

# **BORDERS, TERRITORY, AND THE TURKISH REPUBLIC**

Call for papers for a special issue of *Diyâr*, 2023

*Diyâr* welcomes paper proposals for a special issue on issues of borders and territoriality in the Turkish Republic. This special issue investigates how concepts related to borders, bordering, and territoriality can help us understand the trajectory of one hundred years of Turkish republican history. The editors seek to connect scholarship on the history of borders and borderlands with innovations in the way geographers have critically analyzed territory today. Together with our contributors, we seek to understand how spatial notions of territoriality govern the organization and diffusion of power. We also seek studies that, on their own or in concert with other studies, contribute to a multi-scalar approach to notions of territoriality in the Turkish Republic. We particularly welcome proposals that critically approach concepts and notions of territoriality—e.g., *vatan*, *taşra*, *Doğu*, etc.—or that further develop scholarship on borders and bordering practices in Turkey. For more information on the ideas motivating this special issue, see the text below.

## **Submission deadlines:**

14 Feb. 2022	Deadline to submit proposed title and provisional abstract
28 Feb. 2022	Announcement made of approved paper proposals
ca. Sept. 2022	Provisional manuscripts due; special-issue workshop for authors
30 Nov. 2022	Final manuscripts due and sent to peer-review
2023	Publication of special issue

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## **Instructions for proposals:**

Scholars wishing to contribute to the special issue should submit their CVs and provisional abstracts (150–300 words) as separate Word or PDF document to the guest editors by 14 February 2022. Proposals, as well as manuscripts, are to be submitted in English.

Final submissions should follow the style sheet provided by *Diyâr* at:  
[https://www.diyar.nomos.de/fileadmin/diyar/doc/Diyar\\_Style\\_Sheet\\_2020.pdf](https://www.diyar.nomos.de/fileadmin/diyar/doc/Diyar_Style_Sheet_2020.pdf)

## **Background:**

Even before the expected arrival in Turkey of thousands of Afghan refugees fleeing the collapse of their government in the summer of 2021, the Turkish government and people were already preparing for its consequences. Turkish citizens' reactions to a seemingly looming "migrant wave" were largely expressed in spatial terms. Turkey's main opposition party in August 2021 hung a banner on its Ankara headquarters with the words "*Sınır namustur*" (the border is "honor"), capitalizing on fears and implying that by welcoming a large number of irregular migrants and refugees, the ruling party would weaken Turkish territorial sovereignty. A number of handwritten posters simultaneously appeared around Istanbul with the same message, signed anonymously by those styling themselves "Enraged Turkish Youth." ("*Hudut namustur*' pankartı" 2021; "CHP Genel Merkez" 2021). The use of "*namus*" (honor or moral purity) here implied that the penetration of territory by foreign elements, whether army regulars or irregular migrants, would stain the chastity of virgin territory (İşleyen 2018; see also White 2014). Simultaneously, work continued apace on Turkey's eastern border with the physical erection of a 243-kilometer wall between Turkey and Iran ("Fearing Afghan refugee influx" 2021). Born in 1923 out of a struggle to save territory, the Turkish Republic now approaches 2023 with an ever-stricter interpretation of nation-state territoriality, while trying to manage the inevitable consequences of conflicts in its region.

### *Introducing the special issue*

This special issue of *Diyâr* investigates how concepts related to borders, bordering, and territoriality can help us understand the trajectory of one hundred years of Turkish republican history. As two editors hailing from different disciplines, we seek to connect scholarship on the history of borders and borderlands with innovations in the way geographers have critically analyzed territory today. Charles S. Maier and others have reminded us that the very idea of territory—"space empowered by borders"—is the outcome of contentious historical processes, and that such contestation over the meaning of territory and borders continues into the present (Maier 2016:1; see also Elden 2009; Maier 2006; Storey 2012). While particular notions of territoriality are inherent in all nation-state projects, the Turkish Republic's relationship with territoriality and borders, we argue, is especially volatile and lends itself to fruitful inquiry. Born out of nationalist leaders' acute sense of territorial vulnerability, the Turkish state over one hundred years has faced various challengers to its claims of territorial sovereignty—while also itself seeking to shape and re-shape territorial conditions, imaginations, and narratives around and within its borders.

### *Speaking to the spatial turn*

The time is ripe, we are convinced, for a collection of critical investigations into territoriality and borders in Turkish Republican history and its present condition. With contributions that recognize the co-constitutive nature of history, space, state power and society, this special issue of *Diyâr* speaks to scholars attempting to understand space from a critical perspective. Starting in the 1990s, the spatial turn in the humanities and social sciences has sought to understand how our notions of space are socially constructed. Critical geographic inquiry in particular has shown how spatial concepts are not static and given, but learned and shaped through interaction and discourse. Humans carry "mental maps" of the world and their surroundings— notions of distance and bordering that in turn shape behavior and policy (among others, see Rau 2013; Warf and Arias 2008).

