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Constructing the Discursive Frontiers: A Discourse-Theoretical Analysis of the Blue Homeland Doctrine in a TRT Documentary

ABSTRACT: This article examines how Turkey's maritime borders are discursively constructed in the *Mavi Vatan* [Blue Homeland] doctrine as sites of national identity, historical justice, and power. Analysing a TRT documentary on *Mavi Vatan* and its YouTube audience reception, this study identifies three nodal points, namely, Homeland, Justice, and Power, that organise a hegemonic discourse linking territorial claims to existential questions. The findings illustrate how the hegemonic claims of the *Mavi Vatan* doctrine naturalise controversial maritime boundaries, mobilise collective emotion, and construct antagonistic others such as Greece and Western powers. The study highlights the crucial role of media in shaping border imaginaries and argues that the doctrine's success in unifying national sentiment also constrains democratic debate and diplomatic flexibility. By analysing the discursive processes behind frontier-making, the article advances understanding of contemporary nationalism and the politics of borders.

Keywords: Borders; Nationalism; Blue Homeland; Eastern Mediterranean; Discourse Theory; Discourse-Theoretical Analysis; Public Service Media

POVZETEK: Ta članek preučuje, kako so pomorske meje Turčije v doktrini *Mavi Vatan* [Modra domovina] diskurzivno konstruirane kot prostori nacionalne identitete, zgodovinske pravičnosti in moči. Z analizo dokumentarca TRT o doktrini Mavi Vatan ter odzivov občinstva na YouTube študija identificira tri nodalne točke – domovino, pravičnost in moč – ki organizirajo hegemonistični diskurz, ki teritorialne zahteve povezuje z eksistencialnimi vprašanji. Ugotovitve kažejo, kako hegemonistične trditve doktrine Mavi Vatan naturalizirajo sporne pomorske meje, mobilizirajo kolektivna čustva ter konstruirajo antagonistične Druge, kot so Grčija in zahodne sile. Študija poudarja ključno vlogo medijev pri oblikovanju mejnih imaginarijev ter trdi, da uspeh doktrine pri poenotenju nacionalnega sentimenta hkrati omejuje demokratično razpravo in diplomatsko prožnost. Z analizo diskurzivnih procesov, ki stojijo za vzpostavljanjem meja, članek prispeva k boljšemu razumevanju sodobnega nacionalizma in politike meja.

Ključne besede: meje; nacionalizem; Modre domovine; vzhodno Sredozemlje; diskurzivna teorija; diskurzivno-teoretska analiza; mediji javne službe

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Introduction

There is always tension when writing about borders, a tension that is rooted in the uncertain ways territories are marked and the constant feeling of trespassing. Borders are often imagined as fixed lines on maps that separate sovereign territories and regulate interstate relations. However, these essentialist understandings are far from being uncontested; Agnew (2008, 175–176), for instance, argues that borders cannot be reduced to technical objects or mere ‘facts on the ground.’ Accordingly, borders are seen to be discursively constructed through meaning-making processes that shape collective understandings of identity, belonging, and difference (Agnew 2008; Newman 2003; Paasi 1996). They are not simply ‘there,’ but are invoked, reproduced, and legitimised through language, rituals, media texts, and symbolic representations.

Borders are not only material demarcations, but also historically contingent social constructs, shaped by ongoing struggles over their meaning, and attempting to produce spatial imaginaries that aim to homogenise cultural and political formations. Yet, as Garane (2005, 14) reminds us, ‘local particularities continue to be created or maintained’ inside and through borders, even as they seek to impose uniformity. Thus, borders emerge not simply as barriers, but as sites of contestation, transformation, and negotiation between self and other. Said’s (1979, 54) notion of ‘imaginative geographies’ captures how border-making symbolically constructs distinctions between ‘ours’ and ‘theirs,’ regardless of how those positioned as outsiders perceive themselves. As Newman (2003) argues, borders simultaneously function as protective barriers, mechanisms of exclusion, and markers of cultural and political homogeneity.

