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State violence, nature, and primitive accumulation: dispossession in Dersim

Ozlem Goner[2] · **Joseph T. Rebello**[1]

Abstract This paper analyzes recent struggles surrounding dam projects and extractive industry in Dersim, a Kurdish-Alevi municipality in Eastern Turkey, as both a continuation of state violence against outsider populations, reproducing historical forms of repression, and a more recent neoliberal turn in economic policy and rhetoric, introducing what could be described as accumulation by dispossession to the region. This combination illustrates how the accumulation of capital and resistance to its logic are shaped by other political and cultural struggles that are not generated by the economic logic of capital. We pay particular attention to the active role of nature in these struggles.

Keywords Accumulation by dispossession · Primitive accumulation · State violence · Turkey · Nature

Introduction

One of the primary lessons of the concept of so-called primitive accumulation is the dependence of capitalist economic relations on extra-economic state-orchestrated violence. The doubly free character of the proletariat, free to sell their labor power and free from the means of production, is the product of a bloody history. The historical emergence of "money-bags" and the seller of labor power extends beyond simple economic logics. Indeed, as primitive accumulation expands, enclosing

✉ Joseph T. Rebello
jrebello@jjay.cuny.edu

Ozlem Goner
ogoner@csi.cuny.edu

[1] John Jay College of Criminal Justice, New York, NY, USA

[2] College of Staten Island, 2800 Victory Boulevard, Staten Island, New York, NY, USA

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cultural and epistemic commons as well, the discourse surrounding it increasingly highlights the interplay of economics, politics, culture, and nature.

Although the critical understanding of primitive accumulation undermines apologetic accounts that portray capitalist relationships as products of some natural economic process, it does tend to reinforce the notion that this bloody and messy complexity is ultimately in service of a singular economic logic of capital. Harvey's influential *New Imperialism* (2005), for example, describes the prominence of dispossession in the most recent stage of capitalism as a fix to a crisis of overaccumulation in the 1970s. While dispossession will take different forms across space and objects (land, water, knowledge, etc.), it is ultimately part of an essentially economic narrative. Apparently unrelated activities, such as the destruction of villages for dam projects (Hughes 2006; Isaacman and Sneddon 2000; Peck and Tickell 2002; Vasudevan 2008), or attempts to capitalize on the behavior of internet users (Dyer-Witheford and De Peuter 2009; Brown 2013), are examples of various ways that capital has reshaped the world in response to a fall in the rate of profit in the 1970s.

We do not deny that capitalism faced crises in the 1970s. The construction and management of neoliberalism should be understood in that context. Whatever role Reagan and Thatcher, or the powers and interests they personify, played in making sure the regulation of capitalism took on specifically neoliberal characteristics, their interventions were conditioned by a capitalism that was already in crisis. It then makes sense that important dimensions of neoliberalism can be understood as particular resolutions of that crisis. Furthermore, there is a potential political payoff in Harvey's narrative. The identification of a singular underlying problem may produce solidarity between particular struggles and campaigns.

Our first contention regarding this potential political payoff and the assumptions of the relationship between state violence and capital resulted from field work among the opponents of dam projects in Dersim, a Kurdish-Alevi municipality in Eastern Turkey. Throughout our field work and interviews, we noticed disconnect between local experiences of dispossession and Marxist-influenced scholarship. Even for activists involved in Marxist politics, the narrative around dam projects was dominated by historical experiences of state violence linked to identity (nation, ethnicity, religion). Critical reference points included the Dersim Massacre of 1938 and the destruction of villages in the 1990s in the name of fighting "terror." The economic crises of the 1970s, or a new stage of capitalism, are rarely mentioned as an important part of the story.

We do not outright reject the usefulness of concepts related to primitive accumulation in the case of Dersim, either in making sense of local events and struggles or in linking them to other displacements and enclosures, but we do take the activist narrative seriously. If the production and (expanded) reproduction of capitalism in neoliberalism involves the violence of the state, we need to be cognizant of preexisting projects of state violence that are not simply and totally subsumed by the logic of capital.

Indeed, when dam projects displace populations considered threatening to the state, it is tempting to reverse the primitive accumulation story; perhaps the dictates of neoliberalism (we must not let these unexploited natural resources go to waste) are a means to an end concerning the management of problem populations. In other

words, instead of the displacement of people paving the way for a capitalist dam project, some community members experience the dam project as a new way for the state to displace problem populations under the guise of economics. While this goes too far in a state-centric direction, we do want to argue that the concerns, and preexisting historical dynamics, of the state need to be taken seriously.

A second contention concerns the role of nature. Like the state, nature has played a central but ultimately passive and primarily economic role in most discussions of primitive accumulation. The heart of the standard story is that nature was once common, then later enclosed and privatized. For both proponents and opponents of neoliberalism, nature in this story is a resource. While opponents may fret at the exploitation/recognition of nature as "just a resource," they nonetheless accept that this is the tendency under (neoliberal) capitalism. Like the state, we want to keep nature at the center of the story but give it more agency. We argue that nature in Dersim is not just a resource to be either joyfully shared (the commons) or violently expropriated (the enclosures); it is an important actor in its own right and an understanding of dispossession requires a recognition of the economic, but also political and cultural life, of the environment.

Our research is composed of archival research on state and newspapers of the 1930s and fieldwork in political and environmental rallies, as well as interviews and focus group studies with the activists and with populations affected by displacement. The archival material comes from four sources: newspaper archives of the period between 1930 and 1940; state documents from this period; three long reports about Dersim written in this period; and national and international law cases about village displacements since the late 1990s. We analyze state reports, laws, and newspaper articles about Dersim during the 1930s with a focus on place, nature, and landscape. We pay specific attention to the constructions and management of Dersim as an outsider people and place due to its mountainous geography and beliefs and social relationships based in nature. We also analyze the NGO reports regarding state violence and village displacements during the 1990s.

Our yearlong field research in different districts and villages of Dersim in 2010–2011 was followed up by annual visits to the town. Our sites included major political organizations, leftist and Kurdish, and the municipal government. We also participated in the political and environmental rallies debating with the organizers and state officials alike. Interviews and focus group studies are the third part of this study. Our interviews with politically influential figures, such as heads and active members of the leftist and Kurdish organizations, especially reveal the differences between official political discourse and the local interpretations of environmental projects. Finally, interviews and the focus group studies we undertook with those affected by the village evacuations of the 1990s and displacement due to the dam projects illustrate the connections people make between these seemingly different processes.

