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ARTICLE

Subversive Celebrations: Holidays as Sites of Minority Identity Contestation in Repressive Regimes

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Abstract

What role do nationally celebrated holidays play for groups that are not considered—or do not consider themselves—to be part of the majority nation of a state? What function do holidays specific to minority group cultures serve under regimes that discriminate against those groups? This article explores holidays as a forum for contestation for the national identity proposals promulgated by the state in repressive regimes. We argue that national holidays are meaningful sites of identity contestation for four reasons: the role of holidays in heightening identity salience, the malleability of identity narratives, the relative lack of institutional barriers to acts of celebration, and the significance of refusing to participate in celebrations. We collected the data through interviews and participant observation of the Hui in China and the Kurds in Turkey. We employ ethnographic observation and intertextual analysis to compare these identity narratives. We find that the Hui legitimize their group's existence by co-opting the traditional Spring Festival, or by outwardly insisting they are not celebrating while still engaging in festivities. In contrast, Turkey's Kurds resist the government's co-optation of the spring celebration of Newroz as a Turkish national holiday.

Keywords: repressive regimes; identity contestation; holidays; Turkey; China

Introduction

Each year during the Spring Festival in China, or the Lunar New Year, top Chinese Communist Party leaders extend greetings to the populace. In 2019, President Xi Jinping sent greetings to "Chinese people of all ethnic groups" (*Xinhua* 2019). In 2014, Premier Li Keqiang stated that the holiday would enhance the unity of all Chinese people (An 2014). To observe whether there was any support for Li's statement, on January 31, 2014, the first day of the Spring Festival, one author went to a halal restaurant on Cow Street (*Niujie*) in southern Beijing. After sitting down at a popular restaurant with a bowl of lamb noodle soup, she engaged a group of men at the next table in conversation. When she asked one man why he and the others were not celebrating at their homes, he replied, "We are Hui. Today is not a holiday for us. I'm out with my friends." For a group of people that professed not to be celebrating anything, the atmosphere certainly seemed festive, as the restaurant was about as crowded as it was during Eid al-Adha, or Festival of the Sacrifice. The group's response was surprising in the sense that their actions seemed to contravene the party-state's profession that this holiday is unifying. If anything, their actions suggested a deeper entrenchment of differences. What does this holiday behavior say about how the Hui view themselves vis-à-vis their Han counterparts?

More broadly, what can scholars learn about forms of identity contestation and resistance by minority groups in repressive regimes from the way they approach holidays? An anecdote demonstrating the resistance of Turkey's Kurds to the co-optation of what they perceive to be an

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indigenous spring festival by the Turkish state further illustrates the relevance of non-state-sanctioned celebrations. On March 12, 2012, the leadership of Turkey's Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi, BDP) declared that the celebration of *Newroz*, the Kurdish version of a holiday claimed as indigenous by various ethnic groups across the Middle East and Asia, would begin on March 18th (*Yüksekova Güncel* 2012) in Istanbul and Diyarbakır. Celebrating on this date in the two largest Kurdish-populated cities in Turkey defied state orders, which mandated that the national celebration of what it termed *Nevruz* was only allowed on March 21.[1] The Kurdish spelling of the holiday with the letter *w*, banned along with *x* and *q* as part of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's nation-building project of Turkification (Zeydanlıoğlu 2012), also signified resistance against state practices through an assertion of the holiday as Kurdish.[2] Engaging in Newroz festivities on March 18 thus constituted an affront to the state and nationalist Turks, particularly as that day marked the anniversary of Turkish forces' victory in the Battle of Gallipoli—a campaign led by Atatürk himself.[3] As indication of the state's objections, organizers of a Newroz celebration planned for March 20 in the largely Kurdish province of Şanlıurfa received notification that their activities needed to be postponed until the state-sanctioned day due to "foreseen problems [...] with national security and public order, public health and morals, and the protection of others' rights and freedoms" (Derneği 2012). Kurds undeterred from celebrating were targeted by Turkish police with tear gas and water cannons; at least one participant was killed, 178 were injured, and over 1,000 were detained by police (Korkmaz 2012). Why did Kurds risk injury and punishment to celebrate a holiday outside of the day determined by the state? What is the significance of the timing, and the name, of Newroz/Nevruz?

To answer these questions, we frame the form of observance of national holidays as an under-explored avenue of inquiry into minority groups' politics of protest in repressive regimes. By repressive, we mean authoritarian or hybrid regimes that severely restrict opposition or engage in violence against threats to their rule.[4] In examining holidays and the significance of how they are or are not observed, we focus on the individual and collective agencies of minority groups. We argue that holidays are particularly effective sites of identity contestation through forms of celebration determined by citizens in defiance of the state as a method of reconstituting and reinforcing minority group identity. In doing so we delineate a particular set of oppositional actors, identifying the specific ways in which minority groups assert and sustain constitutive identity practices. We introduce the term *identity ownership* to characterize the behavior we observe and utilize the two cases introduced above as empirical windows into two varied forms of identity ownership. Whereas many Hui co-opt the Chinese holiday to suit their own purposes, many of Turkey's Kurds resist the co-optation and Turkification of Newroz into Nevruz. The variation that is instructive here involves the perceived provenance of the state holiday. Specifically, whereas Hui reinterpretations of Han Chinese celebrations of the Spring Festival stem from the belief that the state tradition is not indigenous to Hui culture, Kurdish rejections of Nevruz festivities represent frustration with the Turkish state's attempt to present this spring festival as indigenous to a homogenous understanding of Turkishness.

Cases and Data Collection

The cases of China and Turkey demonstrate the ability and willingness of minorities to challenge national narratives of belonging even in repressive regimes. Although China and Turkey clearly differ in terms of their degree and institutions of repressive rule, both currently fit into forms of authoritarianism widely accepted by scholars.[5] China's one-party state is by definition authoritarian in terms of prohibiting competition (Manion 2014). In addition, the Chinese party-state restricts political organization and is currently deploying a sprawling surveillance system in cyberspace designed to both monitor and coerce its population (Qiang 2019).

Turkey's regime, frequently classified as competitive authoritarian (Özbudun 2015; Esen and Gümüşçü 2016; Bieber 2018), requires a bit more elaboration. Although many observers welcomed

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initial signs of democratization following the Justice and Development Party's (AKP) ascent to power in 2002, under later terms of AKP rule Turkey regressed significantly along Tilly's (2007) de-democratization path. At the time of writing, the AKP has been in power for 18 years with a highly consolidated presidency. Turkey is the leading jailer of journalists (along with mass arrests of lawyers, academics, civil servants, and many others), and the AKP controls or influences over 90% of the media through complex business ties with massive holding groups (Tremblay 2019). Peaceful opposition to AKP rule, manifested most clearly in the 2013 Gezi Park protests, is often met with violence and arrests. This is particularly the case for Turkey's Kurds and their supporters. As Atak and Bayram demonstrate (2017), pro-Kurdish events are more likely to encounter police action, and with more repressive force, than non-Kurdish events.

