

Mapping Heterotopias: Looking Beyond the Security-Obsessed Aesthetics of the Border Discourse on the Turkey-Syria Border



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Abstract: This research, conducted between 2023 and 2024, analyzes the security-obsessed discourse of the Turkey-Syria Border as constructed by mass media narratives. The paper aims to reconstruct this state-imposed aesthetics of the border discourse in Turkey by using architectural methods and revealing the alternative spatial implications of bordering to what is served to the public. Drawing on extensive fieldwork in May 2023 in five Turkish provinces bordering Syria (Hatay, Gaziantep, Sanliurfa, Mardin, Batman), the research utilizes data from semi-structured interviews and participant observation conducted in the region. The findings from the fieldwork, combined with GIS mapping tools, enabled the identification of heterotopic spaces along the border, in order to be subsequently spatially analyzed and illustrated. By synthesizing these findings using literature from border, migration, and media studies, the paper proposes a counter-mapping methodology to look beyond the imposed aesthetics of the border as a security mechanism in the mass media narrative. Ultimately, this research challenges the limited understanding of conventional cartographies and mobilizes alternative maps to confront the logic of design and the project of the border.

Keywords: Border; Securitization; Cartography; Heterotopia; Mass Media; Aesthetics.

Résumé : Cette recherche, menée entre 2023 et 2024, analyse le discours sécuritaire entourant la frontière turco-syrienne, tel qu'il est construit et diffusé par les médias de masse. L'objectif est de reconstituer cette esthétique de la frontière produite par l'État dans le contexte turc en mobilisant des méthodes issues de l'architecture, afin de mettre au jour les dimensions spatiales du contrôle frontalier qui restent invisibilisées dans les représentations destinées au grand public. S'appuyant sur un travail de terrain approfondi réalisé en mai 2023 dans cinq provinces turques situées le long de

la frontière syrienne (Hatay, Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa, Mardin et Batman), l'étude mobilise des données recueillies à partir d'entretiens semi-directifs et d'observations participantes, menés dans la région. Les résultats de ce terrain, croisés avec des outils de cartographie par système d'information géographique (SIG), ont permis d'identifier différents espaces hétérotopiques à la frontière, lesquels ont ensuite fait l'objet d'une analyse et d'une représentation spatiales. En articulant ces résultats avec les apports des études sur les frontières, les migrations et les médias, l'article propose une méthodologie de la contre-cartographie destinée à dépasser l'esthétique frontalière imposée par les récits médiatiques dominants, qui présentent principalement la frontière comme un dispositif de sécurité. Cette approche cherche ainsi à rendre visibles d'autres réalités spatiales et sociales produites par les pratiques de contrôle et de délimitation territoriale. En définitive, cette recherche remet en question les limites des cartographies conventionnelles comme outils de compréhension des espaces frontaliers et mobilise des formes alternatives de représentation cartographique pour interroger les logiques d'aménagement, de contrôle et de production de la frontière.

Mots-clés : frontière ; sécurisation ; cartographie ; hétérotopie ; médias de masse ; esthétique

Introduction

For many people, the border is only encountered through images before it is ever engaged in space. Therefore, visual representations of the border (such as maps, photographs, satellite views, and other types of media) shape how borders are imagined and perceived by those who are far away from them. These limited sources pretending to conceptualize such complex phenomena have made it possible to frame borders as sites that should be securitized and militarized against the “undesirable.” Proliferating security-driven narratives not only produce images that promote the border as a project but also actively participate in producing it, influencing how bordering practices are justified and how violence, exclusion, and pushback are normalized.

I focus on the Turkey-Syria border as the core case study in this regard, and utilize research material from my master's thesis at Politecnico di Torino in Italy. This border region is particularly important since millions of displaced Syrians have sought refuge in Turkey after the outbreak of the civil war in Syria, leading Turkey to increasingly enforce measures to securitize the shared border. These restrictive border policies have changed over time, and part of this process involved instrumentalizing mass media outlets to depict the border as a fortress and scapegoat the Syrian population in order to promote a security-driven discourse. While such images are produced to influence public opinion regarding the border, they also

obscure its spatial complexity as an inhabited space that is negotiated on a daily basis.

I argue that understanding the Turkey-Syria border requires looking beyond these security-obsessed aesthetics. By theoretically grounding the border as a project produced through design, discourse, and media, and by remapping it through heterotopic spaces encountered during fieldwork, I aim to challenge the limited understandings of the border and propose other ways of reading border territories. As Foucault (2015) suggests, heterotopic spaces refer to “other spaces” of the border; such sites could be considered deviations, thereby offering an opportunity to reimagine the border from a different perspective (Foucault, 2015). The term “heterotopic” draws on the medical term that Foucault initially drew inspiration from, heterotopic ossification, an orthopedic condition involving the presence of bone in soft tissue where bone normally does not exist. Ultimately, I employ the spatial concept of heterotopia to read the border through these alternative spatial conditions, thereby treating them as deviations from the dominant narratives.

Spatial Understanding of the Border

Human understanding of the world is very much tied to the borders that humans themselves have created (Sferrazza Papa, 2020: 22). The border must be understood as a constitutive element of the practices by which social groups and their identities are constructed and governed (Paasi, 2005: 17–31). This chapter focuses on the existing literature to view the border not as a bidimensional line on maps but as a continuous project that shapes territories and becomes instrumentalized by political actors to shape public opinion.

To better understand this, a critical exploration of the border-making process is needed, since it is portrayed as an ideological form as well as a symbol and marker of identity (Paasi, 2005: 17–31). When studying the border, it is fundamental to establish that the main focus is no longer the border per se, but the dynamic and continuous process of its objectification, which is explained by van Houtum as the power practices attached to a border construction that bears a spatial effect, giving a demarcation in space its meaning and influence (van Houtum, 2010).

The materialization process of the border generates socio-spatial effects, which, in Foucauldian terms, makes it a “dispositif.” In essence, beyond its physical form, the border operates as a complex system involving various elements with strategic functions that sustain the exercise of

power in diverse historical and geopolitical contexts (Foucault, 1980: 194–228). Undoubtedly, the way in which this “dispositif” exists in the material dimension is always subject to change. Borders have not always existed. On the contrary, borders are made and endlessly re-made, and their making has never ceased, resulting in a process of continuous “bordering.”

