

Cities, War and Economic Restructuring in Southeast Turkey

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This talk focuses the processes of neoliberal restructuring in southeast Turkey through the lens of an ethnographic research conducted in two cities, namely Gaziantep and Diyarbakır. Building upon the ethnographic material collected in these two cities between 2007-2011, I explore the ways local economic elites attempt to reposition themselves and their cities through urban entrepreneurial regimes. The various and multifaceted phases of capitalist scalar restructuring in Turkey since the introduction of neoliberal reforms in 1980 have not only rescaled localities and imposed a new conception of a fragmented national geography but it also radically reshaped the modes of locality formation and the forms of belonging. The Kurdish region in Turkey is an exceptional site to extend the theories of state rescaling and neoliberal restructuring to explore the complex entanglements between capitalist restructuring, wars, class and ethnicity based identifications and urban culture.

First part of the talk is devoted to a discussion on various entrepreneurial regimes (cultural or industrial) in these two cities that are embedded in the local activism of local elites (political and economic) in support of a specific trajectory under neoliberalism. I discuss various assets/dynamics that serve the local actors to mobilize multi-scalar networks for “jumping scales” and defining particular trajectories under neoliberalism (such as Kurdish/Turkish ethnicity, local history, local politics). I argue that local histories and interventions to urban spaces become part of significant strategies by the local actors for repositioning their localities in the geo-economic hierarchies of neoliberal order. Second, by detailing the moral and legal universe within which the capitalist restructuring in Turkey evolved in tandem with the symbolic universe of religion and ethnicity, I discuss how wars, exceptional rule regimes and authoritarian techniques of government articulate to rescaling processes. Rather than being ruptures to the neoliberal capitalist restructuring, wars and conflicts create alternative systems of profit, wealth and power, thus inevitably alter the identifications and modes of belonging in a particular site.

Ayşe Seda Yüksel-Peçen is a post-doctorate researcher at the University of Vienna. She received her PhD from Central European University, Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology. Her areas of interests include rescaling of statehood, new regionalism and urban development in the neoliberal era; state sovereignty and political economy of war; class and ethnic minorities in Turkey. Between 2015-2017, Yüksel-Peçen worked as a post-doctoral research associate for CIRMENA (the Center for the Study of International Relations of the Middle East and Central Africa) at Cambridge University. Before joining University of Vienna, Yüksel-Peçen was a research fellow at Kadir Has University. Her comparative research project focused on the construction of different urban entrepreneurial regimes and urban coalitions in the southeastern and northern parts of Turkey.