Taking up this question of minority group status, state narratives of national identity in both China and Turkey limit the public expression of minority identity with the groups under study here. In China, it is incorrect to label the Hui as Chinese who happen to be Muslim. They maintain a distinctive, non-Chinese identity and culture, notably using written and spoken Arabic and Persian within their communities (Dillon 1999). Recently, Hui religious culture has come under attack, with vague yet frenzied accusations that both Xinjiang and Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region were becoming increasingly "Arabized" (Wai 2016). While repression of the Uyghurs is more overt and has received more attention, the Hui also resist homogenization, making them an appropriate case.

In Turkey, previous regimes' linguistic and territory-based understandings of Turkishness viewed Kurdish and other minority ethnicities as inherently separatist and therefore dangerous, a remnant of founders' experiences with ethnic nationalism in the Balkan Wars (Hintz 2018). The ruling AKP's Sunni-based view of national identity, in contrast, sees non-Sunni Alevis, who make up a substantial portion of Turkey's Kurds (van Bruinessen 1996), as Others. Further, although the AKP's Sunni orientation does not preclude the public expression of Kurdish identity per se, the military's continued influence on politics until the late 2000s left little room for aggressive outreach to Kurds. Similarly, the July 2015 reinitiation of the conflict between the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the state following a ceasefire, and the AKP's concurrent turn to a highly nationalist stance in policy and rhetoric, constricted the space for public expression of Kurdish identity. Finally, both China's Hui and Turkey's Kurds experienced severe treatment via homogenizing policies of nation building that explicitly excluded them from the state-promulgated narrative, while punishing expressions of these identities through language use, religious practice, and other publicly identifiable behaviors. These forms of repression fostered sentiments of resistance among members of each group that are well documented (on China see Atwill 2003; Chuah 2004; Garcia 2016; on Turkey's Kurds see Watts 2010; Tezcür 2015).

Before proceeding, we explicitly acknowledge the diversity within China's Hui and Turkey's Kurdish groups—indeed, within Kurds alone there are linguistic, religious, tribal, ideological, political, and of course transnational differences, as Kurds' territorial concentration spans not only Turkey but also Syria, Iran, and Iraq (Ünver 2016). We deliberately reject treatment of these groups as monoliths on normative as well as analytical grounds. As is well documented, and reinforced through conflicting positions related in interviews as discussed below, some Kurds' geographical understanding of group identity leads them to pursue independence, while others have alternative understandings of space that orient them toward internationalist solidarity untethered to state belonging; for others still it is a complex mixture of both (Gambetti 2009; Öcalan 2007). In researching what it means to be a Hui in the Chinese nation-state, Gladney found it difficult to determine what would constitute a typical Hui. His fieldwork in four Hui communities throughout China yielded different foundations for Hui identity (Gladney 1991). However, the collective behaviors of many members of Hui and Kurdish groups exhibit patterns of resistance around holidays that, in their own words, challenge the state narrative and thus are worthy of inquiry as a form of contentious politics.[6]

On data collection, our analysis draws on ethnographic observation and interviews conducted largely in Mandarin and Turkish between September 2013 and July 2015 in China and March 2013

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and August 2016 in Turkey, respectively. We supplement this fieldwork with more recent analysis of news and social media material content written by and about Hui and Kurdish behavior during spring festivals. Finally, we analyze news and social media content reflecting regime policies toward these groups produced by outlets controlled or influenced by the Chinese and Turkish regimes.

Situating the Argument: Holidays as Sites of Minority Contestation

This section briefly explores the literature on the contentious politics of repressive regimes, to which we then contribute our concept of identity ownership practiced by minority groups around national holidays. To begin by highlighting individual agency within these groups, Scott's "weapons of the weak" (1985) provides a useful guide for conceptualizing how individuals with limited recourse to feasibly costless protest nonetheless exhibit resistance. His examples of relatively costless protest by Malaysian peasants, such as nicknaming and petty vandalism, generate a means of symbolically eroding the power of village elites and of boosting the morale of peasants. While critical scholars usefully problematize the ability of individuals studied to know with certainty their own motivations for behavior (Wedeen 1999; Yurchak 2006; Rolf 2013; Koch 2018)—and thus the capacity of researchers to discern what Scott's "hidden transcripts" (1985) may really be telling them—we do not discard the concept of everyday, sometimes quite subtle, acts of resistance. In brief, while not all resistance is oppositional vis-à-vis the state as Mitchell (1990) rightly asserts, the collective acts of defiance we identify here are framed as such in our subjects' own words. While it is possible that their motivations are "mundane" and "ambiguous" (Wedeen 1999), inconstant and even self-contradictory, for the purposes of this article we frame minority groups' identity ownership on holidays—practices that challenges their states' narratives of appropriately behaved citizens—as simultaneously oppositional to the state and constitutive of the group.

While mindfully incorporating Scott's insights on everyday resistance in repressive regimes, we also build on Johnston's work on "small contention" (2006) and "creative" opposition (2012). Developed to understand how protests in authoritarian contexts "scale up" from "small" coffee-house or noodle house bickering to large-scale demonstrations, this treatment of seemingly "unobtrusive and ubiquitous" practices usefully identifies nontraditional sites of claim making in which actors express opposition to regime narratives, assert agency, and, in some cases, create space for change (Johnston 2012, 62).[7] Johnston illustrates how the seizure of official events, sports matches, and concerts by opposition actors can serve as an upward shift in the scale of their contention, as well as a sign to other potential dissenters—what can be seen as a revelation of preferences that Kuran (1991) argues individuals falsify in climates of fear. In this vein, Beissinger analyzes the "orgy of nationalist expression" generated by the incorporation of Estonian themes into Tallinn's officially sanctioned annual song festival in 1988 (2002, 172). The event sparked the so-called Singing Revolution, which served to articulate a (renewed) sense of oppositional national identity that resonated in waves through other Baltic countries and eventually led to the Soviet republics' secession. Similarly taking on the spillover effects of other nontraditional sites of protest, Tarrow (1998, 36) argues that the public expression and collective recognition of grievances at funerals can catalyze protests in repressive regimes under which individuals generally do not mobilize. Scholars of the Middle East provide evidence of this, underscoring the blurriness of lines between state-sanctioned and nonsanctioned mobilization in their analysis of Friday prayers as sites of collective grievance articulation and action (Schwedler 2005; Wyrtzen 2013; Butt 2016).

Within the broader category of scaled-up larger events Johnston discusses, national holiday celebrations provide predetermined public occasions ripe for the seizure he outlines. What Johnston does not note, however, is that they also carry symbolic discourses of inclusion and exclusion that make them particularly powerful sites of contestation by minority groups. Specifically, while the occasions and practices of states' holiday celebration differ widely, from independence days in former colonial territories to religious holidays in Muslim-majority countries, each form of festivity can raise questions of belonging for minority groups. Despite their potentially

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powerful role as a sire of identity contestation, holidays receive relatively little attention in the relevant political science literature, with Wedeen (1999, 2008) an outstanding exception. Fortunately, expanding the scope to interdisciplinary studies of citizens' behavior vis-à-vis the state around celebrations provides rich insight into the benefits to be reaped by considering cultural practices as text. In considering how to carve a space for examining the specific dynamics of minority groups' use of holidays as sites of contestation, we group this interdisciplinary literature in three major categories.