Within this process, viewing “bordering” as an active verb shifts our focus toward what the border does, which primarily is the organisation of territory through the modulation of movement, distributing and redistributing the movement that passes through and around it (Nail *et al.*, 2022: 2-3). The Turkey-Syria border as a project is an essential example of how the intention behind bordering is intricately connected to the creation of border spaces, which allows the control and regulation of circulations.

This process is captured by the concept of the «borderscape.» Perera argues that the concept can express “the border as a space that is not static but fluid and shifting; established and at the same time continuously traversed by many bodies, discourses, practices, and relationships that highlight endless definitions and shifts in definition between inside and outside, citizens and foreigners, hosts and guests across state, regional, racial, and other symbolic boundaries” (Brambilla, 2014: 19; Perera, 2007).

As one can reasonably expect, the continuous processes of making and remaking the border mechanism are not natural, but a result of top-down state-imposed policies. As a consequence, such processes have been both rejected and fought against, as well as embraced and fought for. Mezzadra and Neilson argue that “it is the intensity of the struggles fought on borders around the world that prompts our research and theoretical elaborations” (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013: 18). Struggles arise from the very performances of border objectification, all too often forcing migrants to confront matters of life and death (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013: 18).

In the case of the Turkey-Syria border, the weaponized borderscape faced by people on the move has been portrayed as a project that defends the country from the “unwanted” and keeps those inside “safe.” This is certainly designed by political actors in an attempt to manipulate what is happening on the ground, especially for those who live far away from the region, and make people believe that the fortification of border spaces is necessary. However, selling this project to the public surely requires more than the actual physical infrastructure built in the region, as we can see it in the discourse of the Turkey-Syria border in Turkish mass media through a justified and normalised visual language.

The next chapter will investigate the aesthetics of this security-obsessed discourse by analyzing how the role of Turkish media functions as

a component of the border project to shape images of a «fortress» to justify the fortification of the border spaces.

The Aesthetics of the Security-Obsessed Border Discourse

Since 2016, whenever I do a Google search on the “Turkey-Syria border,” the immediate results are consistently about the construction of the border walls or content related to the migration crisis and the Turkish military interventions in the region. Analyzing these results shows a visual saturation of numerous maps depicting the territorial conflict, videos and photos of people on the move waiting at border crossings, and pictures taken during and after the construction of the border wall. Produced by diverse newspapers, self-proclaimed journalists, or anonymous social media accounts, this content certainly influences how we visualize the border. This research problematizes this security-obsessed narrative, delving into how it is designed to shape public perception and promote the border as a necessary project of fortification.

The way the Turkey-Syria border appears on the screens of media-consuming individuals is relevant because securitization involves an issue being considered a security concern when the public perceives it that way (Tagliapietra, 2021: 3). Therefore, the increasingly security-obsessed discourse regarding the Turkey-Syria border in the majority of Turkey’s mass media outlets is an example of how securitarian actors use the media as a tool to legitimize their actions. In the end, securitization links the process of defining an issue with the process of governing it (Balzacq *et al.*, 2016).

The previously developed point is crucial because, according to Lippmann (1922), the media are the primary sources of images constructed by individuals about parts or aspects of the world that are out of sight or reach for most people. This means that the images people have in their minds do not always match what is actually happening on the ground and are, therefore, more liable to manipulation. In fact, people will construct mental images about events that they did not experience directly through the stories shared by the media, which could be misleading (Tagliapietra, 2021: 4-5). Therefore, the media are capable of influencing people’s perception of reality, which can shape their opinions about specific events and lead them to act in certain ways. For example, throughout the past decade, media coverage in the EU tended to portray the migration issue as the “migration crisis” (Tagliapietra, 2021: 7). According to Eberl *et al.* (2018, 207), such narratives influenced public attitudes towards migration,

as the perception of a crisis differs significantly from that of a mere issue (Chauzy & Appave, 2013).

Similar to this, in the case of the Turkey-Syria border, the media play a crucial role in portraying the border as a project that “keeps Turkey safe” from unwanted people. Özçetin’s (2026) analysis of 2,285 news items across the Turkish political spectrum (ranging from socialist anti-government to ultra-nationalist pro-government news outlets) confirms that coverage of Syrian refugees in Turkey is largely massifying and predominantly negative in tone. Moreover, 40% of the coverage is framed through a “threat–security–control” lens while 32% of coverage maintains a “humanitarian–moral” lens, often addressing Syrian refugees as “guests,” “brothers and sisters,” and “people in need.” This rhetoric, which has largely echoes the Turkish state’s narrative until 2016, does not contradict the securitization narrative that mirrors an anti-Syrian sentiment; rather, it functions in parallel with it. As Özçetin (2026) and Korkut (2016) suggest, these competing lenses intersect to produce the figure of the good refugee, “by selectively humanizing only those who embody specific gendered, moral, or classed virtues.”

The alignment of this media rhetoric with the Turkish state’s narrative is no coincidence. In parallel to the influence media has on public perception, I should also briefly mention the relationship the ruling party, Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP), has with dominant media groups in Turkey. According to Bulut and Karlıdağ (2021, 32), with the accession of Erdoğan’s AKP to power, media ownership shifted to groups with close ties to political power. They also note that the mainstream media were turned into a political tool that stuck strictly to the government’s narratives, while other media groups outside this circle were pacified by threats to bring them into line with the government (Bulut and Karlıdağ 2021, 32). Therefore, the critical voices in the media are limited to low-circulation publications and social media posts, while the pro-government outlets are clearly dominant (BBC News, 2023).

To elaborate on the previous point, I can refer to BBC News’s “Turkey media guide” (2023), which suggests that television is still the leading news medium and that “statements by officials and live speeches by President Erdoğan are staple features of coverage.” The same guide also mentions that critical media outlets face police raids, hostile measures, tax fines, and the arrest of journalists on charges of terrorist organization membership, such as reporters for Kurdish media. Furthermore, it shows that courts regularly ban websites or block pages from critical news sites, considering them linked with terrorism (BBC News, 2023).