In line with such views, this article examines the discursive construction of borders as mediatisation of the Turkish *Mavi Vatan* [Blue Homeland] doctrine, a strategic and symbolic vision of Turkey’s sovereignty claims, particularly in relation to maritime borders. This research therefore argues that *Mavi Vatan* is not only a geopolitical strategy, but also a discursive project that naturalises, dramatises, and legitimises particular constructions of borders.

The study is grounded in Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse theory (DT), which sees discourse as ‘a structure in which meaning is constantly nego-

tiated and constructed' (Laclau 1988, 254). Adopting this lens, this research argues that borders are not merely material demarcations, but discursive constructs shaped by historical contingencies, political strategies, and discursive struggles. To better understand how borders are discursively constructed, particularly within the context of *Mavi Vatan*, this study employs Discourse-Theoretical Analysis (DTA), as elaborated by Carpentier and De Cleen (2007). Methodologically, the analysis employs a retroductive approach (Glynos and Howarth 2007), which facilitates iterative movements between the theoretical framework and the empirical material. In order to capture how meanings are produced multimodally in the documentary, DTA is further strengthened by multimodal analysis techniques.

The analysis focuses on a documentary produced by Turkey's public service broadcaster, TRT, and its online reception through YouTube comments, thereby bridging institutional and digital media. By examining how *Mavi Vatan* is articulated as a set of hegemonic claims over maritime borders through the TRT documentary, and how such claims are debated in YouTube comments, this article explores the media's capacity to 'order our lives, and organise social space' (Couldry 2003, 1). By discussing how media operate not as neutral transmitters but as active participants in the construction of hegemony, this study unpacks how borders are discursively produced across legal, affective, and mythic registers that circulate in both 'institutional/official' and 'vernacular' texts.

Furthermore, the article situates the empirical analysis within the context of the Eastern Mediterranean disputes, acknowledging the enduring salience of contested maritime sovereignty in Turkey's geopolitical imagination and highlighting how the *Mavi Vatan* doctrine draws upon earlier struggles over sovereignty and belonging. The doctrine becomes legible not only as a security strategy, but as part of a longer genealogical struggle over borders, one that continues to shape Turkey's nationalist imaginaries.

From Cartographic Lines to Discursive Formations: Theorising Borders

Laclau and Mouffe's (2001) discourse theory (DT) provides the theoretical backbone of this study. DT represents a significant departure from essentialist understandings of society, politics, and identity, offering instead a

non-foundationalist approach that emphasises contingency, antagonism, and the discursive struggles for hegemony (Laclau and Mouffe 2001; Howarth 2000). DT argues that social reality is discursively constructed, and thus, argues that the concept of discourse extends far beyond language to encompass the totality of meaningful practices and relations that constitute the social (Carpentier 2017, 18).

DT argues that discourse is 'a relational totality of signifying sequences that determine the identity of the social elements' (Torfing 1999, 87). This implies that objects and practices acquire meaning through their inscription within discursive formations. In this sense, DT sees discourse as 'a framework of intelligibility providing meaning to social phenomena, objects, and actors' (Dagdelen and Carpentier 2024, 146). This does not suggest that material reality does not exist, but that objects and practices acquire meaning through their inscription within discursive formations. Carpentier (2017, 19) argues that although discourse is distinct from the material, it is crucial for making sense of it. DT therefore views discourse not just as a reflection of the social but as constitutive of it. The social, in this conception, is never given but constructed through articulatory practices (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002).