The first set of arguments focuses on the state's efforts to shape people's internal realities by altering both space and time (Ozouf 1988; Rolf 2000). For example, from Louis XIV to Napoleon, Shusterman (2010, 6–7) shows that French holiday celebrations were largely about control over how people spent their time. Specifically, attacks on Catholicism led to the adoption of the Republican calendar, signifying a reduction of religious holidays to just four per year. In one respect, this literature can explain the Chinese context: by mandating a period of time off for the Spring Festival and not for ethnic minority holidays, the state reinforces a specifically defined Chinese identity through the use of time. That the Hui respond in a variety of ways—including choosing to participate, ignoring the holiday, and creating their own celebration—suggests that this literature, while demonstrating how the state controls time, does not explain why and whether people accept that control. Similarly, the resistance of Turkey's Kurds against pressures to abandon their identity en masse, from state-enforced migration away from their homeland to regulations on Kurds' celebration of "their" spring festival, suggests these studies of holidays leave unanswered the questions of which groups push back against these holiday-targeted efforts and how they do so.

The second set of arguments on holidays center around identity creation through nation building, defined as constituting boundaries of who belongs (Us) and who does not (Them) as well as delimiting appropriate and inappropriate behavior for group members (Hintz 2018). The content of a nation can be broadly defined, celebrating multiculturalism and mutual tolerance (Svet 2013). As Koch argues (2016), for example, even Gulf states traditionally treated as ethnocracies engage in civic nationalism-building National Day celebrations aimed at disseminating inclusive narratives to their noncitizens. More frequently, however, the content disseminated on holidays as nation building is particular to an ethnically or linguistically defined cultural group and its own historical experiences (Perry 2005; Adams 2010). Furthermore, nation-building events can involve constitutive acts of becoming meant to inculcate a particular mindset through participation and performance (Lane 1981; Petrone 2000; Chatterjee 2002; Perry 2005). Özyürek's 2006 study of the privatization of the Republic's ideology in Turkish citizens' domestic spaces and practices demonstrates the state's attempt to disseminate its version of Turkishness through public participation, but it suggests an important factor on which we build here. Analyzing the performative ritual of the Republic Day march each October 29 from the first parliament in Ulus to Anıtkabir (Atatürk's mausoleum) surrounded by chants of "Turkey is secular and will remain secular!" (*Türkiye laiktir, laik kalacak!*), Özyürek notes that the parade raises debates among participants about how best to celebrate and even protect Turkishness—a dynamic we experienced quite starkly while observing the 2012 march—but focuses the state's goal of imprinting a circumscribed understanding of model Turkish behavior for citizens. Picking up and expanding upon the contention observed in these debates, we turn the focus to those who, in a variety of forms, challenge the nation-building narratives disseminated by states on holidays.

The final set of arguments examine how states use holidays to bolster their legitimacy (von Geldern 1993; Podeh 2010). Such celebrations might take a bread-and-circus form, with tangible handouts accompanied by entertainment, or may seek to display the might, grandeur, or modernity of a regime. Wedeen, for example, shows how the Yemeni regime "made an extraordinary effort to be an effective state" during the festivities celebrating the tenth anniversary of Yemen's reunification, doing "*whatever* was necessary" to project the image of a modern and well-functioning state (2008, 82). Again, however, the focus remains largely on the regime and the nation building that takes place among citizens who participate in the events it sponsors. While highly useful, we seek to

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add to this literature on celebrations and state-society relations by exploring two cases in which minority groups use holidays in very different ways to assert an identity counter to the one their state promotes. Thus, our study contributes by facilitating a deeper understanding of how holidays function as a site of effective and, in some cases, relatively costless contestation for minority groups in repressive regimes.

To achieve this, we specify three ways in which holidays serve as meaningful sites for minority groups to challenge the understanding of national identity promulgated by their respective state. First, holidays serve as a focal point in heightening identity salience. The annual occurrence of a holiday on a specific date focuses citizens' awareness of when they are meant to be celebrating along with fellow citizens as an act of civic belonging. Entrenched practices of days off work and school to participate in parades, customary celebrations and meals, and other traditions commemorating historical events provide specific forms of behavior in which members engage as part of (per) forming their identity. On any given independence day, for example, nation-state identity increases in salience for those dressing in colors of their flag, singing patriotic songs, and preparing and consuming dishes previous generations did on the same day in the past. Although nation-building institutions such as education systems (Kaplan 2006) and museums (Anderson 1991) serve to perpetuate these practices, the content can be disputed. This study thus focuses on those whose customs and histories are excluded and even denied by state celebrations; China's Hui and Turkey's Kurds serve as useful cases in this regard.

Also important is recognizing that some identity groups' calendars vary in line with certain conditions. The Muslim festival of the Feast of Sacrifice—Eid al-Adha in Arabic, Kurban Bayramı in Turkish—for example, occurs in line with the Islamic lunar calendar. This means that state and religious holidays can occasionally coincide and thus produce dynamics of contestation. Both the Chinese and Turkish cases demonstrate this dynamic. In China, the Feast of the Sacrifice and the October 1 National Day coincided in 2014. At the time, Xiao Jie, a Hui college student in Beijing, stated that she was returning home for National Day, but shortly thereafter she pointed out that she was in the enviable position of being able to celebrate the Feast of the Sacrifice with her family (Jie 2014). Here, there was some ambiguity as to whether Xiao Jie viewed her identity as first Chinese and then Hui. In Turkey, Turkish citizens clashed over which holiday deserved more attention, as the Feast of Sacrifice and Republic Day (Cumhuriyet Bayramı) nearly coincided on October 29, 2012. With societal tensions already brewing under the rule of the Islamist-rooted AKP, the occurrence of the two holidays heightened the salience of this identity divide, prompting Turks to ask which holiday a proper Turkish citizen prioritizes (participants in a holiday march in Ankara, personal communication, 2012).

Second, holidays serve as an effective site of identity contestation because of the relative lack of institutional barriers to private and small-scale celebration. Public forms of protest against repressive regimes are often met with violent responses, from the tear gas and water cannons of Turkey's Gezi Park protests to the tanks of China's Tiananmen Square massacre. While the Kurds celebrating Newroz also faced harsh responses, security forces generally disrupted only the largest gatherings in the most central locations. Individuals celebrating in villages and in cities outside of large public squares faced little to no punishment.[8] These private or semiprivate celebrations are forms of engaging in the low-cost action Scott describes. Doing so strengthens the morale and group identity of the protesters while symbolically eroding the repressive institution's power. Further, the focal point factor noted above entailed that many individuals would participate in celebrations on the date Kurdish leaders designated as official, reducing the opportunity costs normally involved in protesters' calculations of whether to join. In the Chinese case, the halal restaurant described earlier remained open for business on the first day of the Spring Festival. The state did not order any of the businesses to close in observance of the holiday, thus allowing Muslim minorities the freedom to participate or not participate.