Since the mainstream media outlets are largely unavailable for those who are critical and/or support opposition in Turkey, they depend on social media to share their views. According to BBC News (2023), about 84% of Turkey's population uses the internet, whereas 72% also use social media. Nevertheless, the government gave itself the power to regulate social media content through a 2020 law that "obliges major platforms to store user data in Turkey and appoint a local representative to carry out content removal requests" (BBC News, 2023).

Being in control of the mainstream media and with its the ability to regulate social media content, the state in Turkey has the power to shape media narratives about the outside world, which is out of sight or reach for much of its population. The discourse around the Turkey-Syria border is, therefore, heavily influenced by the media, which serves as a political tool by the government. Since media outlets opposed to Turkey's border policies are visibly disempowered, the state now fully controls how the border should be viewed and represented. This is, substantially, how the border is sold to the public as a project performing like a security mechanism.

When the majority of the population in Turkey consumes media (both mainstream and social), the aesthetics of the border as a project are essential to promote it. This is because securitization can be justified when it turns into a matter of public debate. Therefore, the legitimization of what the securitarian actors do, both towards international and domestic audiences, goes through designing a border that performs like a fortress, constantly pushing back migrants and aiming to be impassable. Only then can the border project be sold as a necessity for securitization, justifying even the violence that takes place and the struggles it produces.

The images shared by the mainstream media outlets in Turkey regarding the shared border with Syria are thereby relevant to better understand the border as a project. Such images often have a low production value and usually involve editing that combines various components of military technology, such as drones, zeppelins, watchtowers, trucks, walls, barbed wires, trenches, and more. These images often show such military components juxtaposed and concentrated in the same location in certain border areas, such the 911-km-long Turkey-Syria border.

The severe exaggeration in collocating different military elements within the same scene reflects a certain pride in defending the border at all costs. Using the latest technologies, the tallest watchtowers, and the most sophisticated drones, Turkey's border policies have become increasingly restrictive since 2015, when the fortification of its shared border with Syria began, along with the militarization of the territory and the systematic pushback against migrants. These policies are corroborated by media that

aim to influence public opinion on the Turkey-Syria border and related issues, such as migration to Turkey, reflecting a growing security obsession with a hostile narrative towards migrants, especially those from Syria. This hostility is also evident in the election propaganda of Turkish politicians across different political spectrums, who continuously scapegoat Syrians when they speak about Turkey's domestic issues, like the financial crisis. Nonetheless, this is ironic considering the open-door policy Turkey adopted in 2011 for those fleeing the war in Syria, which has completely reversed to today's fortification and "*hudut namustur*" (border is *namus*) policies.

"*Namus*" is an expression borrowed from Arabic, originally meaning law or custom but somehow referring more to a notion of prudish morality in Turkish colloquial use (Nişanyan, 2015). For example, a family's "*namus*" would be associated with how romantically or sexually "pure" its females are, and if a wife sleeps with another man who is not her husband, she would be "defiling" the husband's "*namus*." Although the choice of terminology seems to deviate from the border discourse, the previously mentioned expression suggests that the border itself is "*namus*" for the country, and therefore the fact that it is being crossed by illegal migrants "defiles" Turkey's *namus*.

According to Yaşlı (2023, 2639), slogans like "border is *namus*" proliferated in Turkey, together with "I don't want refugees in my country," especially after "secular-nationalist" politicians and their supporters promoted these claims on social media thousands of times while asserting that the country is "under Syrian invasion." He also highlights that from time to time, disasters and major problems, such as the wildfires that broke out in different regions of Turkey, would be blamed on Syrian migrants, and ordinary street fights can be labeled as clan fights between Syrians and Turks. These attitudes resulted in Syrians becoming the first suspects in rape or harassment incidents, and when a Syrian does actually commit a crime, all Syrians in the country would take the blame for it (Yaşlı, 2023: 2639). This suggests that the "othering" of Syrians in Turkey does not result solely from political propaganda; rather, it is a multifaceted problem that is experienced and reproduced at multiple levels of daily life.

The slogan "border is *namus*" can be seen even in the streets, sprayed onto the walls, hung as banners on fences, written at the gates of military barracks, printed on t-shirts, or painted on the border walls. It is also very common to see specific groups of secular-nationalist politicians advocating for the fortification of the border and the deportation of migrants to their home country, holding banners with this slogan. This makes evident once again that politicians repeatedly use this rhetoric, both on social

media and in the streets, in order to manipulate the way people perceive certain issues.

The case of the Turkey-Syria border being promoted as a security mechanism in the media, therefore, inevitably influences people's understanding of border spaces and border-related issues, such as the migration of displaced Syrian people. The next chapter examines this state-imposed aesthetics by looking at alternative border spaces and remapping the territory not through security infrastructures, but through other spaces, in other words, "heterotopias."

Remapping the Turkey-Syria Border Otherwise



Looking beyond the state-imposed aesthetics of the Turkey-Syria border requires a methodological shift. If the dominant media narratives promote the border as a security mechanism, then remapping becomes necessary to challenge how the territory is understood and imagined by people who have never been in the region. This remapping does not aim to shift the focus away from the surveillance infrastructures built along the border, but rather to reveal other spatial objects that both confront and coexist with securitization dynamics.

By remapping the border territory, I also look beyond the components of military technology (such as drones, zeppelins, watchtowers, trucks, walls, barbed wires, and trenches) and focus on spaces shaped by the everyday practices of its inhabitants. These other spatialities offer alternative readings of the border, revealing spatial forms that are not only produced by securitization or militarization, but also by social relations, labor, oil industry, memory, and survival. This combined approach requires engaging with space beyond representational tools alone, which is why I conducted a field study in the region in 2023, soon after it was hit by two earthquakes.