In the first section, we review the treatment of state and nature in the recent literature on accumulation by dispossession. While this literature contains a variety of particular theoretical orientations, we are interested in the often similar roles of the state and nature in the broader discourse. We then turn to the case of Dersim to argue for a more active understanding of state and nature. The second section summarizes state violence and dispossession in Dersim prior to the more recent

neoliberal dam and mining projects. This historical sketch is meant to illustrate not only a preexisting process of state violence and resistance, but also the importance of nature in that history. Before being targeted as a potential resource for capital, Dersim's nature was already politically contentious. Finally, we turn to contemporary struggles over nature. We argue that these newer struggles have significant overlaps with the processes described in the accumulation by dispossession literature, but are also shaped and driven by historical dynamics that are not adequately captured by the standard approach.

State and nature in continued primitive accumulation

Despite thematic resonance, there is not complete theoretical consistency in recent discussions of primitive accumulation. While some notion of increasingly intensive or extensive capitalism might be common, as Hall (2012) describes, a diversity of conceptualizations of capitalism has led to distinct theories of primitive accumulation. Furthermore, there is significant overlap and slippage between discussions of primitive accumulation, accumulation by dispossession, the new enclosures, commodification and neoliberalism. Our discussion will initially focus on the work of Harvey. Although his twenty-first century return to the problematic of primitive accumulation is predated by others including Perelman (2001), De Angelis (2001, 2004) and thinkers associated with the journal *The Commoner*, we are interested in Harvey due to the influence of his "accumulation by dispossession" and the expansiveness of his approach, as it attempts to tie together heterogeneous processes in both the Global South and Global North (Glassman 2006). Although we cannot be comprehensive, we conclude with a discussion of how the tendencies in Harvey's account relate to the broader literature.

Harvey[1] identifies the state and capital as the "primary systemic agents" behind a "geographical landscape of capital accumulation…perpetually evolving, largely under the impulsion of the speculative needs of further accumulation (including land accumulation) and only secondarily in relation to the needs of people" (2010, p. 185). While he admits the existence of other actors and exceptions (p. 247), the dominant narrative involves an asymmetric struggle over space between the state and capital on one side and the people on the other.

The sides differ in terms of interests—"Place-making, particularly around that place we call 'home,' is an art that belongs largely to the people and not to capital…deeper meanings that people assign to…land, to place, home…are perpetually at odds with the crass commercialisms of land and property markets" (p. 192). The people's practices of reproducing qualitative place-based significance are inherently at odds with the quantitative drive of capital. There is also a power differential. State and capital act on a systemic level, and working together can draw

[1] As a geographer one can find theoretical work closely related to the question of primitive accumulation throughout Harvey's work, including *The Limits to Capital* (2006), but in our reading it was *The New Imperialism* (2005), through an attempt to make sense of the Iraq War, that began his explicit focus on the topic. Here we focus on the later *Enigma of Capital* (2010) which we see as having a more developed theoretical argument.

from the disciplinary force of the gun and the market. The power of the people currently exists in the form of localized resistance and is structural only in some potential future.

Despite the advantages the state has over the people, its agency is also questionable. The state does not really work with capital; it works for capital. Exceptions exist. Harvey references (p. 247) instances where the dispossession is ultimately a state project. State-motivated "territorial organizations" predate capital and therefore define "initial conditions to which capitalism either had to conform or transform in order to survive or flourish" (p. 195). However, once capital becomes dominant, periods of crisis do not threaten its role with respect to the state. Furthermore, Harvey's distinction between a "logic…driven by territorial imperatives and political interests, captive to all of the complexities involved in place-making" and a "capitalist logic…searching for endless growth through profit-making" (p. 204) reinforces the relative dominance of capital. While the territorial logic does aim at management of "the population" which suggests a broad and diverse set of practices and motivations associated with the state, Harvey's examples are primarily economistic or specifically capitalistic—"good business climate for capital…access to resources, markets, labor power…further accumulation" (p. 205). The two logics are largely just different dimensions of capitalist reproduction.

In the struggles between state, capital, and the people, land is an object. The literature on primitive accumulation never understates the importance of land, place, and nature. Even as the literature moved beyond the enclosures of common land, the figure of the "commons" is the principle metaphor through which new objects of struggle have been thought through. However central it might be in our conceptualizations of these struggles, it remains largely passive, taking on characteristics according to the balance of power between state-capital and people. While the land of the "people" is represented as contrary to the cold, quantitative, economistic space of capital, the fundamental question is how it is managed as an economic resource. Different modes of resource management have political and cultural consequences, and these consequences often mediate and motivate resistance to dispossession, but they are secondary to the economic question.

The interest in intellectual and cultural commons (Harvey 2011; Hardt and Negri 2011; Andrejevic 2007; Brown 2013) does not necessarily undermine this point, since they are attempts to expand the category of processes and objects we understand as resources.[2] While there are theoretical and political choices involved in the specific character of these attempts, we should recognize that this is to some extent unavoidable. Scholars must contend with the diversity of resources that constitute (re)production. The role of advertising in the twentieth century, intensified with the internet of the twenty-first century, has transformed "eyeballs" into an important resource (Sherman 2014). We now speak of this resource with the casual matter-of-factness that a twentieth century development economist would speak of "capital." However unavoidable the question of resource management is,

[2] McCarthy (2005) analyzes the relationship between more traditional conceptualizations of the commons related most famously with Hardin and Ostrom and broader often non-academic affirmations of the commons motivated by political movements against neoliberalism. As academics have increasingly worked on theorizing this broad commons, a distinction between the two may be becoming anachronistic.

simply as persons attempting to coordinate our behavior in a shared world or in the face of capitalist pressure, we do want to emphasize the centrality of this question in the literature.