Finally, we focus on holidays because of the flexibility individuals have in choosing how, and whether, they observe the date of celebration. Here, we highlight the significance of the rituals

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people do not perform and those they do. Related to the argument regarding few institutional barriers, it is also difficult to punish citizens for not observing a national holiday. While states could deploy patrol units to ensure that people are celebrating, many regimes calculate that selective repression is more efficient.[9] Thus, an opportunity exists for individuals and groups to resist by not celebrating or by celebrating in a way that explicitly or implicitly contravenes the national narrative. To return to the examples above, both the Hui men eating in a restaurant rather than observing the Spring Festival with family at home and the Kurds celebrating Newroz outside the date designated by the state engage in identity contestation.

We demonstrate how these and other acts constitute a practice we term identity ownership. National holidays can invigorate patriotic sentiment through parades and performances, but these celebrations also expose and exacerbate differences for those who feel excluded from the state's narrative. For minority groups targeted with what Brubaker (1996) calls nationalizing policies to assimilate or eradicate difference in the name of national cohesion, these holidays commemorate the very institutions that dominate them. This dominance produces collective pushback in the form of identity ownership. Specifically, by deviating from state tradition, these groups express their refusal to celebrate a holiday in a manner that negates or marginalizes their own identity. In engaging in individual and collective acts of rebellion centered on national holidays, minority citizens reconstitute and reinforce their group identity in opposition to the state.

"Have It Your Way": Hui Ownership Practices in the Spring Festival

Our first case study examines the Hui, China's third largest ethnic group. The Hui are a Muslim minority, with the greatest concentrations of the population living in western China and additional dense enclaves in Hebei and Henan provinces in central China and Shandong in the east.[10] They are thought to have descended from Persian and Arab traders along the Silk Road, and there are Hui in contemporary Chinese society who still cite this common ancestry to emphasize commonality among members (Lipman 2004, 25). Nonetheless, other evidence suggests diversity within the group. Dillon (2013, 8) writes that it is unclear whether the term Hui describes the ancestors of those who call themselves Hui today, as there were times when Hui was used as a catchall term to describe Muslims in China.

With relevance to the present study, Lipman (2004, 22) suggests a key commonality of the Hui: they have successfully adjusted to local society while still maintaining their own customs and habits. Thus, the Hui are the same and yet different—all at the same time. This finding has important implications for this study. Engaging in activities that mark the Spring Festival is one way in which the Hui adapt to local communities. As the Han majority are celebrating, the Hui, whether to protect relationships with colleagues or to fill their free time, find some way to acknowledge the festival (Peng 2013 and Jie 2015). This behavior is distinctly different from that of individuals in other Muslim minority groups. Most Uyghurs, for example, ignore the festival entirely. Yet the Hui take ownership of the Spring Festival, engaging in activities that either reflect their Muslim identity or are purposefully different from traditional New Year customs. In this sense, they maintain an identity separate from that of the Han.

Celebrating Holidays in China

How the Hui view the Spring Festival is one important way in which they depart from the Han majority. Formal interviews and informal conversations with Hui in Beijing indicated that they regard Eid al-Adha and Eid al-Fitr as their most important holidays. Ma Taitai,[11] when asked whether she considered the Spring Festival to be a major holiday, reported, "Well, we are off, but today isn't nearly as important a holiday as some of our other ones" (Ma 2014). Xiao Luo, a Hui man in his early 40s from Xinjiang, when asked whether January 31, 2014, was a holiday, remarked, "Not for us. We Muslims don't have a new year. For us, the most important holidays are Qurban and Eid al-Fitr" (Luo 2014).

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The above demonstrates how holidays heighten identity salience. The mere mention of the Spring Festival was an opportunity for these Hui to demonstrate their differences from the Han despite having a similar appearance and having adapted to the local community. In addition, they used the Spring Festival to highlight their most important celebrations, emphasizing a contrast between "us" and "them." Although the Hui have found ways to integrate themselves into their local communities, making clear that the Spring Festival is not significant to them is one way in which they break with the majority.

Identity salience is also significant concerning the holiday period itself. Viewing Qurban and Eid al-Fitr as the most important celebrations has implications in a state that considers the Spring Festival so important that the state officially designates seven days off (Dezan Shira and Associates 2019). Small shop owners and students will leave large cities for close to two months to return home. All people in China, regardless of ethnicity, have this mandated period off, leaving a percentage of the population, however small, wondering how to spend this festival that has no meaning for them. Just having this time off, then, is a reminder to the Hui that they are different.

One might argue that the circumstances described here are akin to the Christmas holiday in multicultural Western societies. Many students in the United States return home at the end of December whether they celebrate Christmas or not. There is a marked difference, however. While ethnic minorities in China by law can take time for their own holiday celebrations, the reality is much more mixed. For those in Inner China, particularly Muslims, taking time off for holidays is a more difficult matter.[12] Ma Lili, a Chinese-language teacher in Beijing, reported that her immediate supervisor, an American, told her that if someone was willing to substitute teach her classes, she was free to celebrate (Ma 2013). Xiao Wang, a Hui journalist working in Beijing, explained that his situation was entirely different. When asked whether he could request time off for holidays, he responded, "There's sick leave that I could take, but nothing for holidays. We were short of people on my team… There could be no replacement for me" (Wang 2013). Furthermore, unless the holiday happens to coincide with a sanctioned Chinese holiday, students have no way to return home.

The above discussion draws attention to identity salience in addition to paving the way for the Hui to take ownership of the Spring Festival. A key part of identity salience is that the Han and the Hui mark time in different ways. When the Hui struggle to find ways to celebrate their own holidays and are given time off for a festival that is essentially meaningless to them, there is a heightened awareness of not belonging to the majority. Thus, Xiao Wang's inability to take time off for Qurban and Eid al-Fitr is more than just a matter of workplace policies—it is identity politics in practice where the majority ethnic group makes the rules, and minorities are expected to follow. The "Circular about Public Holiday Arrangement" from China's General Office of the State Council makes this point. While all the holidays most relevant to the Han majority are listed with the designated days off, no mention is made of any ethnic minority holidays (Dezan Shira and Associates 2019). These circumstances thus open the possibility for the Hui to make purposeful adjustments to a holiday that carries no significant meaning for them.