The long trip through the cities of the border region in Turkey enabled the collection of ethnographic information and personally experiencing how people inhabit the encountered spaces. Although manipulating maps, territorial data, or literature to locate thought on the territory is essential, this journey allowed for fuller engagement with space and unlocked another level of understanding by involving all five senses to experience narratives and, especially, the different spatial conditions of the border. In doing so, the trip made it possible to encounter the "heterotopias" of the border, thereby offering an opportunity to reimagine the border through a different perspective.

The term heterotopia, literally meaning “the other spaces,” was originally used to define a medical irregularity, “a spatial displacement of normal tissue” or “a site in which biological material is out of place” (Goode, 2018: 227–250). A popular example is the orthopedic condition of “heterotopic ossification,” which refers the presence of a bone in soft tissue where the bone normally does not exist (Miller *et al.*, 2019; Goode, 2018: 227). This somehow inspired Foucault to draw parallels with the social world, possibly to gain insight into social and spatial practices (Goode, 2018: 227). Indeed, for Foucault, a heterotopia is “a space that challenges or subverts the hegemonic order” and, essentially, a place of deviation, “capable of containing within itself a diversity of spaces” as well as “valorizing differentness and diversity” (Goode, 2018: 227; Boano, 2011). I apply the notion of heterotopias as an instrument to represent the diversity of materiality and narrative in border spaces. Using the articulation of heterotopia enables confronting architectural thinking and the project of the border and therefore provides an opportunity to read the border through its deviations and different spatialities.

These spatial objects, or heterotopias, are material conditions through which we are able to think about other places along the border by revealing stories, components, and elements. They uncover different aspects of the border, and through these aspects, I aim to reconstruct the story of the border. In particular, I overlap these stories by remapping the Turkey-Syria border through the elements emerging from its heterotopic spatial conditions. This chapter presents the visual depictions of each heterotopia according to the chronological order of the journey, from west to east: starting with the kebab shop and the lake park in Hatay, followed by the Aleppo soap factory in Gaziantep, a holy grave in Şanlıurfa, and the oil refinery in Batman.

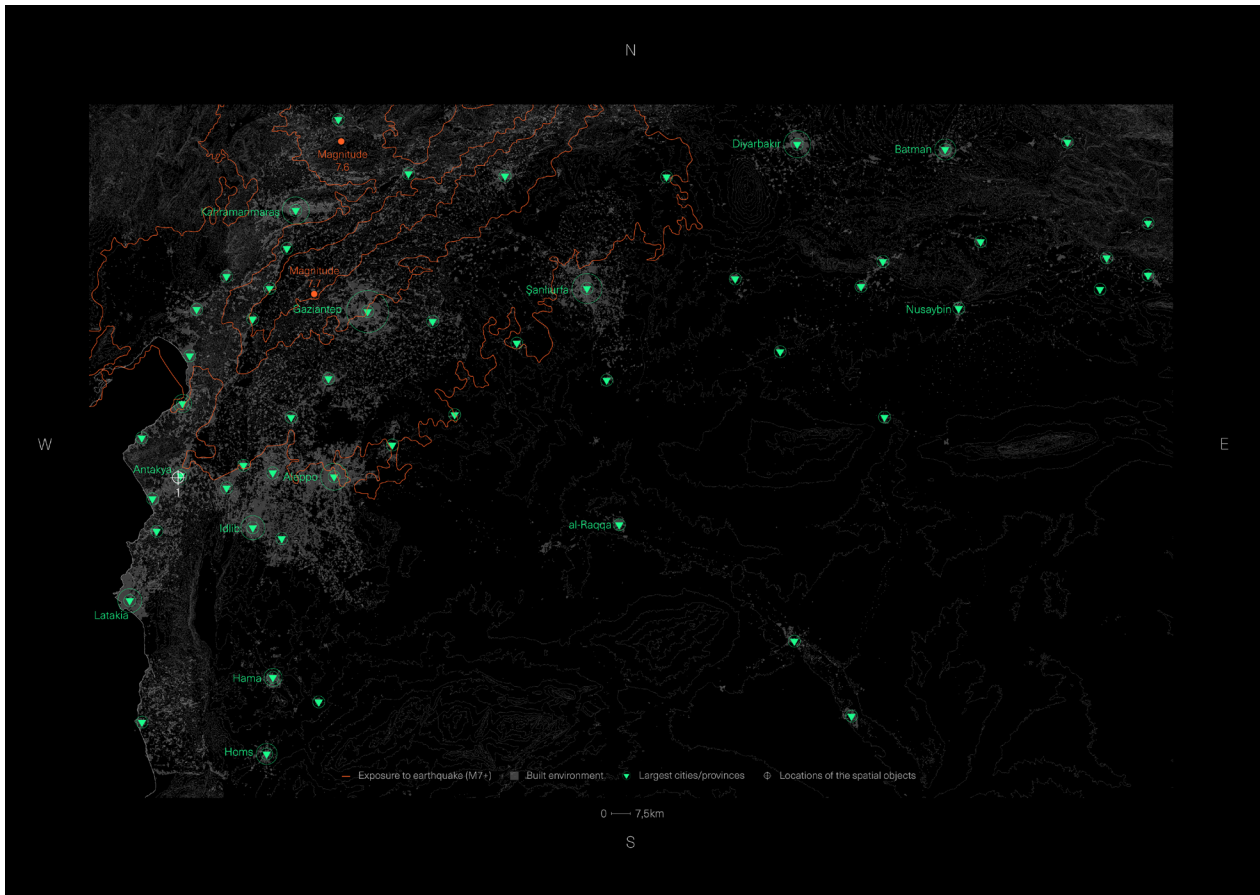


Figure 1. *Heterotopic Ossifications I*, 2024, Author's own work.

The first spatial object encountered is a kebab shop in rubble located in the city center of the significantly damaged Hatay. It is particularly interesting as it tells the story of everyday life within the border area after the twin earthquakes hit the region in February 2023. Amongst the rubble, this makeshift structure blurs the boundary between inside and outside, as an immediate result of the destruction. The shop serves as a point of reference for all the other makeshift spaces across the border, be they in Syrian or Turkish territories. The depiction reveals a story of social life in general, in which kebab shops are seen as significant sites of sociality.