Finally, Harvey's narrative locates the drive toward dispossession in capital's need to overcome crises as opposed to the simple drive for accumulation itself. Accumulation by dispossession is a fix to the crisis of overproduction experienced in advanced capitalist economies in the 1970s. This account provides a unique cause for a variety of political and economic developments over the last few decades. At the same time, Harvey's understanding of overaccumulation is broad:

> Overaccumulation within a given territorial system means a condition of surpluses of labor (rising unemployment) and surpluses of capital (registered as a glut of commodities on the market that cannot be disposed of without a loss, as idle productivity capacity and/or as surpluses of money capital lacking outlets for productive and profitable investment). (2005, 108).

Harvey's "overaccumulation" fits with distinct, and even competing, crisis theories. All surpluses are not created equal, and while most crises take the appearance of too much labor (high unemployment), too many commodities (unplanned inventories), and too much capital (falling capacity utilization), the specification of a crisis refers to underlying causes. Since accumulation generates the demand for constant capital and labor power, and therefore direct (through investment) and indirect (through wages which lead to consumption) aggregate demand, a break in accumulation will lead to too much labor, commodities, and capital. But what caused the break in accumulation in the first place? This question is particularly important if we are to evaluate whether something can be characterized as a fix. A fix for one type of crisis may impede recovery for a different type of crisis.[3]

Although the ambiguity in the causes of the crisis makes evaluating claims about fixes difficult, our primary point here is not necessarily to criticize Harvey, but to illustrate rhetorical and theoretical choices. Long forays into debates on crisis theory do not belong in a text like *The New Imperialism*. They are a distraction from the counter-hegemonic linking of various social movements responding to dispossession under an anti-capitalist banner, or, as Harvey puts it—to bring together the victims of accumulation and accumulation by dispossession. The expansive and at times vague account of the specific origins of capitalist crisis goes along with an expansive move to align various victims of the fix to the crisis. This expansive notion of capital, capitalist dispossession, and therefore potential anti-capitalist resistance, is not unique to Harvey. Sassen (2010, 2014) suggests commonality more through form than theory, as victims of various types of "expulsions" are introduced one after the other. Hall (2013) notes that the plasticity of the literature allows some to theorize almost anything, and/or its opposite, as primitive accumulation. One does not want to pass judgement too harshly on this tendency.

[3] To give a very simplified example, in an underconsumption crisis, policies to strengthen the bargaining power of labor may help increase wages and therefore partially resolve the underlying problem. In a crisis caused by increased wages lowering profit margins (the "profit squeeze"), similar policies would likely exacerbate the problem.

At least some of this would appear to be due to the expansive and plastic character of actual capital. It should also be said that not all attempts to tie together diverse struggles ignore particularity. In their introduction to a collection of ethnographies with an "expansive geographical and historical scope," Kasmir and Carbonella (2014, p. 2) recognize that dispossession is "experienced and lived differently in specific localities" even if we can find "heretofore hidden histories of connection."

Without judgement, we want to emphasize the political dimensions of this choice. Theorists of continuing primitive accumulation appear to bring together superficially disparate processes under the heading of capitalism, neoliberal capitalism, and/or dispossession, in order to foster common ground beneath disparate social movements.

In summary, Harvey's account can be characterized by three related features. There is a well-defined set of actors: the privileged role of capital, the state that acts in its interests, and the people standing in opposition. The objects of struggle—land or its analogues—are largely passive potential resources that could be managed in various ways. Finally, the multitude of often placed-based instances of resistance are articulated together, at least at the level of political potential, due to the common link between various acts of expropriation and dispossession—the requirements and logic of a particular period of capitalism.

Harvey's narrative is an influential one. At least in terms of these three general features, it is also characteristic of much of the broader literature. We want to consider the case of displacement and dispossession associated with dams and extractive industry in Dersim with respect to this framework. While this approach helps illuminate some important dynamics in Dersim today, Dersim's history illustrates some limitations in the standard narrative. There are some places in the literature where these features have already been problematized.

Perreault (2013) analyzes mining in Bolivia and comes to conclusions similar to ours. First, the economic consequences do not simply fit proletarianization, nor do they fix an accumulation problem. Second, he argues for the importance of nature's materiality. This point has also been argued by Sneddon (2007). Illustrating the ways in which the specific character of the natural environment helps to shape processes of accumulation resonates with our desire to give more agency to nature, but this materio-technological-economic agency does not necessarily imply that nature has a social and cultural life. On the first claim, the title of Perreault's article—"Dispossession by Accumulation"—might have even more in common with our argument than the conclusions of his own case study (pp. 1063–1065) which might be more accurately described as dispossession without accumulation. It is not so much that accumulation acts to dispossess but that the dispossession does not necessarily lead to accumulation. As we describe in the following section, this describes earlier periods in Dersim, but does not characterize the contemporary setting in which both processes are occurring.

Kappeler and Bigger (2011), who subtitle their article "Dispossession without Accumulation?", also problematize the link between the two processes in the Harvey-influenced literature, by making a different point. Using the case of real estate in the USA, they remind us that capital does not always succeed.

Dispossession's capacity to lead to actual accumulation is complicated by the contradictions of capitalism, including of course, political struggle.

In addition to the work by Perreault and Sneddon, others have problematized and complicated our view of land/nature/commons. Castree worries that important "differences can easily be glossed when the one category "nature" is used as shorthand to refer to such substantively different things" (2003, p. 275). More attention must be paid to their social and material specificity. St. Martin (2005, 2007) exposes the "capitalocentric" (Gibson-Graham 2006) discourses that dominate mainstream, but also inform radical, interpretations of the relationship between resources held in common and capitalist economic development. Using different language, Bakker (2005) makes similar points by disaggregating the various processes involved in commodification. Both reach results that suggest the ability of capital to enclose and commodify is more limited than often imagined. In the standard account, land's qualitative and symbolic dimensions are stripped in the process of enclosure and commodification, but Bakker describes this very process itself as having "socioeconomic," "discursive," and "material" dimensions (p. 545). Akram-Lodhi (2007, p. 1439) emphasizes the social multidimensionality of land (scape) to counter the neoliberal assumption that it is "an economic resource that should be allocated to maximize the benefits." However, in this critique the multidimensionality under neoliberalism is ambiguous. While we agree that this is indeed an assumption of neoliberalism, we disagree with the notion found in the dispossession literature that neoliberalism succeeds in its reductionism. To use Bakker's language, while the socioeconomic, discursive, and material character of nature may change radically under neoliberalism, it is still multidimensional.