The ways in which notions of space are constructed have long been a feature of Middle Eastern Studies (e.g., the “Islamic city”); indeed, the discipline itself rests on the spatial imagination of a “Middle East” region (Lockman 2016; see also Milutinovic 2020). Nevertheless, contemporary concerns like migration and economic neoliberalization—along with increasing skepticism surrounding ontological categories like East, West, and “Middle East”—have afforded space a larger role in area studies and social sciences (Mills and Hammond 2016). Middle Eastern historiography, too, has enjoyed a spatial turn. For the twentieth-century Arab world, the concept of “territoriality” has recently been used as a major explanatory factor for phenomena ranging from collective violence to economic integration. By linking the spatial categories of the urban, the regional, and the global in a process he calls “transpatialization,” Cyrus Schayegh’s work has made a particular impact in this regard (2017; see also Robson 2020). In Ottoman historiography, an interest in spatial concepts has manifested itself particularly visibly in scholars working on mobility—whether at the level of the city streets, the (post-)imperial periphery, or the globe (Erdim 2018; Gutman 2016, 2021; Kasaba 2009; Köksal 2010; Ryan 2016; Tejel and Öztan 2022). While contemporary scholars in Turkey have also been very receptive to the spatial turn (Beritan et al. 2021; Şentürk 2014), most spatial-turn research for the Turkish Republican period continues to fall within urban studies (Alptekin 2014; Demircan 2021; Koca et al. 2013; Tekeli 2009).

#### *Enriching Turkish studies: Two goals*

Thus, we believe— as editors hailing from different disciplines—that studies of territoriality in the Turkish Republic have strong interdisciplinary relevance. At the same time, the field of Turkish studies also has much to gain from a greater appreciation of “territoriality” in the Turkish Republic.

This special issue aims to contribute to two interconnected scholarly debates: First, we seek to understand how spatial notions of territoriality govern the organization and diffusion of power. Understanding idealized notions of space, for example, might help us explain patterns of Ankara’s administration in the countryside (Karaömerlioğlu 2006; Nalbantoğlu 1997). Because of its intimate connection to power, territorial imagination is also a key feature of movements (both political projects and literal human mobility) seeking to challenge and unsettle the authority of the Turkish nation-state (Zeynep Kaya 2020). On the other hand, notions of space shape the everyday life of citizens and residents of Turkey. The rapid change in residential patterns effected by international or seasonal migration, for example, has both altered the urban landscape of Istanbul—making class and racial lines more visible across space—and given rise to extreme forms of rural segregation in Turkey (Salomoni 2018; Pelek 2020).

Second, for this special issue of *Diyâr*, we seek studies that, on their own or in concert with other studies, contribute to a multi-scalar approach to notions of territoriality in the Turkish Republic. An approach that draws analytical connections between places and geographical scales, enables us to understand existing power relations inherent in hierarchical notions of space. Contributors to this special issue can draw connections between (large-scale) geopolitical power in (small-scale) everyday lives, and vice versa, assigning an important role to the embodied experiences and spaces of state power. In so doing, we aim to disrupt binary and hierarchical scalar modes of thinking and to emphasize new spaces and political actors in order to foster a more relational and cross-scalar knowledge production in the case of Turkey. Mert Pekşen, for example, has recently shown how large-scale human mobility across Turkey has upended the “conventional understanding of the border as a line separating countries from each other.” Appearing in the guise of

multiple practices and behaviors, Pekşen argues, the border “transcends state contours and exists at multiple simultaneous scales, ranging from transnational and national, down to the regional, urban and the body of the refugee” (2021).

### *Elaborating fields of inquiry*

In what follows, we present two potential fields of inquiry for article submissions to this special issue. Both fields speak to our twin goals of interrogating the diffusion of power over territory and developing multi-scalar perspectives. Naturally, articles may fall under both categories, or offer completely different aspects. The special issue is open to both revisions of current models or innovative approaches to the construction of territoriality and borders in the Turkish Republic.