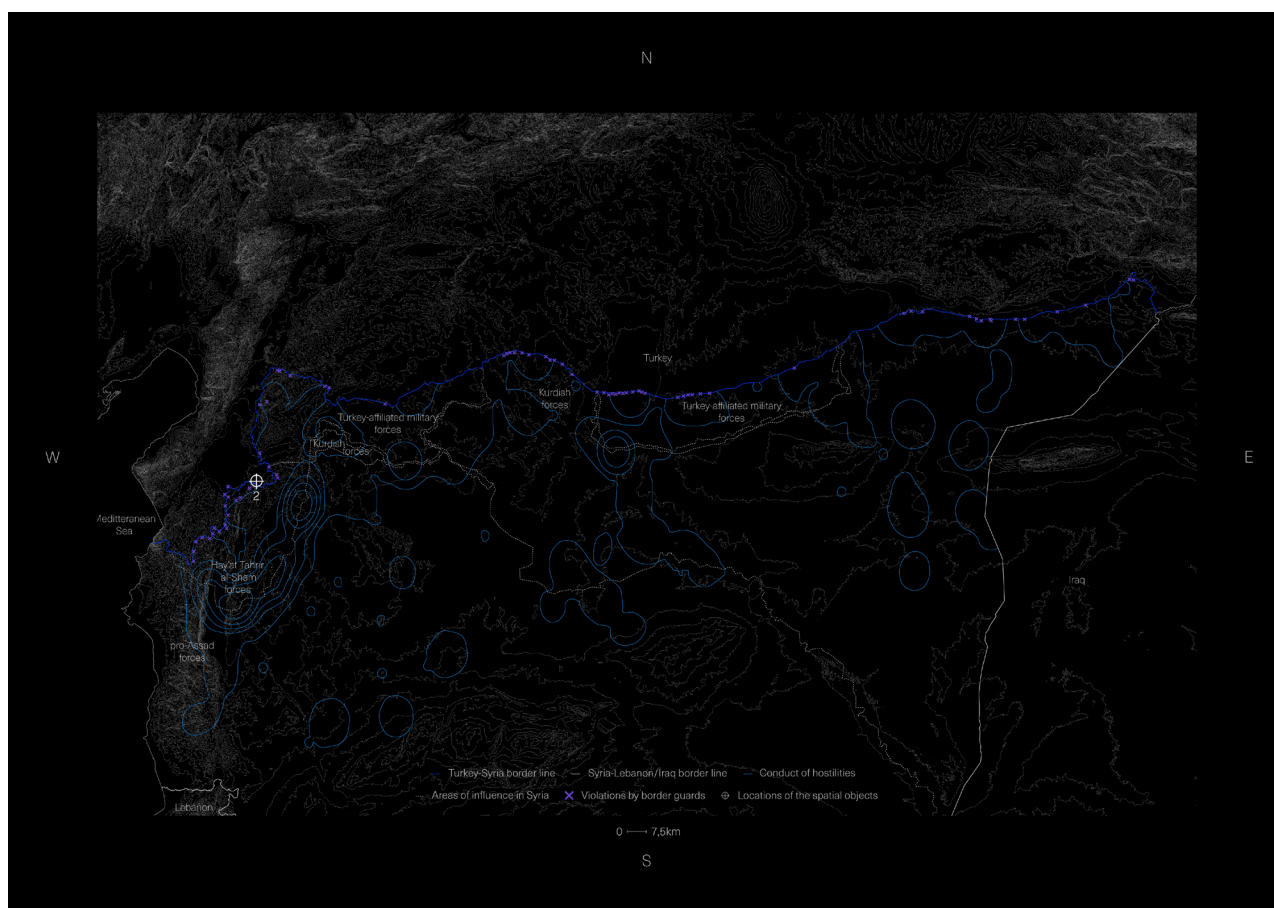


Figure 2. *Heterotopic Ossifications II*, 2024, Author's own work.

The second spatial object encountered is the Lake Park below the border walls, located in Reyhanli province of Hatay, one of the bordering areas of the city. The park is situated next to the hill that forms the division between Syria and Turkey, where border walls, watchtowers, and patrol roads are constantly kept under surveillance by armed Turkish border guards. However, at the foot of that hill, on Turkish territory, there is a park with a lake, playgrounds, sports courts, and restaurants, giving the impression of a “backstage” of the border. Indeed, this park highlights how borders are constantly shaped by such “backstages,” a dynamic that can be observed at various points along the Turkey-Syria border.

