A local (i.e. micro-level) analysis of ethnic conflict and political violence has recently attracted significant interest from researchers. Prior to that, most scholars working in the fields of conflict analysis and security studies have tended to use only macro-level datasets in order to explain the causes of political violence and war. Yet, these studies are likely to avoid many local factors in explaining the cycles of violence, conflict and peace making. In order to fill this gap in the literature, my paper offers new insights on the Kurdish-Turkish conflict by emphasizing local experiences and meanings of violence at the Turkish-Iranian and Turkish-Iraqi borderlands.

Drawing on my ethnographic fieldwork in Van, Hakkari and Cukurca that I conducted between 2013 and 2014, my research explores how the ongoing case of ethno-territorial conflict between the Turkish state and Kurds is rooted in the complex interactions between processes of violence and perceptions (including demands, emotions, choices and expectations) of local actors in geopolitical areas of armed conflict. Given that border zones are contested yet connected areas, what are the perceptions of people living in the borderlands on state policies of territorial control? My analysis then focuses on people’s perceptions of the Turkish state in borderlands by tracing the effects of the border regimes (such as border controls, guards etc.) on interactions, negotiations and contestations among different actors ranging from villagers to state officials. I argue that the negotiations between the Turkish state and the Kurdish movement (guerillas, leadership and party members) can be better explored through a theoretical framework that is conducive to multiple roles played by different actors on the ground. My study therefore opens up a new space for a nuanced understanding of how politics has been contested and negotiated at multiple levels from local to the state.