

Bordered Places | Bounded Time

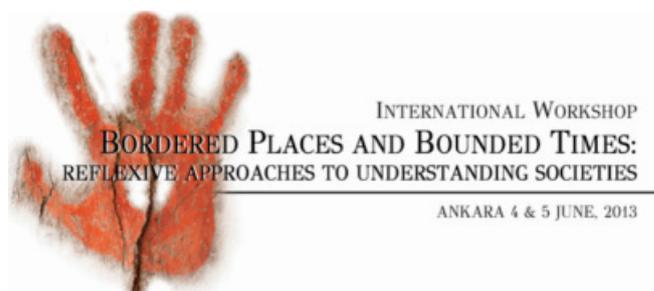
Emma Baysal and Leonidas Karakatsanis |
British Institute at Ankara

Bordered Places | Bounded Time: Reflexive Approaches to Understanding Societies. Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Turkey from Archaeology, Anthropology, History and Political Science, a fully interdisciplinary social science workshop, was held at the Middle East Technical University in Ankara on 4–5 June 2013 as part of the Divisions, Connections and Movement – Rethinking Regionality research programme. We organised the event as part of our Post-Doctoral Research Fellowships at the Institute. The workshop was inspired by the fact that, despite working within separate disciplines (archaeology and political science respectively), we were using the same theoretical approaches to borders. Having realised our overlapping areas of interest, it seemed natural to test the waters with an event aimed at interdisciplinary interaction. Borders and boundaries have been a popular topic in the social sciences in recent years, and Turkey provides an ideal subject given its role as a crossroads both in the past and the present. Participants with subject areas ranging from contemporary political theory to prehistoric archaeology travelled from 11 countries to attend the event. All were fired-up by a passionate interest in borders and boundaries in their many and various forms.

Boundaries are a powerful defining feature in human society: they can separate, unite and catalyse change; they may be areas of conflict, friendship and trade. The workshop targeted three main aims: to facilitate communication between research areas that do not usually meet; to stress the dynamic diachronic processes of making and unmaking borders; and to foster the diffusion of an interdisciplinary, mutually beneficial dialogue with a broad perspective on border and boundary studies *in* Turkey and with a special focus *on* Turkey.

The workshop took place at the height of the recent protest activities relating to Gezi Park in Istanbul, and this not only gave rise to an extra element of debate with relation to borders and boundaries but also some considerable practical problems for the organisers in Ankara. In the end, the only effect on the event itself was the withdrawal of two of the discussants who were otherwise occupied in Istanbul. Their absence was more than compensated for by the enthusiastic discussion of all participants, many of whom also took advantage of the opportunity to be at the heart of political action, observing at close hand the protests in Ankara as spectators and out of research interest. The immediacy of the situation was reflected in contributions by a number of scholars which included photographs and thoughts tying current events to their research topics.

Current research on other political situations provided an up-to-date picture of live social issues in Turkey, such as the status and actions of Syrian migrants and the question of the politics of memory when coming to terms with past events.



The construction of identities through the use of borders was approached both through historical and contemporary perspectives in case studies combining populations inside and outside the borders of modern Turkey. Historical perspectives came in the form of the discussion of frontiers and the perception of the ‘other’ in the construction of identity.

Turkey’s deep and complex past provided inspiration for many of the papers; the difficulty of identifying borders in Classical archaeology and texts proved to be a major theme. It emerged that despite the relative abundance of archaeological and textual evidence for this period, the identification of borders on the ground is a controversial topic.

Moving deeper into Turkey’s past, the interpretation of early written sources and their correlation to the interpretation of archaeological evidence, the complexity of land divisions, ritual and material cultural differences was explored by several of the speakers. Turkey’s most distant past was encountered from the perspective of some of the earliest settlements, and papers considered issues of interpretation caused both by the agency of the archaeologist and the wider political agenda.

After much lively discussion and exchange of ideas over the course of the two-day event, two major themes emerged from the workshop. Firstly, the use of narrative to contribute to, and reinforce, political agendas is a subject consistently encountered from prehistory to the present day. Secondly, the problem of the identification and conceptualisation of boundaries, both by those experiencing them and by those studying them from a temporal or spatial distance, was noted.

Having held such an inspiring interdisciplinary event, we are now looking forward to the publication of an edited volume of selected papers.

The programme of the event and abstracts can be found at: <http://bordersworkshop2013.wordpress.com/>.