A brief overview of Spring Festival customs as the Han understand them will illuminate Hui behavior, thus allowing for a meaningful comparison. Customs and traditions, though, will vary among families. People's location can determine what they will eat. In addition, different relatives may be present at different parts of the celebration. In general, however, the following pattern emerged from the interviews. Families gather on the eve of the New Year (*chuxi*) and have a large meal (*tuanyuanfan*). While it used to be a time-honored tradition to watch the New Year's Gala (*chunwan*) as a family at 8:00 p.m., many people now have the program on as background noise. At midnight, people set off fireworks to welcome the New Year and then eat dumplings. For the next two weeks, family and friends gather at one another's homes. The Spring Festival culminates two weeks after the first day of the New Year (*chuyi*) with the Lantern Festival (*yuanxiaojie*). As this brief description demonstrates, spending time with family at home is the cornerstone of the festival.

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Year of the Horse 2014 in the Cow Street Neighborhood

The previous description serves as a baseline against which to compare how the Hui mark the Spring Festival. The following narrative and analysis is based on observations made in Beijing on January 31, 2014. The first and most obvious difference was the physical environment. The streets that came just ahead of Cow Street were deserted, strewn with remnants of firecrackers from the night before. The sidewalk was littered with small red streamers and pinkish powder, firework residue.

Around the corner, the scenery changed entirely. Several feet before Cow Street's entrance, restaurants were shuttered and closed, but on the main street, all remained open. Just glancing inside, one could see that all the tables were filled with patrons. Along the street itself, two women clad in white coats cut large slices of chestnut cake and wrapped small glutinous rice cakes filled with red bean and rolled in powdered sugar (*ai wowo*). Other vendors sold Uyghur flat bread (*nan*), deep-fried dough coils (*sangza*), deep fried pastries coated in honey (*tang erduo*), and braided ropes of fried dough coated with sesame seeds. The contrast with other parts of the city was striking: this street was busier than during non-holiday periods.

This street scene demonstrates the lack of institutional barriers to choosing to celebrate or not celebrate and the flexibility afforded to ethnic minorities during holidays. The street and the businesses were not closed by government order. Although most businesses throughout Beijing chose to close several weeks before the first day of the Spring Festival, those choices were left to the individual. The simple act of the state not interfering in whether streets and businesses were permitted to remain open thus creates space for the Hui to assume ownership of the Spring Festival in a way that suits how they understand themselves.

The food items sold on Cow Street during the 2014 Spring Festival drew considerable attention to ethnic differences. At many Lunar New Year festivals, pork is one of the main meats served. Yet the Hui do not consume pork. Thus, as described above, their festival observations featured lamb, other halal meat pastries, and halal versions of Old Beijing specialties. The Hui created their own celebration with foods that held meaning for them. Regarding flexibility, one reason they were able to do so was that it is nearly impossible to force them to conform to Han Chinese traditional foods in private settings.[13]

This description is significant in that the contrast with tradition is already evident even before engaging in conversation with the Hui. The first day of the Spring Festival is not, at least not traditionally and still not for many people, a time for shopping, eating at restaurants, and patronizing local businesses. This holiday is centered around the family and the home. Given the lively atmosphere on the street, it was clear that traditional attitudes toward the Spring Festival were absent from this location. This description, then, illustrates the significance of not participating in traditional holiday activities.

It is perhaps more difficult to argue that the crowded restaurants signify that the Hui are creating their own holiday. Although the Han traditionally gather at home for the main meal, more families are now opting to celebrate at restaurants given the intense preparation labor. One might point out, then, that it is not significant that the Hui would choose to do the same. It is possible, however, that the Hui we spoke to were not necessarily aware of what individual Han families choose to do but rather that they were reacting to the traditional aspects of the holiday of which they were aware. To return to the anecdote at the beginning of the study, when the young man answered one author's question, he directly addressed that author's point about not being at home for the holiday, suggesting that being at home was the way he understood how the Han celebrate the Spring Festival.

Identity Ownership: To Celebrate or Not to Celebrate?

The ethnographic data presented above suggests that there is an ambiguity to how the Hui celebrate the Spring Festival. On the one hand, the liveliness of the Cow Street neighborhood implies that a celebration was under way, yet at the same time, other Hui did not understand their actions as

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celebratory. Interviews conducted in Beijing uncovered this same ambiguity. In general, respondents fell into three categories concerning how they viewed the Spring Festival: those who celebrate, those who do not, and those who take an ambiguous position.

Xiao Liu, a 26-year-old graduate student, is the clearest example of someone who celebrates. He reported that he returns home to Henan Province during the festival, as he has so few opportunities to visit family. Consistent with Han understandings of the holiday, he brought gifts for both his parents and grandparents, partook in special foods, and had the Spring Festival Gala on television. While he pointed out that the Spring Festival was not as important as Muslim holidays, as a Chinese he would "celebrate the number one holiday," as he phrased it (Liu 2013).

At the other extreme is Xiao Peng, a graduate student in his 20s. When asked whether he celebrated the Spring Festival, he responded, "No, where I'm from, Hui don't celebrate the Spring Festival" (Peng 2013). Still others fall between the two extremes, less clear about whether they recognize the festival. One example is Xiao Gong, a 22-year-old undergraduate. He reported that while he will attend celebrations, his family does not set off fireworks and does not gift children with the traditional monetary present (*yasui qian*). He continued to say that his family still gathers in the same way a Han family would gather but that there is a lack of celebratory feeling. He then remarked that he was not sure whether what he just described counted as a celebration or not (Gong 2014). Xiao Jie, a 23-year-old college senior, also illustrated an ambiguous attitude toward the Spring Festival when she remarked, "On the outside, it looks like a holiday, it looks like we're celebrating something, but in our hearts, we aren't" (Jie 2014). In the cases of Hui who hold an ambiguous attitude toward the Spring Festival, they still assert their own form of observation, whether or not they call their actions observation.

Perhaps the best example of ambiguity is Ma Lili, a 33-year-old Mandarin Chinese language instructor. When asked whether she celebrates, she responded, "We celebrate the Spring Festival, but it's not really celebrating it […] We just create our own holiday" (Ma 2013). After some further discussion, Ma Lili elaborated upon what she meant by "creating a holiday." Her family does not decorate their home, does not set off fireworks, and does not eat the traditional dumplings. Rather, her family prepares noodles, goes to the local flower market, and plans a day trip to Tianjin, a port city approximately 70 miles from Beijing. Ma stated her reason for these activities: "As Chinese […] we should do something. We are under the umbrella of 'Chinese,' so this holiday is something we've come to accept" (Ma 2013). When pressed further, Ma admitted that something else was also at work: "We are Hui and don't celebrate your holiday" (Ma 2014).

What the above ethnographic data and interviews demonstrate is that members of the Hui mark the time they have off by creating their own holiday. They engage in different customs or ascribe a different meaning, or no meaning, to customs that are similar to those of the Han. In so doing, the Hui reaffirm their own identity, one that is distinct and separate from the Han. In short, they have Spring Festival their way.

One might ask, however, if the Hui's repurposing of this holiday truly has any significance from the party-state's point of view. In the same way that the state does not forbid the opening of businesses and the consumption of lamb rather than traditional pork, it also does not mandate the observation of specific traditions. In this sense, whether the individuals here see themselves as observing the Spring Festival or not, from the state's perspective, they are doing just that. After all, a lively street scene, even when everyone else is with his or her families at home, can be taken as acknowledgement that something significant is happening.