While there is no shortage of literature arguing for the importance of the state, the literature on primitive accumulation usually treats it as an agent of capitalism. Whether this is a claim about the essential nature of the state, or a matter of focus on state-related activities that are directly related to capitalist reproduction, is not always clear. Tilly claims that "[w]ar making, extraction, and capital accumulation interacted to shape European state making" (1985, p. 172) in an argument that centralizes state motivations, but pertains to a very different time period.

Gill's (2014, p. 32) study of neoliberalism in Colombia emphasizes the terrifying "brute force" of violence as experienced by communities in opposition to "economistic accounts of capital accumulation that unfold at a high level of abstraction." While accumulation has long been associated with violence, we agree that it is has been treated as primarily instrumental. The manner in which violence targets the "fabric of social life" (p. 33) plays a large role in our story as well, although the consequences of these historical trauma on political organization differ.

Moore places Zimbabwe (2003) in the immediate aftermath of the 2002 elections at the intersection of various historical processes primitive accumulation, nation-state construction, and democratization. These processes, existing within the structure of global capitalism, are conceptually distinct but operate together to shape this specific conjuncture. While they have to be thought of together—"Zimbabwe's 'organic crisis' consists of a combination of problems" (p. 45)—they are not reducible to a single historical trajectory. Our case touches on similar combinations,

with more emphasis on changes in this relation over different periods. In particular, we explore how contemporary struggles over accumulation by dispossession in neoliberal Turkey are shaped both by the ongoing process of nation-state maintenance and earlier periods of dispossession that had little to nothing to do with capitalist accumulation.

State and nature in Dersim

While dam projects and extractive industry in Dersim could fit within the discourses of neoliberalism and accumulation by dispossession, many in Dersim more likely relate state violence and dispossession to local historical trauma. The discourse that emerges from this historical orientation characterizes dispossession, the state, identity, and nature in ways that differ significantly from most of the current literature on accumulation. The two most common historical referents are the 1938 massacre and the destruction of villages in the early 1990s in the name of anti-terrorism. Here we provide an account of the former with emphasis on the distinct relationships between state, identity, and nature.

The Turkish state, established out of the remnants of the Ottoman Empire in the early nineteenth century and recognized through international treaties guaranteeing it sovereignty in the 1920s, was based on a differentiation, organization, and control of the nation and nation-space in relation to the definition and management of outsider peoples and places. In 1938 this state undertook a massacre in Dersim, defined throughout the 1930s as a problematized place and people. Dersim has historically combined various identities of otherness, primarily including Alevi (which, being simultaneously within and outside of Islam, constituted an "anomaly" starting with the Ottoman Empire), Kurdish (with a contested status due to Dersim's difference from other Kurds), and Armenian (even after the Armenian genocide of 1915 Armenians survived in Dersim until 1938).

Furthermore, the population was, and to some extent remains, scattered throughout a large mountainous geography (7685 km^2). The combination of outsider populations scattered in this mountainous space made Dersim a problem. Scott (2009) discusses the conflicts between the space of the state and space of the highlands/mountains as a key social and political dynamic in the history of Southeast Asia, but also suggests that twentieth century technology has led to the triumph of the former. It is unclear whether this battle has been definitively decided in the case of Dersim, but it was certainly a prominent concern in official discourse on Dersim in the 1930s. The three sets of mountains combined with various hills, valleys, and rivers, not only shaped the state's perception and management of Dersim, but should be seen as central to the social, cultural, and political constitution of community and subjects, which further complicated matters for the construction of a nation state.

The state first tried to reorganize this space by consolidating the populations of small mountain villages together in the valleys. When this was unsuccessful, as people had lived in these mountain villages for centuries, more dramatic measures were implemented. Massacres and subsequent forced displacements between 1937 and 1939 followed. Other means, such as building state institutions and schools

were to come in the 1940s and 1950s. These means, through which the Turkish state managed the "problem" of Dersim, were also situated in the international political and cultural context of colonialism and racial nationalism. Legitimizing the massacres and genocides against outsider populations as modernizing attempts to transform barbarous people and places helped normalize these exclusionary and repressive practices.

In Dersim's case, it is impossible to understand exclusionary representations of people apart from the representation of place. The landscape of Dersim has historically been discussed as pre-modern, unruly, and anti-state. This outsider place simultaneously shapes subjectivities of people, as well as strategies for political movements. Understanding the relationships between landscape, place, state, identity, subjectivity, and movements is impossible when we treat nature and culture/society as separate entities, considering the former unidirectionally constructed by the latter. It is critical to pay attention both to the discourses about, and mobilizations of, nature and landscape by historical and social actors, as well as to the role of landscape itself in creating movements and identities in a non-deterministic, non-unified fashion.

The nationalist discourse of the 1930s simultaneously included and excluded its others. The inclusion was based on contradictory definitions of the nation. A racial discourse based on the difference and superiority of the Turkish race excluded groups who did not belong to ethnic, racial, religious, and spatial definitions of Turkishness, such as Armenians, Kurds, and Alevis. At the same time, the state simultaneously denied even the existence of these populations, especially Kurds and the people of Dersim, by defining them as original/undeveloped forms of Turks. This was supported by a nationalist thesis produced as a result of a series of conferences among Turkish historians, defining everyone living in Turkey, and even in the world, as originally Turkish. People in Dersim were called "mountain Turks," who, "living in a natural environment, did not become modernized yet."[4]

Nowhere were these contradictions of inclusion and exclusion more multiple and visible than in Dersim. This was due to its complex identity, as well as its mountainous geography. The natural environment and the mountains were used to connect Dersim to Turkishness. This connection is also used to prove the existence of earlier and purer forms of a Turkish race. For example, the *Gendarmerie Headquarters Report on Dersim* (*GHR*) has a section titled "Racial Status of Dersim," which discussed Dersim's Turkishness physiologically, saying that people of Dersim have the same type of head, *brakisefal*, as Turks, and their facial and body features, as well as personality traits, are identical with those of Turkmen (early Turkish). Similarly, the *Cumhuriyet* series in 1936 stated:

> The slightly slanting and shut eyes under a bare open forehead, prominent temporal sides next to the flat nose, and the approximate measure of the diameter of the head, had given me the biggest and extant, the biggest and physical certificate, an unfalsifiable proof of a history without doubt.[5]

[4] This statement is from an Anonymous Report on Dersim. Yegen (1999) discusses the use of the term "mountain Turk" in the context of other Kurds.