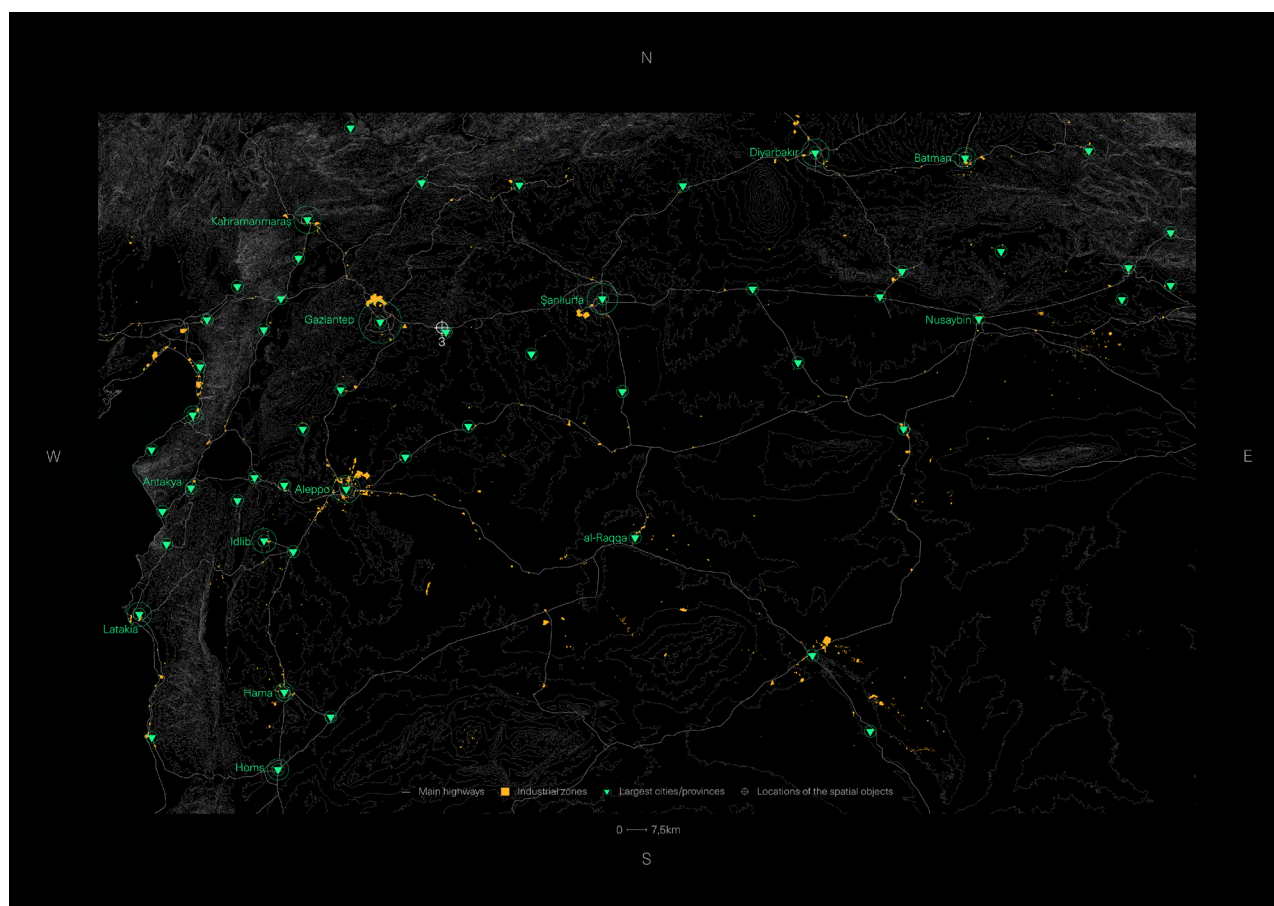


Figure 3. *Heterotopic Ossifications III*, 2024, Author's own work.

The third spatial object encountered is the Aleppo soap factory, located in the industrial zone of Nizip, in the city of Gaziantep. The factory is run by a young Turkish man who inherited the property from his father, and mass produces the famous Aleppo soap, a centuries-old recipe for olive oil soap originating in Syria. In the interview conducted with the factory owner during the trip, he explained that he also works as a lawyer and seeks to “send refugees off to their countries,” because he is a “Turkish nationalist.” However, all of the workers encountered at the soap factory were actually from Syria. Therefore, the story reveals the inherent ambivalence of this place, where Aleppo soap is made in a factory run by a Turkish nationalist lawyer who aims to send refugees back to Syria but makes a living thanks to Syrian labor. This is another lens through which we can read the border, since it reveals how a security mechanism designed to “push back the undesirable” functions selectively by facilitating the exploitation of refugee labor to benefit national capital. Although this space does not reject the securitized logic, it exposes the reliance on undocumented and underpaid Syrian workers who are simultaneously dehumanized and excluded by the same nationalist discourse that profits from their presence.

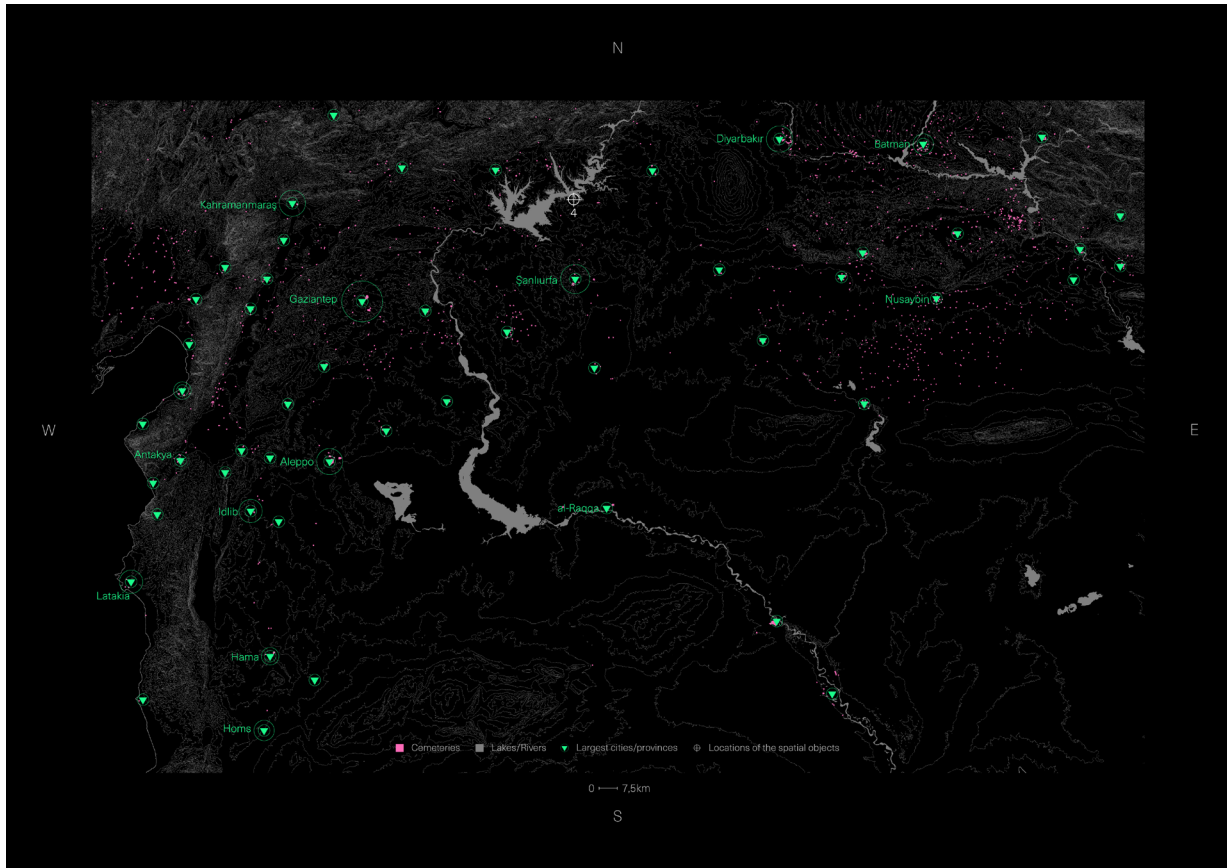


Figure 4. *Heterotopic Ossifications IV*, 2024, Author's own work.

