeast, like Acheal, it stands out as a place where specific memories of violence have lodged in the collective imaginary and been vibrantly mobilized for cultural rights claims.

The municipality is involved in dynamic cultural rights claim-making. From the BDP's initiative in January 2011 to make all the signs in the municipal buildings bilingual (Kahraman 2011), to the establishment of the Dersim branch of Kurdî-De and the proliferation of interest in Zazaki language classes, Dersimis are dedicated to reinvigorating their mother tongue. The narratives that community members disseminate to researchers and to a much wider audience through books, court cases, and petitions, demonstrate that the massacres of 1938 are intimately linked to their current quest for cultural rights, and specifically the right to speak Zazaki. Kurdish activists in Dersim have chosen reference to 1938 as a strategy to claim language rights, and this strategy appeals to a younger generation, but not to the older generation, who interpret the consequences of 1938 as a reason *not* to mobilize.

Cultural accommodation for Kurds:

As Kurds migrate from rural areas where Kurdish is the dominant language, to urban spaces in search of work or as internally displaced peoples from the civil war between the PKK and the Turkish military, speaking Turkish becomes a necessary survival tool and thus the Kurdish language is at an increased risk of disappearing (Kaya 2011). In addition, public schools in places like Dersim have been very successful at linguistic assimilation by requiring Turkish immersion in order to receive an education. Yet Kurdish people who have not learned their Kurdish language, or who have deliberately stopped using it, often report feeling disconnected from their culture. This separation can be a source of psychological stress, particularly when it leads to a loss of connection with one's elders. For example, Sami Tan, who has been part of the Kurmanji language revitalization movement in Istanbul remarked:

It is impossible without language to live the Kurdish identity and to preserve Kurdish identity. When you ask people why they want to learn Kurdish, they say,

'I want to continue with my identity, I want to understand the stories of my grandparents.' (Tan 2011)

Language loss matters for Kurds today because, as one young woman put it, "we can't even speak to our grandmothers." Memories of violence and the emotions those memories create are directly tied to the loss of intergenerational understanding among Kurds in Turkey.

The idea that a modern state could only evolve out of a homogenous populace has been reinforced through the Turkish government's approach to education and national myth-making over time. As Benedict Anderson points out, imagination is a key component of nation-building (1991), and most countries could be charged with fictionalizing their unity through a variety of national symbols. Coşkun and his colleagues at the Diyarbakır Institute for Political and Social Research created a unique report, with the title translated from Turkish as "Scar of Tongue," that addresses the role of imagination in Turkish nation-building in relation to consequences of banning mother tongue education for Kurdish students (Coşkun, Derince et al. 2011).

[T]he first thing that needs to be done for the creation of a national identity is the creating of an imagined common memory. The teaching of history is designed in accordance with the historical memory needed by the nation-state; *events believed to negatively affect the people are either passed over quickly, or ignored, or distorted*. On the other hand, events believed to be of critical importance for the memories are parsed in detail and, if necessary, exaggerated. (Coşkun, Derince et al. 2011: 17, emphasis mine)

Just as remembering is critical to forming the imagined community, so is forgetting. As one memory scholar writes, "[i]n order to ensure national cohesion there is a need to forget events that represent a threat to unity and remember heroes and glory days" (Misztal 2003: 17). In Turkey, selective remembering forms the basis for the imagined unity of the state, but Kurds are challenging this narrative with their own counter-narrative and paying a high cost for their contestation. Similarly, in Acteal, Tzotzil members of Las Abejas use memories of the 1997 massacre to shame the state and claim a broad array of rights; the right to justice for the massacre

perpetrators, but also the right to cultural continuity through bilingual education and autonomous political governance. States may want to forget and homogenize, but some ethnic minorities do not.

Conclusion

This article has discussed why culture matters, how memories of violence influence the continuation of Tzotzil and Kurdish culture, in particular their languages, and how these two communities are mobilizing for cultural rights. In both Acteal and Dersim, I presented evidence of how the communities mobilized memory through iterated narratives to assert their right to culture. I argued that different avenues available to translate memories of violence into public narratives—forums and tactics for speaking out about grievances—as well as mixed levels of state accommodation explain why a portion of the Acteal community has mobilized with more institutional tactics, while the Alevi Kurdish community in Dersim tends towards extra-institutional mobilization. The different physical and emotional legacies available to Tzotzil and Kurdish cultural rights activists come from their historical relationships with their states and the way that memories of violence have been processed within minority communities.

Though both Tzotzil and Alevi Kurdish people have been subject to state and paramilitary violence and are both poorly accommodated by the state, they have mobilized for cultural rights to different degrees and through different tactics. Tzotzils in Acteal, Chiapas created powerful public narratives that have highly mobilized their population through discourses of memorialization in songs, communiqués, slogans, and court cases. Though they use extra-institutional means, much of their mobilization practices are at least locally institutionalized, and use a broad array of claiming and shaming tactics. In contrast, Kurds in Dersim, though also highly mobilized, have had to rely more on extra-institutional claim-making

because their narratives have not found institutional access. In part, this situation has come about because of low state accommodation of Kurds. As the Turkish state has denied their existence and criminalized their language for so long, there are fewer institutional options for Kurds in Turkey to make claims. In Mexico, Las Abejas have more options to make claims institutionally thanks to new attention paid to indigenous citizens since the EZLN uprising of the 1990s. At the same time, both communities show similarities in shaming and claiming tactics. Memories of the 1997 massacre in Acteal and the 1938 massacre in Dersim have been effective in creating shame for Mexico and Turkey, respectively, if not internally than at least in the eyes of the international community, where both states want to be seen as democratic actors.

State accommodation patterns also inform the way in which each community channels memories of violence into narratives that are used to mobilize for cultural rights claim-making. I presented national level factors such as institutional design and constitutional provisions that affect political accommodation of originarios in Mexico and Turkey, as well as local factors like EZLN solidarity and political party incorporation. I also looked to political, economic, and cultural policies and practices that specifically inhibit cultural rights, such as how the teacher's union and SEP in Mexico have fostered education programs based on assimilation rather than diversity appreciation, and how the central state apparatus has promoted a similar agenda in Turkey.

More broadly, this article examines what community use of violence narratives and policies of inclusion and exclusion tell us about Mexico and Turkey's contemporary commitment to multiculturalism and democratization. Constitutional reforms, the legalization of local governance and cultural projects, and a decentralization of power under federal arrangements all have the potential to provide a structural environment to accommodate pueblos originarios. Yet

pressure to assimilate and accommodate political party agendas has manifested into violence and terror despite the package of institutional accommodations for ethnic minority citizens. Ongoing economic marginalization of originario communities in addition to denial of the right to mother tongue education through poor systemization of public education and overt discrimination has further compounded the marginalization of Mexico and Turkey's ethnic minorities, respectively.

Through strategies of political, economic, and cultural cooptation, Mexican and Turkish states continues to favor assimilation rather than accommodation of a diverse citizenry.

Nonetheless, many groups like Las Abejas and Kurdi-De, as well as local leadership in both Acteal and Dersim, push back against the state through memorialization ceremonies, comunicués, marches, petitions, and the creation of local spaces for minority language use and education. Infused in these mobilizations, both communities use memories of violence to shame their states as they claim their rights.

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