

Transregional Agency and Politics in Defining the ‘Middle East’: Unpacking Critique and Cartography Through Syrian–Turkish Borderlands

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The term ‘Middle East’ has been contested ever since its emergence in 1902. Although it has acquired a fairly mainstream delimitation, this conception of the region has largely been shaped by outside (Western) powers. This is problematic because the area thus defined comes with three theoretical flaws that influence our understanding of the region until today: (1) Orientalist sentiments that homogenize or ignore diverse histories; (2) lopsided power relations in regard to knowing and defining the region; and (3) rigid methodological practices that prevent more nuanced and interconnected understandings of both the ‘Middle East’ and the ‘West’. This text expands on these flaws by identifying and, to some extent, countering them on both theoretical and empirical grounds. It does so by unpacking maps of Syrian–Turkish borderlands, especially focusing on cross-border dynamics between 2010 and 2025 in Türkiye’s Hatay province, known as *liwā’ Iskandarūn* in Syria. It finds that conflicting claims to this territory highlight the contentious and fluid processes of defining and border-drawing in, and of, the ‘Middle East’. Through this examination, the article contributes to a more nuanced and transregional understanding of one key part of the MENA region.

More Information

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