The fourth spatial object encountered is a replica burial place on the riverbank, located on the edge of the Euphrates River, in the city of Şanlıurfa. It was a building observed during my exploration of the remote rural villages nearby. It looked abandoned, and had a locked door and a window without glass that offered a glimpse into the interior, where one could see a raised mound resembling the resting places of holy figures in Islam. A piece of paper left beside the raised mound indicated that it was dedicated to Imam Sayyid Martyr Zayn al-Abidin, who died in 713, and was now memorialized with this replica grave on the riverbank. There is little information available about the grave, but villagers have embraced its presence, with one stating, “It’s always been here.” This story reveals aspects of the border in relation to monuments from the past, particularly how people inhabiting border areas observe death rituals.

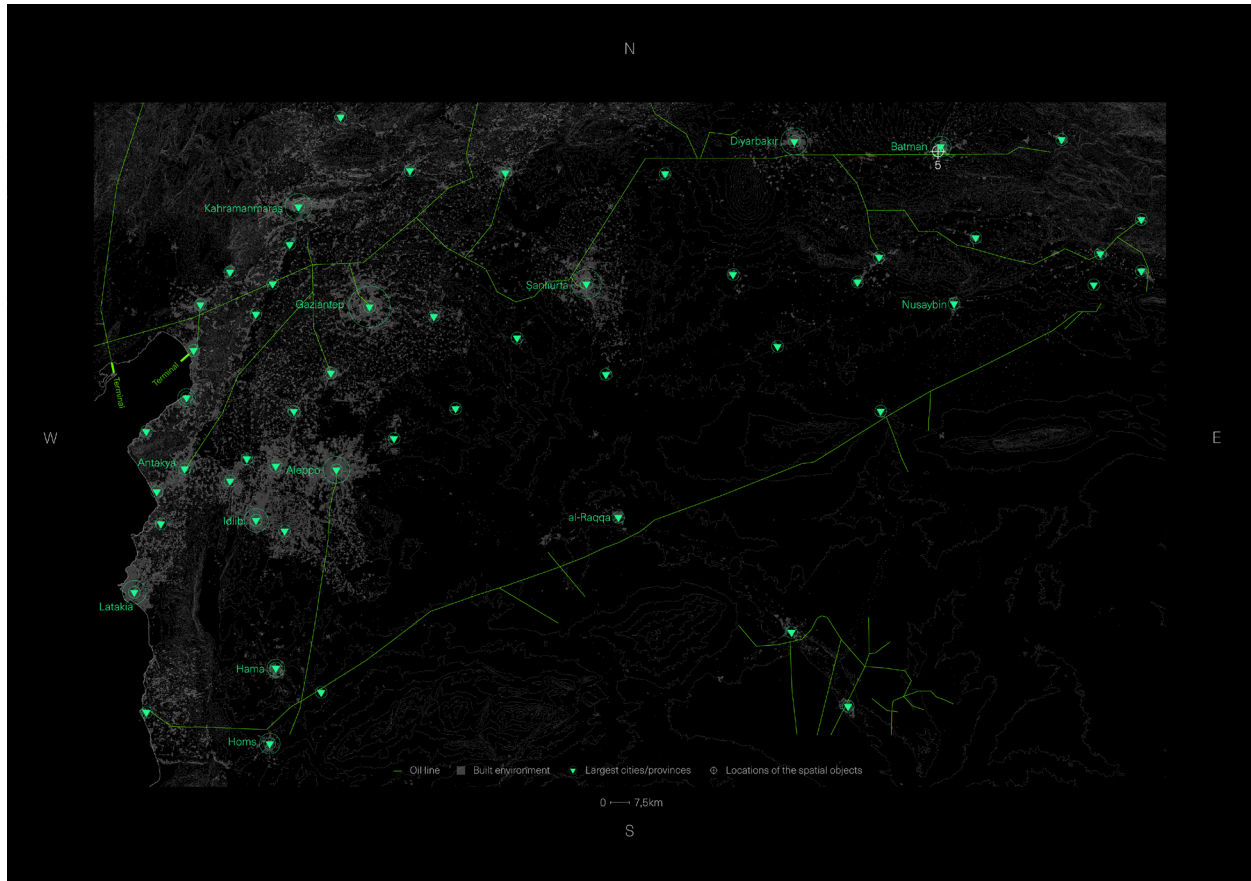


Figure 5. *Heterotopic Ossifications V*, 2024, Author's own work.

The fifth spatial object encountered is an oil refinery, located in the city center of Batman. Compared to the previous objects, this one has a much larger scale as it encompasses the privatized and securitized neighborhood of “Petrol Sitesi,” which consists of the crude oil refinery and its related buildings, hospitals, schools, sports clubs, suburban areas, and parks. The city has evolved around the fortified site; shortly after oil deposits were discovered in the region in the 1940s, the Turkish government built the refinery and granted Batman city status in the 1950s. This story reveals the kind of urbanization driven by privatization, securitization, and the oil industry, which is crucial given that oil evidently led to the emergence of places like Petrol Sitesi in the region. While this may appear to align with the securitized narrative of border discourse, I argue that such heterotopias must be taken into account to show how bordering practices shape spaces intended to secure capital and energy just as much as national safety. Therefore, Petrol Sitesi serves as a unique example of urban development in the region, radically deviating from the planning and logic of the surrounding cities.