[5] Published on 9/23/36.

Not only were people of Dersim uncivilized original Turks, but their physical traits were a proof for the existence of the Turkish race more generally. Their beliefs in the sacredness of natural phenomena, especially the rivers and mountains, were associated with earlier Turkish beliefs; their physical traits were considered those of Turks living in the natural environment. This environment played the dual role of linking Dersim to a proto-Turkish identity and explaining away cultural differences between Dersim and contemporary Turkishness.

Different identity categories were mobilized to establish the relationships between Dersim's landscape, beliefs, and Turkishness. At some points, Kurds in general are discussed as mountain Turks; at other times, these categories were used to differentiate Dersim from Kurds. Interestingly, establishing Dersim's Turkishness based on spiritual and cultural traits in relation to the natural environment and landscape, and differentiating these from those of Kurds, acknowledges the existence of a separate Kurdish community and identity that is denied elsewhere. A state report written in 1933 brings together gender, sexuality, ethnic and religious identities and natural environment:

> Unlike those women who are referred to as Kurdish, Zaza women (Zaza is an ethnic group identity, used to define people in Dersim and some other surrounding municipalities) are not masculine. Like Turkmen women, Zaza women are fond of sexual contact. It would be a shame to differentiate Zaza women from the Turkmen women who, facing the moon light, have burst into cheerful laughter looking for their men under the skies filled with stars that they consider as sacred. (GHR)

Both categories of women, Zaza and Turkmen, are traditional and un-civilized. The apparent approval of fondness of sexual contact, not just as a characterization of "Zaza" women, but also of Turkish women more generally, attributes sexuality and femininity to women living in natural landscapes. Living and believing in nature, both Turkmen and Zaza women, represent the pure origins of the Turkish race. Civilization comes with Islam and modernization, not only of people, but of their environment and landscape, which would work to transform the sexualized Turkmen women into modern and moral Turkish women. Their "uncivilized" spiritual beliefs, considering the skies and mountains sacred, which differentiate them from Turkish women, were also transformed with the recognition of (Sunni) Islam. If the Turkmen women were successfully civilized into Turkish women, Zaza women were civilizable unlike their Kurdish others. Once they are reorganized spatially and their environment civilized, the people of Dersim should be included in the nation and nation-space.

These narratives establish the sameness of Dersim with Turks. However, the same reports simultaneously use the categories of nature and landscape as a corruption to Turkish traits, such as language. That is, if people in Dersim speak a different language, this must be an effect of the mountains, caves, and the rivers. In an earlier report from 1918 to 1919, Kazım Karabekir, an acclaimed military figure and statesman, says:

> Dersim is an extremely rocky, steep, hard to pass through, wild place and its arable areas are limited. This savagery of the landscape had influenced the character of people and made them into wild savages who are deprived of humanity and merit.[6]

While Dersim's landscape was tactically useful at various moments in discourse producing Turkishness, it was also a practical problem. First, it was simply difficult for the state to reach and enter. Creating a nation-space, defined, organized, and connected was important both for state formation and national imaginary. Due to its mountainous geography and scattered population on and around these mountains, Dersim did not belong to the nation-space, which was to be connected with roads and railways. Second, people's knowledge of this place gave them an advantage over the state army. Finally, nature was a crucial element in beliefs and culture, providing an alternative to Sunni Islam as a state-defined national religion. Nature shaped the beliefs of inhabitants, but it also played a role in selecting inhabitants. Historically, Dersim's mountains attracted people, especially Alevis, who had escaped different parts of the Middle East and Anatolia.

Later in the 1930s two reports discussed Dersim's landscape. The introduction of one reads: "With its steep and rebellious landscape, Dersim has been the bed of banditry for centuries." This report also shows several pictures of the mountains, Munzur River, and the riverbed. Another report claims "The steepness of landscape has always inspired atrocity and savagery in its people."

During the 1930s, *Cumhuriyet* newspaper published a series on human control over nature. A 1933 article about Mount Everest was titled "Human eating baleful mountain: The Everest, which has been considered insurmountable till now, will be invaded from land as it has been conquered by air." Dam projects and construction projects that would change the routes of the rivers, shift or combine them, were also given attention. Modernization, these discourses showed, was not only constructing the modern subject and managing populations, but managing nature and landscape. We do not want to suggest a simple geographical determinism. We certainly do not endorse claims that mountains create savages or that difficult landscapes necessarily lead to tensions between people and the state. Nonetheless, we do want to emphasize the historical role, and indeed agency of nature, that is too often poorly captured in the struggle over common or private property.

In the case of Turkey, big modernizing projects were not easy. Although the state started road projects in Dersim, the landscape and the hard winter conditions made them too costly to continue. Hence a more efficient solution was chosen: removing the people.

In 1938, after a series of smaller-scale detentions and relocations of people, the state undertook a series of massacres in different parts of Dersim, killing and deporting thousands of people to "places in which Turkish customs prevail" (Aygun 2009, pp. 83–84). The Resettlement Law of 1934 was going to be extended to relocate people of Dersim in places where they could absorb Turkish customs. The Settlement Law originally suggested that the percentage of people could not exceed

[6] As quoted in Kasmir and Carbonella (2014, 203).

10 % in the areas in which they are resettled. In 1939, this percentage was lowered and only one family could be sent. In some instances, even small families were separated. Moreover, the state increased the number of the exiles. The population of the area previously determined as "unlivable" was approximately 3000, and this number was increased to 7000 by the Cabinet of Ministers, first in May 1938, then in August 1938. The exiles were not allowed to leave their settlement areas without permission from the local governor who had possession of their resettlement papers. Property given to them in their settlement areas was considered compensation for demolished property in Dersim. Hence even after the state legalized returns to Dersim in 1947, people were not only scared to return, but had incentives to stay where they still owned property. Nonetheless, many returned.

Proletarianization was neither a goal nor consequence of resettlement. However dramatic the changes involved in resettlement, they did not involve any significant class transformations. Economic self-sufficiency was perfectly acceptable provided the problems of cultural, political, and religious autonomy were overcome.

