

New political subjects: children of displaced Kurds

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Since 1984, the ongoing conflict between the Turkish army and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) has caused the displacement of millions of Kurdish people in eastern and southeastern Turkey. In locations where forcibly displaced families live, the active participation of children in political demonstrations since 2006 has been at very high levels. Rather than seeking to understand the motives of these children, the usual perception has been that they have been manipulated by the PKK and that they are not aware of the consequences of their acts.

Displacement has had a significant impact, however, on both first- and second-generation children. Although the second generation has not experienced displacement themselves, they have lived through the social, economic and political consequences of displacement and have witnessed the trauma experienced by their families.

Most of the children have not been able to continue their education and have had to work in low-paid jobs and in the informal sector to support their families. In many cases, due to language barriers and parental illiteracy, children have had to bear new responsibilities within the family. Most importantly of all, the children of displaced families have grown up with stories of displacement and violence – and research shows that this generation

suffers traumatic stress and depressive symptoms as do those who actually experienced displacement.

Having grown up in these conditions, the children embraced an adult role from an early age, acquiring a political awareness of the inequalities and discrimination they face as Kurds. Witnessing the experiences of their families, living under extremely difficult conditions

and experiencing discrimination and humiliation themselves, these children have sought various ways to express their feelings. While some have become involved in ordinary crime or gangs, recently political activism has become the main way to express their feelings and cope with their secondary traumatisation.

Being left 'out of place', these children have increasingly become politicised

and radicalised, reclaiming the spaces denied to their families. Rather than being silenced, reduced to passivity and denied their political agency, they need to be taken seriously and listened to.

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Protest in Turkey.