

# Stanford

---



## Serkan Yolaçan

Assistant Professor of Anthropology

### Bio

---

#### BIO

Serkan Yolaçan's research broadly focuses on the interplay of past and present in the lives of individuals, diasporas, and states. In all his projects, Yolaçan combines broad space and deep history empirically, and history and anthropology methodologically, to generate geo-historical frames that speak to questions of human mobility, political order, and social change.

His book project, *Time Travelers of Baku: Conversion and Revolution in West Asia*, weaves the modern experiences of Turkey, Iran, and Russia through the lens of a diasporic people from the region of Azerbaijan. In this work, Yolaçan reveals the Azeris' deep historical roots within each country and shows how shared pasts allow for the cross-pollination of ideas among neighboring realms, languages, and even religions, especially in times of opening or crisis. By placing mobile Azeris at the center of three major states, he ties together their near-synchronous transformations from constitutional revolutions at the beginning of the twentieth century to expansionist agendas in the twenty-first.

Yolaçan's second project is a comparative study of millennial and messianic movements. It explores how embodied authority, eschatological beliefs, and textual traditions interact to create invisible forms of sovereignty.

He is also part of a collaborative project that opens a new inquiry in political anthropology by studying two ubiquitous figures of the 21st century: strongman and informal diplomat. By shifting the basis of understanding their partnership from bureaucracies to networks, law to trust, and protocols to rituals, the project renders these opaque figures legible to ethnographic and historical inquiry while offering new methodological approaches to the study of populism, authoritarianism, diplomacy, and internationalism.

#### ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

- Assistant Professor, Anthropology

#### PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

- PhD, Duke University , Cultural Anthropology (2017)
- MA, Central European University , Sociology and Social Anthropology (2008)

#### LINKS

- OTES – Ottoman and Turkey Encounters @Stanford: <https://mediterraneanstudies.stanford.edu/initiatives/ottoman-and-turkey-encounters-stanford>
- Abbasi Program in Islamic Studies @Stanford: <https://islamicstudies.stanford.edu/people/serkan-yolacan>

## Research & Scholarship

---

### CURRENT RESEARCH AND SCHOLARLY INTERESTS

Serkan Yolaçan's research broadly focuses on the interplay of past and present in the lives of individuals, diasporas, and states. In all his projects, Yolaçan combines broad space and deep history empirically, and history and anthropology methodologically, to generate geo-historical frames that speak to questions of human mobility, international order, and state expansionism, past and present.

His book project, *Time Travelers of Baku: Conversion and Revolution in West Asia*, weaves the modern experiences of Turkey, Iran, and Russia through the lens of a mobile, diasporic people from the region of Azerbaijan. In this work, Yolaçan reveals the Azeris' deep historical roots within each country and shows how shared pasts allow for the cross-pollination of ideas among neighboring realms, languages, and even religions, especially in times of opening or crisis. By placing mobile Azeris at the center of three major states, he ties together their near-synchronous transformations from constitutional revolutions at the beginning of the twentieth century to expansionist agendas in the twenty-first.

Yolaçan's second project is a comparative study of cults and messianic movements. It explores how embodied authority, eschatological beliefs, and textual traditions interact to create invisible forms of sovereignty.

A side project he works on opens a new inquiry in political anthropology by studying two ubiquitous figures of the 21st-century: strongman and informal diplomat. Populists at home and maverick dealmakers abroad, strongman leaders are side-lining official career diplomats by using informal diplomats, drawn from transnational networks of diasporas, religious communities, and merchants. By shifting the basis of understanding their partnership from bureaucracies to networks, law to trust, and protocols to rituals, he renders these opaque figures legible to ethnographic and historical inquiry while offering new methodological approaches to the study of populism, authoritarianism, diplomacy, and internationalism.

## Teaching

---

### COURSES

#### 2023-24

- Anthropological Research Methods: ANTHRO 306 (Win)

#### 2022-23

- Anthropological Research Methods: ANTHRO 306 (Win)
- Cults: Mystics and Messiahs in a Modern World: ANTHRO 102 (Win)
- Time Travel: Pasts, Places, and Possibilities: ANTHRO 312 (Aut)

#### 2021-22

- Cults: Mystics and Messiahs in a Modern World: ANTHRO 102 (Win)
- Empires and Diasporas: ANTHRO 147, ANTHRO 247 (Spr)
- Time Travel: Pasts, Places, and Possibilities: ANTHRO 312 (Aut)

#### 2020-21

- Mystics and Messiahs: Explorations in Cult Movements: ANTHRO 102 (Sum)
- Time Travel: Pasts, Places, and Possibilities: ANTHRO 312 (Win)
- Transregionalism: ANTHRO 147, ANTHRO 247 (Spr)

## STANFORD ADVISEES

### Doctoral Dissertation Reader (AC)

Miray Cakiroglu

### Master's Program Advisor

Jonas Tai

### Doctoral (Program)

Ronald Chen, Poornima Rajeshwar, Mahder Teshome

## Publications

---

### PUBLICATIONS

- **Iron fist or nimble fingers?: An anatomy of Erdogan's strongman politics** *HISTORY AND ANTHROPOLOGY*  
Yolacan, S.  
2021
- **Strongmen and informal diplomats: Toward an anthropology of international relations** *HISTORY AND ANTHROPOLOGY*  
Lutfi, A., Mathew, N., Yolacan, S.  
2021
- **Azeri networks through thick and thin: West Asian politics from a diasporic eye** *Journal of Eurasian Studies*  
Yolaçan, S.  
2019; 10 (1): 36-47
- **The Idea of the Northern Tier: A New Order in the Middle East?**  
edited by Yolaçan, S.  
NUS Middle East Institute.2019