

Resistance in a “sacred geography”

Resistance in a “sacred geography”: Critical perspectives on land, ecology, and activism among Dersimi Alevi in Turkey

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Abstract:

Environmental actions related to sacred geographies have recently intensified, leading to growing research interest. Many studies have explored indigenous struggles to defend the land, its ecosystems, culture and identity, especially in the Americas. This article employs the concept of sacred geography in Dersim (Tunceli), Turkey, to investigate the unique relationship between the indigenous Alevi population and their land and natural environment. Dersim is also unique for its internal politics and left-wing identity politics, which are rooted in a history of state violence, discrimination and coloniality of nature. Focusing on environmental resistance and women’s initiatives

within contemporary Kurdish socio-cultural, environmental and political activism, this article explores the relationship between land and identity and how this connection motivates environmentalist actions in Dersim. Based on ethnographic findings and analysis of secondary sources, we argue that the territorialised Dersimi Alevi identity, rooted in the physical and imaginative realms of the natural landscape, its representations, and its sacredness, is intertwined with widespread resistance to state hegemony, coloniality, and neoliberal and neo-extractivist policies. Social struggles exist in multiple forms, such as protests in defence of a sacred geography; affective relations with the land; and cross-border engagement and social mobilisation through cultural initiatives, for example, the Munzur Festival where culture, environmentalism and politics come together.

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