

# Borderscapes in Eastern Turkey

## Responsable

**Johanna Ollier**

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**Mercredi 12 juillet 2023**  
**11h-13h**  
**Salle Athéna 049**

## Intervenants

**Burcu Ateş**

(Middle East Technical  
University & Vienna University  
of Technology)

**Johanna Ollier**

(School of Political Studies,  
Université Grenoble-Alpes)

**Marie Poulain**

(Department of Geography  
and Environment, University of  
Geneva)

**Elif Yıldız**

(Hacettepe University)

## Résumé de l'atelier

This panel aims at observing a little known and under-researched area in Turkey, namely the very eastern borderland part of the country. Mainly focused on the borders with Greece or Syria, we are often inclined to forget that Turkey is also sharing borders with Iran and the Azerbaijani enclave of Nakhchivan in the eastern part of the country. Through different perspectives, from geography and urban studies to political science and international relations, the panel's contributions wish to offer a better picture of this area by exploring and discussing the concept of *borderscape* (Rajaram & Grundy-Warr, 2007 ; Brambilla, 2015). This concept enables us to think of the *border* as a non-static space and *bordering* as a process characterised by a constant negotiation between identity and territorial claims. In this way, new lines of sociospatial and political separation and inclusion can be distinguished according to a variety of criteria such as nationality, ethnicity, generation, gender and legal status (citizen, refugee, temporary protection, international protection, etc.) of people living in the borderland. Beyond a narrow state-centric vision of the border, the four contributions of this panel seek to exceed the *territorial trap* (Agnew, 1994) and analyse the relationship that people maintain with their own borderland territory. Including the border cities of Van and Doğubayazıt, they provide great insight into this region thanks to knowledge from fieldworks and the literature on migration and border studies.

## Programme

**Burcu Ateş**

*Among Bodies and Borders: An Ethnography of Forced Migration in Van*  
Locating on the eastern border of Turkey, the one with Iran, Van is a historically and politically significant city with the diverse cultures and communities it has hosted since antiquity. Looking at the last century, the central region of Van witnessed several wars and conflicts that resulted in the (forced) exclusion of some communities, such as Armenians, and (forced) inclusion of many others. During evacuations of Kurdish villages in the 1990s, thousands of Kurds migrated to Van city centre, followed by the establishment of new peripheral settlements in the city. Another major influx to the city has occurred via transnational forced migration, mainly from Afghanistan, Iran, and Syria. Considering other marginal patterns of cultural diversity in the city as well, Van is now a city where borders both at physical and phenomenological levels are constantly being constructed and deconstructed with the exclusion and inclusion of diverse bodies in everyday life. In this context, this paper, I aims at creating a spatial re-reading of the forced migration in Van in relation

to the diverse bodyscapes as "temporal and spatial reach of corporeal signification" co-manifested by refugees in the city. The discussions and socio-spatial analysis throughout the paper will be based on my ethnographic fieldwork in Van between 2021 and 2022.

### **Johanna Ollier**

*What is the link between border and security ? Perception of the Turkish-Iranian border by students of the Van Yüzüncü Yıl Üniversitesi*

The link between border and security is often laid out as very clear and logical by central state authorities. Borders protect the state's territorial integrity as well as citizens from external threats by filtering good from bad cross-border flows. A higher degree of securitization is therefore justified by a higher degree of insecurity at the borderland. In the case of the borderland between Iran and Turkey, we can precisely observe a higher degree of securitization, particularly with the construction of a wall on the Turkish side of the border since 2017. Several studies point to the necessity of interrogating the reception by the local population of a border securitization process (Deleixhe, Dembinska & Iglesias, 2019 ; Fortuné, 2021). In the same perspective, this paper aims at highlighting different conceptions of the relation between security and the Turkish-Iranian border through students' eyes. The purpose of this original approach is double. First, it contributes to display a non-state vision of border security by focusing on borderlanders reception of the border securitization policy. Second, it gives voice to young borderlanders rarely taken into account in border studies literature. Based on interviews conducted in Van in 2022 with around twenty students of the *Yüzüncü Yıl Üniversitesi* this study provides a new perspective on the border security perception in this eastern Turkey region.

### **Marie Poulain**

*Negotiate the border in a mountainous borderland: the Mount Ararat in Turkey*  
Lying near the border with Iran, Armenia, and Azerbaijan (Nakhchivan corridor), Doğubeyazıt is mainly known for hosting the highest summit of Turkey, Mount Ararat. A high symbolic and tourist location, Ararat is, however, constrained by its localization in a borderland. The state authorities oscillate between a regime of opening and closing tourism, regulated by the issuance of climbing permits by the army. More specifically, we will look at the process of appropriation of these mountainous borderlands by the borderlanders through the angle of tourism practices. In this perspective, some actors among borderlanders manage to negotiate the climbing of Ararat with state agents in securitized borderlands (Deleixhe, Dembinska & Iglesias, 2019). The interactions and dynamics between the representatives of authority at the national and local levels are said to produce arrangements, and "institutional norms" are reappropriated, giving rise to "practical norms" (Olivier De Sardan, 2008). Considering these local reconfigurations for tourism purposes, this paper aims at wondering about the empowerment of the borderland, in terms of its political, economic, and security aspects.

### **Elif Yıldız**

*Asylum Seekers Residing in Van during the Process of Settlement in a Third Country: An Evaluation from the Perspective of Human Rights*

Turkey signed the 1951 Geneva Convention on the legal status of refugees by placing a geographical restriction: it does not grant refugee status to asylum seekers from countries other than the Council of Europe countries. Yet Turkey has been hosting a large number of asylum seekers, especially after the Syrian war. Although there has been an influx of migration from Afghanistan to Turkey for nearly 40 years, this number has increased since 2017. Turkey has enacted the Law on Foreigners and International Protection in 2013. An interim solution has been tried to be developed by granting International Protection and Temporary Protection status to the refugees entering Turkey. However, Turkey does not pave the way for granting citizenship status to asylum seekers.

Non-Syrian asylum seekers under International Protection are waiting to be resettled in third countries. During this waiting period, in which UNHCR also follows the process, asylum seekers can obtain the right to stay in Turkey temporarily. In this regard, asylum seekers have been waiting in Van for many years. Van is indeed located on one of the important transit and waiting routes for non-Syrian refugees. However, asylum seekers subject to International Protection face different problems during their waiting period for a third country. In this study, which includes Iranian, Iraqi and Afghan refugees and asylum seekers residing in Van, these problems experienced during the waiting period for a third country will be examined in terms of human rights, taking into account the possible roles of international actors and countries.