#### Field 1: “Concepts and Notions”

One line of inquiry looks at the terms associated with territorial concepts in Turkey and analyzes the emotional or political valence these terms possess. Perhaps the most important space-related term to garner attention has been *vatan* (homeland). Two monographs by Sezgi Durgun (2011) and Behlül Özkan (2012) have interrogated the process by which territorial conceptions of the homeland were inculcated among the population of the Turkish Republic through history and geography textbooks—i.e., how the territory of the nation became a “geo-body” (Winichakul 1997). Studies in this field could examine the diffusion of territorial concepts at the scale of the nation through the ideological state apparatus or, for example, through infrastructure projects (Adalet 2018:121). Studying the diffusion of power over territory immediately brings to mind the notion of center and periphery—Şerif Mardin’s postulate that the patterns of modern Turkish politics might best be explained by cleavage and competition between a Turkish bureaucratic center and a popular periphery (Mardin 1973). While many have rightfully critiqued or modified this center-periphery model (Bakiner 2018) the notion of *taşra* (periphery, outskirts, backwater) nevertheless continues to carry significant weight in both everyday political and academic Turkish conceptions of internal space (Bora 2005).

Concepts and notions of territoriality can also be examined at multiple geographic scales beyond that of the nation-state. While it is true that the construction of territorial space played a particularly important role in the evolution of Turkish (and other post-Ottoman) nationalisms (cf. Diamandouros et al. 2010), concepts of space in the Turkish Republic extend beyond a mere focus on the national. First is the level of the region. Studies might examine the (re-)appropriation and (re-)formulation of historic terms like *Anadolu* (Anatolia) during the twentieth century. Or, they might look at the ways in which the neutral spatial designator *Doğu* (East) was imbued with ethnic connotations as it began to be used to refer to the country’s Kurdish-majority areas (Gündoğan 2011; Özsoy 2013). In this regard, the state has also been accused of “environment deprivation,” neglect, and de-population (forced resettlement) as a means of achieving a “new spatial organization of the countryside” (Jongerden 2007, 2010). Nature itself earns a significant role in the construction of the Turkish nation as a territorial unit, used, for example, in claiming and regaining territory (Goner and Robello 2017; Hommes et al. 2016). Concepts and notions of territoriality could be employed at a supra-national scale as well. Spatial concepts are also used to define Turkey’s place in the world. Most obviously, this is the case with endless references to the country as a “bridge between East and West” (Soysal 2001 [1989]). Another approach would be to examine Turkey’s position within the so-called “Global South.”

Field 2: “Within and Beyond Borders”

The enthusiasm with which many scholars of other world areas have adopted the precepts of borderland studies remains much more elusive when it comes to the Turkish Republic. More has been written about the way in which the borders of the Turkish Republic were settled (through the *Misak-ı Milli* and international treaties) than with the social and political effects these borders (and related issues of mobility) have created. There are some exceptions: anthropological studies of the Turkish-Iraq border region (Özgen 2005); critical investigations of the Turkish-Syrian border (Altuğ and White, 2009; Öztan 2021; Şenoğuz 2018); and collaborative interrogations of the contemporary Turkish-Armenian border (Yılmaz 2016). Alexander E. Balistreri has recently called for scholars to “bring the nation-state back in” by recognizing the significance of discursive struggles over the border held in the years leading up to the establishment of the republic. “Studying nation state borders is valuable,” he argues, “because it helps us understand the worldview of Turkish nationalist leaders, the way they imagined and internalised the map of their country as well as their role in it” (Balistreri 2022:31).

The conception of nation-state territoriality has also exceeded the borders of the nation-state. There are several examples which come to mind: Turkish irredentism in the twentieth century (Hatay); its complex relationship with what some call the *yavru vatan* (baby homeland) in Northern Cyprus; the status of its miniscule territorial exclave in northern Syria; Turkey’s military presence in Iraq; its power projection into Mediterranean waters (called by proponents Turkey’s “Blue Homeland,” *mavi vatan*); or its attempt to secure essentially permanent control over Suakin Island in Sudan.

Our study of the construction of spaces related to the Turkish Republic need not be confined to the borders of the republic (political borders being, of course, both a result and tool of spatial construction). There are a number of phenomena which call into question the assumed relation between national space and nation-state territory. First, there is a mismatch between national communities and nation-state boundaries. What role, for instance, do Turks in Syria or Arabs in Turkey play in each country’s respective national-territorial imagination? The most obvious example of a community divided by nation-state borders is the Kurds. In this regard, İsmail Beşikçi has been influential in his elaboration of “international colony” as a spatial category describing Kurdistan (Beşikçi 1991; Duruiz 2020). Finally, international migration has extended the boundaries of the Turkish nation (and of minority ethnicities) far beyond the nation-state borders of Turkey. Yet transnational environments that emerge out of migration present a paradox when it comes to the construction of notions of space: On one hand, the back-and-forth of travel between Turkey and migrants’ new homes foster new conceptions of identity that are “vibrant” and “cosmopolitan,” a belonging to a space beyond any one state (Ayhan Kaya 2007). At the same time, such transnational environments are also sites where ethnonationalist conceptions of space can be reinforced (Zeynep Kaya 2020).

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