Beginning in the 1970s, as leftist guerilla movements opposed the state from its mountains, Dersim became a key symbolic and practical model for combatting homogenous depictions of the nation. The landscape was now not only sacred for its spirits, but also for the ideal of revolution. Dersim's mountains became a theme in folk songs, as well as within revolutionary songs and marches of leftist bands. Four years after the coup d'etat in 1980, the Kurdish Worker's Party of Kurdistan took up arms against the Turkish state. With war intensifying in the 1990s, state violence targeted the people, forests, and especially mountain villages. Calling the mountain forests "nests of terror" military officials aimed to make guerillas visible by burning them down, despite state efforts at forestation elsewhere. Villagers lived under constant threat from the military, which was given "extraordinary powers" through the "extraordinary situation law." Following a long period of tortures and threats, during which mobility within the town was limited by constant check points, searches, and food cards limiting the amount of food one could take, villages were emptied and houses were burned by the military. People were brought together in the valleys and migrated to the town center of Dersim. Even more moved to cities throughout Turkey. Throughout the 1990s, 284 out of 420 villages were emptied in Dersim (Çelik et al. 2008).

Those displaced in this period were more likely to find themselves freed of any means of production and in need of wages. Furthermore, the influence of Marxism gave the struggle a class dimension, at least on the level of ideology. Nonetheless, it would be difficult to see these dispossessions as crucial to accumulation. The amount of labor power made available was relatively small, the land was primarily depopulated as opposed to enclosed, and state-related motivations were quite apparent.

State and nature and neoliberalism in Dersim

While we argue that the history described in the previous section continues to have effects, we must also recognize the ways in which relations of power began to take different forms articulated with neoliberalism, a discourse of democratization, and

new definitions and management of outsiders since the later 1990s. After the elections of 2002, a new political party, the AKP (Justice and Development Party), became one of the central actors shaping this process. A product of the rightist-Islamist tradition, the AKP established a single-party government. Unlike other parties in the Islamist tradition, the AKP openly adopted neoliberalism, which it legitimizes through discourses against corruption and economic crises (Öniş 2004; Patton 2006; Bedirhanoğlu 2007). And unlike other parties on the right, its political discourse included democratization. Influenced by the struggles against exclusionary nationalism and state violence, as well as notions of multiculturalism in Europe, in 2002 the AKP government adopted discourses and policies of a "democratic opening" toward "minority identities."

AKP's notion of "opening" is shaped by many local, national, and transnational factors, including decades of struggle by internationally recognized movements such as the PKK, attempts to join the European Union, and its aspiration to be the "democratic" power in the Middle East. Although the latter two are recognized in discussions of the AKP (Phillips 2004; Önis and Yilmaz 2005; Larrabee 2007), the struggles of outsiders are mostly neglected. Since the late 1990s outsiders have found themselves at the intersection of an increasing urban population due to forced and voluntary migration, new spheres and means of struggle, the resonances of decades of state violence and struggle in and outside of Turkey, and an increasing discourse of democratization and minority rights.

Starting in the late 1990s, lawyers in Kurdistan brought the issue of state terror to the European Court of Human Rights, asking for recognition of violence and reparations for their material loss. Kurdish struggle took new forms, especially after the abolition of the state of exception in the region in 2002. Kurds were now participating in the public sphere through legal parties and organizations, which, despite being described as terrorists similar to the previous period, were active and vocal not only in Turkey, but in the Middle East and Europe. Due to the displacements of the 1990s, millions of Kurds were now living in big cities, where they formed political and social associations. The migration to Europe throughout the 1980s and 1990s also created a lively Kurdish community there, which Ayata calls "Euro-Kurdistan" (Ayata 2008).

Similarly, Alevis, who had gone through a silent period after the repression of the left in the 1980s, formed community organizations and associations, especially in the big cities where they had migrated after the coup. Starting in the late 1990s, Alevi organizations and individuals challenged practices imposing Sunni Islam on Alevi citizens, such as the mandatory religion course and the appointment of the Presidency of Religious Affairs (Vorhoff 1998; Goner 2005). Politics in Dersim has been shaped by these identity-based struggles among Kurds and Alevis. Moreover, among those unhappy with broader Kurdish and Alevi organizations' interpretations of Dersim, an emphasis on Dersim's unique identity has strengthened.

These struggles show that the AKP's discourse of democratization cannot be attributed solely to a single political party or its transnational aspirations. Moreover, despite its promises of democratic openings, a closer look into outsiders' experiences reveals that the AKP (re)produces outsiders through relatively new rationalities and means, which are shaped by transnational measures of

neoliberalism and security. In other words, this period since the 2000s is shaped by new tactics and meanings of governing outsider populations and places at the intersection of multiculturalism, neoliberal governance, and security.

Recent struggles in Dersim reveal these means, suggesting both transformation and continuity in the management of outsiders. First of all, a recognition, or at least an explicit reference to identities such as Alevi and Kurdish, takes place simultaneously with other processes that people in Dersim consider a threat to their identity, most importantly the dam projects. Second, state-defined notions of identity, democracy, and rights present those with alternative visions as outsiders. The increasing imprisonment of Kurdish politicians, journalists and academics who have been critical of the government reveals the boundaries of state-defined conceptions of democratization. A simultaneous recognition of identities and a repression against those who struggle for the rights of outsiders illustrates that the state accepts only difference that can be expressed within state-defined categories and that does not challenge the political and economic organization of the state and society. Other forms, performances, and demands of identity are treated as "bad" difference as opposed to state-defined "good" difference (Mamdani 2004). As such, historically constructed notions of good and bad, shaped by the complex construction of Turkishness, continue to shape not only political and cultural inclusion, but also struggles over neoliberalism.

This explains the shared prominence of two superficially distinct movements in Dersim: the anti-dam movements and the recent struggles over producing a collective memory of 1938. The first struggle calls attention to the threats against Dersim's environment, as it has become the object of resource extraction for the state as well as national and transnational corporations. Although they struggle for seemingly environmental causes, the activists, who are part of various leftist and community organizations, often explain the dam projects as the "state's final fight against Dersim" or "the second 1938." They pay at least as much attention to issues of identity and political repression as the environment. Interestingly, but not coincidentally, similar organizations located within and outside of Dersim have been directly mobilizing 1938 as an issue in and of itself after 72 years of relative silence.