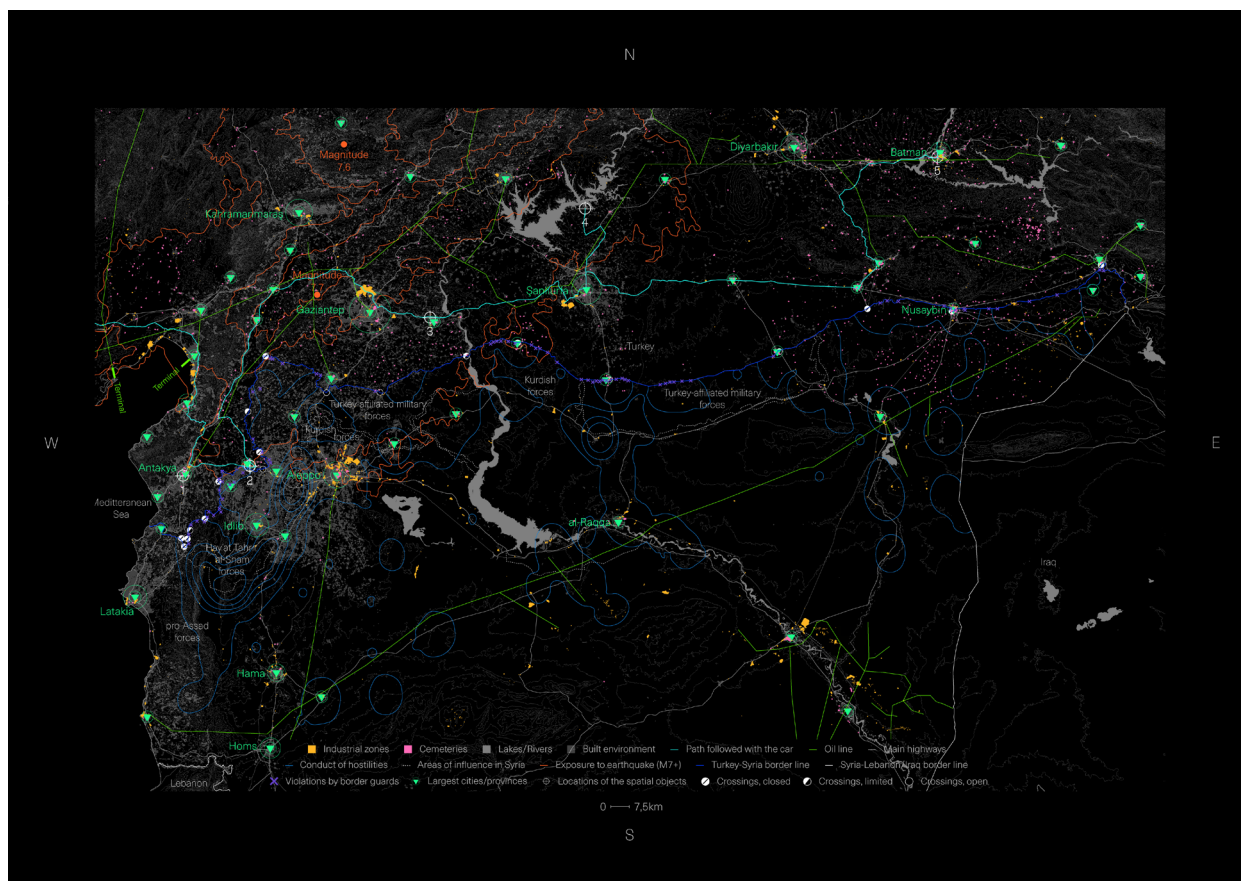


Figure 6. *Heterotopic Ossifications VI*, 2024, Author's own work.

In the end, by revealing the stories of these five sites, I propose an alternative spatial understanding of the Turkey-Syria border. This is because the territory is continuously constructed and negotiated through these different spatialities, in other words, heterotopias. By overlapping the maps of these spatial objects, I aim to reconstruct the state-imposed aesthetics of the border territory in order to provoke reflection within border discourses on the role of the media in engineering conformity in political discourse.

Conclusion

The border cannot be understood solely as a line on two-dimensional maps but should instead be read as a project produced by states and circulated through aesthetics that promote its securitization. By analyzing the case of the Turkey-Syria border and the ways in which Turkish mass media promotes it as a security mechanism, this paper argued that securitization operates not only through infrastructure and policy, but also through media narratives. These imposed representations of the border shape public perception, scapegoating displaced populations and legitimizing hostile

border practices, thus normalizing violence and exclusion as necessary actions to protect the country.

In order to confront this security-obsessed aesthetics, I propose remapping the border otherwise. Rather than reproducing visual narratives that focus on surveillance infrastructures, mapping and field-based inquiry should be mobilized to reveal alternative spatial conditions along the border. Through ethnographic fieldwork, this research examined how heterotopias contest the securitized logics within the border discourse. These heterotopias enable a different spatial understanding of the border, challenging interpretations that fully depend on visual narratives produced by mass media outlets. This approach allows for a multifaceted representation of the border, showing it not merely as a line, but as a densely inhabited territory.

By overlapping the maps of different heterotopias encountered in the region, the article does not seek to deny the presence of military infrastructures, but to challenge the way they shape our spatial understanding of the border. The five spatial objects presented, ranging from a makeshift kebab shop to an oil-driven urban site, demonstrate that the border is not only a fortress against the “undesirable,” but is also inhabited and negotiated in ways that go beyond security-obsessed narratives. In this sense, remapping the border becomes crucial in order to reveal its alternative spatial forms and to challenge its securitized aspects.

Ultimately, I propose looking beyond security-driven imaginaries when engaging with borders, shifting how they are read and represented by focusing on them as a project promoted to the public. By doing so, I aim to contribute to broader debates in border-related studies and to encourage alternative imaginaries informed by fieldwork and critical literature that reveal the diverse spatial implications of borders.

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