From our close reading, Hui reinterpretation and ownership of the Spring Festival is not a substitute for politics; rather, it *is* politics. In addition, while the interviews and ethnographic fieldwork discussed above did not indicate participation in collective action, these hidden off-stage acts can be the impetus for such activities. What the party-state may view as outward compliance with the Spring Festival and the unity that Premier Li stated it represents masks deep-seated differences rooted in religious customs. Thus, rather than bring citizens of China together, the Spring Festival serves as the terrain to push the Han majority and the Hui further apart.

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"Step Off Our Turf": Turkification and Kurdish Ownership Practices in the Newroz Spring Festival

In turning our examination to the case of Turkey's Kurds, Newroz was long outlawed by the Turkish state. As part of homogenizing efforts to erase ethnic identifications believed to be secessionist in nature, Turkey forbade the public observation of Newroz along with other Kurdish cultural practices. Even the use of the letter *w*, present in the holiday's Kurdish name but absent from the Turkish language, was cause for punishment. Despite government warnings and crackdowns, Kurdish celebration of Newroz in Turkey continues, underlining our claim that there is a relative of lack of effective institutional barriers to celebrations. Indeed, the holiday has become an annual occasion for the rallying of Kurds to hear a statement from PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan, imprisoned since 1999 for terrorist activities against the Turkish state.

How has the celebration of this holiday persisted despite government attempts to suppress its public display? How does the act of celebrating this holiday shape beliefs held by Turkey's Kurds about their shared, distinct sense of Self? How have Kurds resisted attempts by the Turkish state to appropriate the holiday by, as Yanık rightly points out, inventing an indigenous Turkish tradition of Nevruz (2006, 285)? What specifically about Newroz celebrations helps in constructing what Aydın terms a counterhegemony against the Turkishness promulgated by the state (2013, 84)? The concept of identity ownership provides useful analytical leverage in exploring these questions in the case of Turkey's Kurds, while also extending the insight to other cases of minority identity contestation in repressive regimes.

Following the founding of the Republic of Turkey in 1923 and the failure to create an independent Kurdistan homeland, the Turkish state embarked upon a campaign to make all ethnic groups Turkish. As a legacy of the Ottoman Empire's *millet* system, by which society was divided and administered along religious lines and in which ethnic differences were not particularly salient, the modern Turkish Republic's minorities were religious ones; thus, although Kurds comprise roughly 15–20 million of Turkey's citizens, they are not officially recognized as a minority. Rather, the state's position produced versions of a crude narrative that Kurds were "mountain Turks" who had forgotten their Turkishness (Gunter 2010, 215).

The Turkification reforms carried out under Turkey's founder Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his Republican People's Party produced rebellions among the new country's Kurds. Sweeping measures aimed at creating a homogenous nation, as ethnicity was seen by Turkey's ruling elites to be inherently dangerous. Ottoman political and military elites watching territory being ripped from the empire through secession and irredentism developed a "dismemberment syndrome," which linked minority identity expression with territorial loss. Thus, to create a homogenous nation and eradicate so-called separatist (*bölücü*) ambitions, the state outlawed the Kurdish language, renamed towns, and forcibly resettled families. The brutal suppression of uprisings such as the Sheikh Said Rebellion and the Ağrı Rebellion, as well as the Dersim massacre of 1937–38 left tens of thousands of Kurds dead. In Turkey's military crackdown following the September 12, 1980, coup, thousands of Kurds and Kurdish sympathizers disappeared, were tortured, and killed. The 1990s are often referred to as the Lost Decade, as violence from both Turkish security forces and the PKK left politics hamstrung and Turkey's society polarized along ethnic lines. Kurds who were children and adolescents in the 1990s recount personal observations of security forces torturing Kurdish civilians in the streets, leaving them with the impression that the Turkish state and its founder deliberately discriminated against and targeted them (Güzeldere 2013). Although tensions between self-identifying Kurds and Turks eased somewhat during the 2012–2015 solution process (*çözüm süreci*) of negotiations between the PKK and the government, by the end of 2015 the switch to a "state-led anti-Kurdish discourse" was accompanied by quick escalation in intercommunal violence and renewed polarization (O'Connor and Baser 2018, 53).

Some, like Hüseyin,[14] a man is his 30s from Bingöl, believe the only way for Kurds to advance is to separate from what they view as an oppressive state that does not want them and join with Kurds in Syria, Iraq, and Iran. Hüseyin views the linguistic and cultural differences across these Kurds as

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little impediment to unity when compared with the Turkish-Kurdish divide he views as primordially rooted and institutionally exacerbated (Toprak 2016). Many other Kurds, however, see their past and future as inextricably tied with the Republic of Turkey. Mehmet, a man from Diyarbakır, also in his 30s, resents that people assume he is disloyal to Turkey because of his hometown in southeastern Turkey and his darker (*esmer*) skin complexion. He recalled being turned away from jobs, being told he has fewer rights to citizenship than new immigrants from Bosnia, and witnessing his son branded a PKK sympathizer (Oktar 2016). In brief, Kurds' views on their place in Turkey and their relations with Turks span the spectrum, from wanting to be separate to wanting to be equal.

Constructing Nevruz: State Co-optation as Turkification Strategy

In recognizing that the strategies of eradicating Kurdish identity were ineffective as well as costly, the Turkish state changed its tack. Part of this shift in policy toward Kurds involved a rethinking of the holiday celebrated by Kurds as integral to their sense of collective, and separate, existence (Aydın 2013). As a spring festival with contested Persian and Zoroastrian roots falling around March 21, Newroz has long been celebrated by Kurds with an annual gathering in Diyarbakır, the symbolic capital of Turkey's Kurds. Kurds traditionally observe the holiday by jumping over bonfires to express revival and rebirth, a myth that increasingly began to take on political tones with the oppressive policies of the Turkish state. The coming of spring and celebration of Newroz thus served as a focal point to display Kurdish identity symbols. Kurds' festivities, whether collectively in public squares or in smaller gatherings in private homes and cultural centers, demonstrate the relative lack of effective barriers to holiday celebrations. For example, as processes of internal migration changed Turkey's demographics—through a combination of identity-targeted forced migration, displacement due to conflict, and pursuit of better employment prospects (Çelik 2015)—observance of Newroz traveled from east to west as a way to sustain cultural ties, sometimes simply through the sharing of collective memories (Kaczorowski 2017). In sum, even when the observance of Newroz was banned, Kurds still used the holiday to reaffirm their identity as separate from the homogenizing Turkish state.