The history of dam projects in Turkey dates back to the foundation of the Electricity Studies Administration in 1936. Due to the lack of resources, these ambitions were largely unrealized. The first proposal, the Keban dam project, was implemented after 30 years in 1966. In the 1970s, dam projects were once again popularized, with a new economic discourse of regional and national development. Designed in the 1970s, the GAP, Southeastern Development Project, undertaken in the Kurdish provinces, was the biggest irrigation and hydraulic energy project designed in Turkey. The dam projects in Dersim started during the peak of the war in the 1990s and were hence perceived by many in the region as part of the project of fighting against terror. With the AKP rule in 2002, dam projects, accompanied by hydroelectric power plants, again took a new pace and form. Although they continued to be presented as a means of economic development, the projects, now marketed to national and international capital, were different from the Keban and GAP of the previous decades. Even after the implementation of the neoliberal

policies of the 1980s, GAP, for instance, was a project undertaken by the state with the promise of irrigation, a major problem for the agricultural producers in the region.

Although the AKP government discursively shares the populist tendencies of earlier conservative governments, which presented and implemented the GAP as a favor to the region, the AKP's promises of development are hardly convincing for people whose livelihood is threatened by the dam and hydroelectric power plant projects.[7] The increasing number of projects since the early 2000s affects not only the big rivers but the little streams all over Turkey without the promises of the previous era, such as irrigation. The hydroelectric power plants primarily involve construction of turbine pipes around the streams, abolishing people's and animal's access to water, leading to protests throughout Turkey.

Moreover, in most projects private companies gain control not only of the water, but also the land and natural resources around the waterbeds for a long period of time.[8] Hence, although hints of development persist in economic discourse, the rationality and the implications for people and nature have been transformed in the recent decade. Nature has become an economic resource to be marketed nationally and internationally. Within this context, while Prime Minister, Erdoğan, declared, "We do not want a single creek to be wasted," echoing the classic Lockean lament over "wasted" underexploited nature.

As these projects, as well as people's protests against them, multiply, the state's discourses and measures take extreme forms, calling villagers "anarchists," setting military and police forces on them, and subjecting them to lengthy trials. Hence, in the recent decade new outsiders are produced among those who resist neoliberal policies.

Although these projects are widespread, the projects in Dersim are interpreted differently due to a consciousness of history and the specific entanglements of previous movements with the newly burgeoning environmental concerns.[9] Dersim reveals the intersection of neoliberalism and management of outsiders on one hand, and the contradictions of recognition at the intersection of neoliberalism and historically established hegemony on the other. The projects in Dersim are composed of over twenty dams and hydroelectric power plants on the three major rivers, as well as the small streams and creeks all around the town. The project also involves part of the Munzur Valley, a national park that is protected under a special law. The park, as well as the valleys and mountains surrounding the other riverbeds, shelters hundreds of species of animals, plants, and flowers, some of which are endemic to this region. Although these projects have similar implications elsewhere, the extent of those in Dersim, including the inundation of the town center, threatens the whole population and livelihood of the town. The dam project does not only destroy the natural habitat, but also constitute a threat to the religious and cultural

[7] For an analysis of Özal's legacy in Turkish politics, see Öniş (2004). For contradictions between populist tendencies and neoliberal economic policies of the AKP see, for instance, Patton (2006).

[8] In most of the projects in Dersim this period is about 50 years.

[9] Ronayne (2005) is now 10 years old, but documents the environmental and social impacts of proposed dam projects, as well as local concerns, in Dersim.

practices of the people, which are intimately related to nature and landscape. Although some people, especially those who had suffered earlier village displacements and were cut off from the landscape, initially perceived dams as an economic opportunity, they later began to oppose the dams, especially after the first inundation of villages and neighborhoods in 2009. The biggest rally after the inundation in 2009 was attended by approximately thirty thousand people among a total population of less than one hundred thousand, most of whom live in remote districts and villages.

During fieldwork, which began after this rally in 2009, one of us came across multiple discussions, rallies, and everyday conversations where people refer to the dam project as the "domestication of the river, as well as the people," "a threat against Dersim's identity," and the "state's attempts to kill Dersim." In rallies and public speeches, the dams are repeatedly associated with 1938. In the opening speech of the 2010 summer festival, one speaker said, "The dam projects are the final mission of the state to kill Dersim and its people, akin to what was intended in 1938."

These interpretations reveal that although the economic dimensions of these projects are not unique, cultural implications are shaped by specific entanglements of consciousness of history, movements, and the newly rising environmental discourses. Most people in Dersim, even those who are active in the leftist movements and emphasize capitalism in their political discourse, explain dam projects based on the history of Dersim and state violence. Ekber (49), for instance, considers himself socialist and uses terms such as "class" and "capitalism" in everyday discussions, gave his explanation:

These are not electricity or economic projects. All these are, you see, if the state could manage it, it would erase Dersim from the map. It would not want such a place to exist. It has tried this in the past and is trying again. Dersim has been a problem for it, with its history, its beliefs… Now it is trying to dig this place under water.

Ali Haydar (24), who spoke of "capitalism," the "system," and "capitalist companies" throughout the interview, in the last instance blamed the state:
Ali Haydar: And now, they are attacking our beautiful and pure geography with their bloody hands. They try to destroy us but we will fight.
Ozlem: Who are they?
Ali Haydar: Definitely the Turkish state.

One of the most illustrative examples of the analogy made between 1938 and contemporary dam projects is a frequently referenced misinterpretation of an archival document from the 1920s. In this document, a state officer suggested that the state should establish "block pools" in Dersim, which would facilitate the governing of its people. Since the suggestion involved the word "pool," most interpreted it as the building of dams. What the officer was suggesting instead was the resettlement of dispersed village populations into concentrated settlement areas, which he called "pools." As Portelli (1991) argues, misinterpretation suggests more

than false knowledge. It shows us the ways people relate the present and past within a consciousness of history in which the state is repressive.

In these discussions, 1938 is used to emphasize the severity of the impact of these projects, and a history of repression and its implications for the present and future, as well as to call attention to the role of identity in both cases. Many of those who associated the two processes often said that the dam projects, the "second '38," were actually worse than the first. The reasons were multiple and related to the role of the Munzur River in the beliefs and practices of the people. Ali (33), for instance, said, "Munzur River symbolizes the freedom of the people here. If they capture it, they would capture the people." Similarly, a pamphlet for the summer festival reads, "Munzur is our history and future." Most people and rallies emphasize the religious/spiritual value of Munzur River through the holy places on the rivers, where people worship and pray.

Even grandchildren who mention not having visited these places on their own emphasize the threats the dam projects present to Dersim's cultural and religious identity. The inundation of holy places, especially that of Gola Chetu, believed to be the site for Xızır, an important holy figure in Dersim's beliefs, triggers interpretations of the dam as a state attack on the identity of Dersim. If an interest in identity shapes these discourses about the dams, the threats the dams actually present to these holy places further trigger an interest in identity. As such, the dam projects and especially the inundation of holy places in Dersim reveal the contradictions of recognition initiated by the state.

The resolution of one of the first law cases against the dam projects further illustrates this contradiction. Before dam waters inundated Gola Chetu, Barış, a lawyer activist, opened an official complaint case according to the law that protects homes of worship. His case was rejected on grounds of the "absence of a home of worship" in Gola Chetu. Since worship here takes place in nature, rather than in a human-made structure, the case was dismissed. This happened while the state was promising a "democratic opening" based on recognizing outsider groups such as Kurds and Alevis. Despite these discourses of democratization, recognition is bound by orthodoxy, which defines and accepts the other within the limits of its own imaginary. In other words, for difference to be recognized, it needs to be expressed through the categories of the insiders, which, in this case, involves a human-made holy structure.

The categorical significance of human-made structures produces a radical difference between the official treatment of the Alevi *cemevi*[10] and sacred natural places, exemplifying the necessity of a categorically definable identity and practice, and the limits neoliberalism imposes on recognition. Since 2009, for instance, Tunceli University, a state university whose president is known to be connected to the AKP, opened an Alevi Studies Center, as well as a Zazaki language course in its attempts to support "democratic opening." The Center also established close connections with the *cemevi* in Dersim. Although Alevi foundations' demands for a legal recognition of *cemevi* are still denied, the visits of the AKP officials to the *cemevi* is different from the previous periods when *cem* was considered a perverted

[10] The cem is an Alevi ceremony. A cemevi is where the cem takes place.

ceremony. However, unlike the *cemevi*, which, despite its difference and historically degraded character, can somehow be categorized as the tolerable other of the mosque, holy sites on the rivers and mountains are still considered an anomaly to the extent that they are outside of the boundaries of categorically defined religions.

A recognition of the sacredness of these places is further bounded by the reach of neoliberal economic policies. So far as Dersim's geography is opened for resource extraction, a recognition of identities based on place is limited. In other words, a rightful recognition of even those differences that cannot be categorized through the discourses of orthodoxy, such as the sacredness of Dersim's rivers, is secondary to the neoliberal economic concerns of a government that perceives nature without profit as waste.

Conclusion

It is possible to tell the story of contemporary dam projects and extractive industry in Dersim through accumulation by dispossession. The denial of protection for sacred sites along the Munzur River, for example, can be seen as a classic case of the drive for accumulation outweighing other concerns. Such a story would miss the historically constructed terrain of identities on which these struggles take place. The state is not simply indifferent to the qualitative significance of nature. It is actually hostile to it in a way that can only be understood in the larger historical context. Seeing state-enforced dispossession solely through the lens of accumulation misses this dynamic.

While we see the political payoff in linking together struggles against dispossession, the intelligibility and attractiveness of broader counter-hegemonic discourse is contingent on its capacity to address local concerns. In the case of Dersim, this requires attention to violence related to the construction and management of the nation state's insiders and outsiders. When natural resources are enclosed and redirected for the maintenance of Turkish military posts, for example, it is difficult for those under its watch to immediately identify with a narrative centered around a singular abstract global economic logic. Presumably, unique historical preconditions would exist and shape many other cases of dispossession.

One could err in the other direction, rejecting all attempts at broader counter-hegemonic movements as insensitive to local or specific identity-based concerns. This is precisely why we are unsatisfied with the qualification that some acts of dispossession are exceptions, as Harvey describes them, to the drive for accumulation. Instead of positing the norm (accumulation by dispossession) and then increasingly excluding instances of it as careful analysis shows them to be exceptional (dispossession not simply for accumulation), it seems more fruitful to include the exceptions. Practically speaking, it is hard to imagine dispossession not being mediated by extra-economic struggles. To the extent primitive accumulation involves the dependence of the supposedly self-sufficient logic of capitalism on extra-economic coercion, we should expect that this coercion does not act as a neutral tool in the hands of a meta-capitalist but as a shaper of dispossession itself.

Finally, while we have emphasized ways individuals experiencing dispossession understand their situation very differently than the literature on primitive accumulation describes, we are not suggesting the theory of primitive accumulation should be abandoned. We are concerned with the intelligibility and appeal of the theoretical literature because we think it has plenty to teach. A concrete example concerns remunerations for lost land. When a newspaper article quotes a government official saying that the dispossessed have been paid for their troubles, critical readers are unimpressed. How much? Is it enough to replace what was taken? If the land has qualitative importance, is anything enough? However, at a local level these remunerations are not simply sufficient or insufficient; they create distinctions between those who have received money and those who have not, motivating suspicion, accusation, and division. The traditional critique of primitive accumulation might be the strongest weapon against this. Marx repeatedly stressed that capital is not a thing, but a relationship, and primitive accumulation is not about getting lots of stuff, but about producing and securing specific relationships.[11] Whether the remunerations are insulting or relatively "fair" in a one-off exchange sense, a pile of cash to pay rent in your new apartment as you look for a job entitles a radically different set of relationships than those that were destroyed during dispossession.

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[11] Even here one might take issue with Harvey-influenced scholarship, which Bhattacharya has argued understands "primitive accumulation… more in terms of enrichment than separation. To the extent separation matters to this understanding, it matters as a means to enrichment. This is in sharp contrast to Marx's understanding, which I have argued, focuses on enrichment as a means to separation, where separation itself is understood in its class-transformative aspect. Theoretical positions leaning on the "enrichment" aspect tend to emphasize the redistributive role of primitive accumulation, rather than its class-transformative role" (2010, 57–58).

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