Recognizing the futility of its efforts to ban the celebration, in the 1990s the state made the decision to co-opt the festival, changing its name to the Turkish spelling Nevruz and "inventing" a history to legitimize the holiday's Turkishness (Yanık 2006, 287). Then Turkish Minister of Culture Namık Kemal Zeybek proclaimed Nevruz a national holiday to be celebrated every March 21 and linked the provenance of the festival to pre-Ottoman Central Asian and Anatolian roots, thus marginalizing its Kurdish character. The language used by Turkish political leaders was steeped in nationalism; then President Süleyman Demirel's 1996 Nevruz speech emphasized "brotherhood" and "unity," proclaiming, "There is no discrimination or separatism here" (*Cumhuriyet Gazetesi* 1996). In essence, the state attempted to claim the Newroz holiday as its own, denying Kurds their own form of observation that had historically allowed them to celebrate their uniqueness.

Identity Ownership: Staking a Claim to Newroz

Many Kurds, however, refused to accept the Turkish version. Unsurprisingly, the PKK announced that it did not recognize Nevruz. Pro-Kurdish newspapers condemned the government's action in "slowly emptying the contents" of the Newroz that Kurds "paid such a large price to create" before finally just "proclaiming [the holiday] a part of Turkishness" (*Özgür Gündem* 2012). Kurdish leaders mocked Turkish attempts to replicate traditional Newroz practices; one Kurd critiqued, "ridiculous scenes […] of officials in ill-fitting suits attempting to celebrate Newroz by jumping over tiny bonfires" (Sharma 2016). In one of his annual messages, Abdullah Öcalan declared that the state's Nevruz celebration represented "internal and external destructive forces aimed at the Kurdish people's existence" (*BBC Monitoring* 2004, as quoted in Yanık 2006). These acts of ridicule and resistance illustrate clear practices of identity ownership. For them, only Kurds know how to celebrate Newroz, and attempts to take the holiday away are affronts, and even threats, to their existence as a group.

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Despite the state's insistence on the Turkish and Central Asian heritage of the holiday, Kurds' observance continues to emphasize division and contestation against the suppression of their identity. Kurds annually mark the holiday by wearing traditional colors and waving banners praising Kurdish political movements. Öcalan's picture is ubiquitous at gatherings, and anti-state slogans, such as "We will win by resistance!" and "Long live Öcalan!" are frequently chanted in Kurdish (Cakan and Butler 2016). While the state has reinitiated its crackdowns on Newroz celebrations in the wake of the broken ceasefire in July 2015, millions of Kurds take advantage of March 21 as an opportunity to performatively enact the Kurdish proverb "berxwedan jiyani" (resistance is life; Colta 2017), in direct contrast to the state's efforts to co-opt the festival. In this sense, Kurds claim ownership of the celebration, refusing to allow the Turkish state to defuse and dilute the festival's Kurdishness. This highlights the flexibility in determining forms of holiday celebration; to celebrate outside of March 21 is to engage in a distinctly Kurdish practice of resistance and identity ownership. As Gourlay notes in an interview with a Kurd lamenting the absence of an officially recognized flag, "when other 'normal' national markers were absent," small forms of resistance like shopkeepers collectively closing down become acts in which "all can participate […] as a hallmark of Kurdish identity" (Gourlay 2018, 138). Similarly, determining the language in and date on which the spring festival is celebrated can be seen as a constitutive act of identity ownership as well as an act of resistance.

Timing here, as is said, is everything. Although in 2012 the Istanbul mayor's office refused to give permission for holiday activities to take place several days earlier, many Kurds engaged in public celebrations on March 18 and 19. Progovernment newspaper *Sabah*'s (2012) headline questioned the demonstrations' legitimacy by deeming them "pirate celebrations" carried out by those "who turned the city into a war zone." The daily's headline reinforced this, questioning, "What kind of Nevruz is this?" (Bu Nasıl Nevruz?). Pro-Kurdish venues, such as the now-shuttered *Taraf* and *Özgür Gündem*, lauded the fact that, even though the early celebration was outlawed, Newroz demonstrations took place in public arenas "all across Turkey" and criticized security forces' intervention they termed a "tear gas catastrophe" (*Bagımsız İletişim Ağı* 2012).

Newroz in 2013, however, marked a departure in the dynamics of Turkey's Kurdish question. PKK leader Öcalan used the occasion of Newroz to drastically change his public stance, calling for an end to conflict between Turks and Kurds and using unifying language embedded in Islam. That the founder of a Marxist-Leninist organization would use Muslim identity to frame nonethnic brotherhood at the annual celebration of Kurdishness speaks to both the importance of holidays as focal points and their flexibility regarding their celebration. His Newroz message, written in prison and read aloud in Turkish and Kurdish to a massive crowd in Diyarbakır, stated, "The Turkish people who live in what is called Turkey today—ancient Anatolia—should recognize that their *common life with the Kurds, under the flag of Islam*, rests on the principles of amity and solidarity" (YouTube video of speech 2013; emphasis added by author). Both the newly unifying tone and the incorporation of Islam as the binding factor reflected the PKK's negotiations with the AKP government during the 2012–2015 peace process (*çözüm süreci*). They also serve to underscore the flexibility of how holidays are celebrated, a plasticity that enabled Öcalan to rhetorically place Kurds in a context in which they should celebrate the development of more amicable relations with the state.

Taking It Back, Again: Reasserting Kurdish Ownership of Newroz as Identity Contestation

By the end of July 2015, however, the ceasefire had been broken by both parties. Following the AKP's victory in November 2015 snap elections, security and humanitarian conditions in Turkey's southeast quickly deteriorated. Prolonged sieges and 24-hour curfews led to civilian deaths from lack of water and food, access to healthcare, and sniper fire that entered homes. Thousands of Kurds were internally displaced, fleeing the violence in their own region. Despite these conditions, and in line with our theoretical assumptions about the importance of holidays as a focal point around which minority groups will assert their identities, Newroz in March 2016 served as a salient site of contestation.

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Kurds came to the streets to celebrate publicly, as an occasion for resurrection from and contestation against the state and its ruling AKP. The Kurdish-friendly HDP announced that it would proceed with its observance of the holiday, but that it would promote smaller-scale celebrations (Kamer 2016). This behavior aligns neatly with the idea that holidays constitute a relatively costless form of protest in repressive regimes and that celebration can be flexible, as individuals and collectives can alter their celebrations while still effectively shifting the symbolic balance of power that Scott discusses. The HDP also announced the dates and provinces in which the festival would be celebrated—March 17—22, beginning in Şırnak and ending in the sieged city of Cizre—thus symbolically and concretely taking back ownership of Newroz from the state in terms of the timing and locations of public demonstrations (*Evrensel* 2016). Even in the face of potential violence, Kurds continued to celebrate Newroz in their own way in subsequent years. In telling the Turkish state to "step off our turf," they display a collectively assertive form of minority identity ownership in a repressive regime.

Conclusion: Co-optation and Resistance as Identity Ownership

We conceptualize a politics of protest under repressive regimes that has been underexamined in the literature. We identify four elements of holidays that make them meaningful and effective sites for minority groups to express and reassert their collective existence. First, holidays are a focal point for questions of identity, evoking affective elements of commonality among the in-group who celebrates the holiday while, in some cases, generating the exclusion and even shaming of those who do not celebrate. Second, groups have significant flexibility in bending history to fit their own narratives. Third, we find a relative lack of effective institutional barriers to identity contestation through the celebration of minorities' own holiday narratives. Finally, we highlight the constitutive power of *not* celebrating in line with tradition, custom, or state mandate. Together, these elements function to constitute a relatively safe forum for the private and public expression of minority group identities, articulation and legitimation of their distinct sense of collectivity, and mobilization in rebellion against an unresponsive or, worse, violently responsive regime.

Thus, this study provides insights into a politics of protest understudied by scholars of repressive regimes and by experts on festivals. In the case of China's Hui minority, we see that the Spring Festival exposes differences in behavior between the Hui and the Han, raising the salience of ethnic and religious identity. One respondent's comment that Muslim holidays are the most important underscores the hierarchy of beliefs about belonging; for Hui, a key part of their identity is constituted by the relative importance of celebrating Eid al-Fitr and Qurban. Further, members vary in the degree to which they observe the festival, underscoring the flexibility of what it means to be Hui. One does not break any cultural taboo by participating in traditional festivities, but, importantly, one can also determine the nature of participation. We also do not find any sanctions on the Hui's deviation from tradition, arguably because acts of observance are small scale and take place in part in the private sphere. Finally, the act of nonobservance, while constitutive in terms of a particular interpretation of identity, is difficult to police. Thus, Hui co-opt the Spring Festival and observe it in the way that best suits them, largely absent the national meaning the Chinese state infuses into the holiday. By taking ownership of how they will behave during the Spring Festival, the Hui resist by asserting that their identity is separate from and, in some cases more important than, the collective national identity.

Recent events in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, however, suggest that the Hui's ability to maintain their collective identity may face obstacles. In 2018, Hui Muslims protested the destruction of a treasured mosque. This protest came amid other bans across the city: calls to prayer have been labeled "noise pollution," books on Islam and copies of the Qu'ran have been removed from souvenir shops, and some mosques have cancelled Arabic classes (Gan 2018). The party-state has typically permitted the Hui to peacefully practice Islam, but in light of recent crackdowns on the Uyghurs in Xinjiang, the Hui have increasingly become targets (Gan 2018). This past February,

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Radio Free Asia reported that Chinese authorities in Xinjiang brought pork to some Muslim households and even required alcohol and pork consumption (Long 2019). While the report did not specify which Muslim groups were targeted, it does suggest that the party-state is beginning to encroach on the way some minorities observe the Spring Festival. Thus, these recent restrictions suggest that it may become increasingly more difficult for the Hui to maintain their identity as its markers are eroded. In contrast, however, having it their way may become all the more significant if the Chinese party-state continues to limit Hui religious practices.

Turkey's Kurds engage in a reverse process when compared to China's Hui, demonstrating active resistance against the Turkish state's efforts to co-opt Newroz by portraying it as a national holiday referred to as Nevruz. This attempt to eradicate differences in forms of observance highlights the affective import of Newroz for Kurds as much as their own enthusiastic celebrations. The state plays on the flexibility of identity and practices of inventing traditions by creating a pan-Turkic narrative explaining the unifying power, which counterproductively generates resistance in Kurds. While we observe some crackdowns on the largest Kurdish demonstrations during Newroz, many celebrate without rebuke; further, crackdowns lessened during the period of the solution process. We also find evidence of the small-scale forms of protest Scott identifies, such as mocking Turkish officials' performance of Nevruz activities. Some Kurds' insistence on celebrating outside of the state-mandated day of March 21 can be interpreted as a form of resistance by refusing to celebrate per the law.

These cases demonstrate a powerful and illuminating dynamic of identity ownership, one that illustrates the significance of determining not only one's behavior but also one's membership. Particularly in repressive regimes in which the state's treatment of minority groups is dismissive or discriminatory, the observance, and nonobservance, of holidays is constitutive, performative, and in the cases examined here consciously subversive. Due to the role of holidays as a focal point, the relative lack of effective barriers to celebration, and the flexibility groups have in determining their own forms of (non)celebration, minority groups reassert and reproduce their collective identity by owning the terms of celebration. Our findings shed valuable light on a meaningful politics of protest that has the potential to exacerbate social divides around holidays and serve as a platform for group demands.

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Notes

1 Law No. 1353 on the Implementation and Adoption of the Turkish Alphabet (*Türk Harflerinin Kabul ve Tatbiki Hakkında Kanun*) was passed by the Turkish legislature November 1, 1928, and was registered as law two days later.

2 A 2008 news article cites numerous incidents of legal cases against Kurds for using the letter *w*, including a politician who distributed a Newroz celebration invitation, in reporting on transition to state broadcasting in Kurdish in 2008. See TV24.com, "Üç Harf, Hem Yasak Hem Serbest!" December 27, 2008, https://t24.com.tr/haber/uc-harf-hem-yasak-hem-serbest,22486.

3 For a discussion of various strands of ethnic, secular, and religious nationalism in Turkey, see Hintz (2018).

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4 For a discussion, see Levitsky and Way (2000).
5 While potential cost deters some, it does not deter all. For an analysis of minority group members' reasons for highly risky behavior in undertaking armed rebellion, see Tezcür (2016).
6 Critical scholars raise important questions regarding how knowable citizens' behavioral motivations at repressive regime-sponsored festivities are to researchers, indeed to citizens themselves, and whether motivations are actually supportive, oppositional, or something else (Wedeen 1999; Yurchak 2006; Koch 2018). For a discussion of sincerity and public affect in North Korea, for example, see Mazzarella (2015); on dilemmas of research in closed contexts, see Koch (2013). While acknowledging these concerns' validity, we examine the framing of Hui and Kurds' contestation in their own words and do not for the purposes of this article question their sincerity.
7 For a seminal overview, see Tilly and Tarrow (2015). For regional studies on the Middle East, see Wedeen (1999) and Brown (2012); on Latin America, see Eckstein (2001); on Europe see Hanspeter, Koopmans, Duyvendak, and Giugni (2015).
8 This claim is based on a list of all arrests, detentions, and injuries sustained during the 2012 holiday recorded in *Timeturk* (2012).
9 See Pei (2012) and Diamond (2010).
10 Here, western China refers to the Gansu, Ningxia, Qinghai, Xinjiang, and Yunnan provinces.
11 Pseudonyms used for interviewed Hui.
12 While there is no fixed area that scholars agree upon as Inner China, the term is used to distinguish the core provinces of China from the frontier regions of Tibet, Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, and possibly Manchuria (present-day Heilongjiang, Liaoning, and Jilin provinces).
13 Although halal food is readily available for sale in China, it is theoretically possible for the party-state to prohibit the sale of these products or make it very difficult. Currently, there is a thriving halal business scene in China, with nearly 6,000 halal food production firms in the Muslim-strong northwest provinces. Furthermore, local authorities demonstrate support for this industry, noting the potential for increased exports (see Dubé et al. 2016).
14 Pseudonyms used for interviewed Kurds.

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