DT defines discourse as 'a structure in which meaning is constantly negotiated and constructed' (Laclau 1988, 254). Central to this process is the concept of articulation, which is, according to Laclau and Mouffe (2001, 105), 'any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice.' Through articulation, distinct elements are woven around privileged signifiers called nodal points that serve as organising centres for meaning making. Nodal points function to temporarily arrest the flow of signification, creating partial fixations that enable the construction of identities and political projects. As Stavrakakis (2007, 58) puts it, nodal points 'describe the signifier which, in every chain of signification, serves as [a] reference point, the 'anchoring point' uniting a whole set of signifiers.' Nodal points, then, 'function as a central category in discourse theory, designed to explain how meaning achieves a (partial) fixation without which social and political discourse would surely disintegrate into psychotic rumbling' (Stavrakakis 2007, 68). As Jørgensen and Phillips (2002, 28) argue, nodal points are 'emp-

ty in themselves.’ This implies that different discourses engage in discursive struggles to invest these signifiers with meaning in particular ways. Thus, a nodal point ‘refers to a point of crystallisation within a specific discourse’ (ibid.).

Such struggles over meanings constitute the terrain of hegemonic struggles. DT’s understanding of hegemony has been largely inspired by the work of Gramsci, for whom hegemony could be seen ‘as the organisation of consent’ (Barrett 1991, 54). Hegemony, thus, ‘explains how power may be exercised not just through physical coercion but covertly, through ideology and discourse’ (Flowerdew and Richardson 2018, 4). The concept therefore refers to ‘the processes through which subordinated forms of consciousness are constructed without recourse to violence or coercion’ (Barrett 1991, 54). In other words, it is a condition in which authority is legitimised through the tacit consent of the governed rather than through coercive means (Flowerdew and Richardson 2018, 4). Hegemony, for DT, is not simply domination but rather ‘a political type of relation, a form [...] of politics, but not a determinable location within a topography of the social’ (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 139). In DT, ‘hegemony refers to situations where particular discourses obtain social dominance’ (Carpentier 2017, 21). However, ‘even in cases where the establishment of hegemony concludes antagonistic struggles, this hegemony is not permanent, as new (or old) antagonisms can always (re)surface’ (Dagdelen and Carpentier 2024, 147). Laclau and Mouffe (2001, 135) argue that ‘hegemony [...] emerge[s] in a field criss-crossed by antagonisms.’ Therefore, as Mouffe (2005, 18) puts it, ‘every hegemonic order is susceptible of being challenged by counter-hegemonic practices [...] which will attempt to disarticulate the existing order so as to install other forms of hegemony.’

Antagonisms can also be found at another level, involving both discursive identification and the exclusion of others. As Carpentier (2017, 22) argues, antagonisms ‘attempt to destabilise the “other” identity but desperately need that very “other” as a constitutive outside to stabilise the proper identity.’ Perhaps most significantly for the study of borders and nationalism is the discourse-theoretical conceptualisation of antagonism as constitutive of identities. Antagonism represents the tension arising when an ‘other’ disrupts or threatens one’s identity. As Laclau and Mouffe

(2001, 125) argue, 'antagonism constitutes the limits of every objectivity,' revealing the contingent nature of all social formations by showing that 'the presence of the Other prevents me from being totally myself.' This understanding of antagonism has profound implications for analysing nationalist discourse and border construction. National identities are not given entities but emerge through antagonistic relations with Others, who are often positioned as threatening the coherence and continuity of the nation. The frontier of antagonism thus becomes both a discursive and material boundary that separates 'us' from 'them,' inside from outside, legitimate from illegitimate.

The application of DT to border studies reveals that borders are discursive phenomena rather than natural or purely material entities. As Foucault (1980, 68) observes, 'territory is no doubt a geographical notion, but it is first of all a juridico-political one: the area controlled by a certain kind of power.' In this sense, borders are not simply lines on maps but are constituted through discursive practices that define, legitimise, and reproduce relations of power and authority over space. This perspective challenges conventional approaches that treat borders as given territorial demarcations, emphasising instead how borders are constructed, maintained, and contested through discursive practices (Newman 2003; Paasi 1996). Such understanding calls for a critical rethinking of borders, moving beyond a territorialist lens to see borders as dynamic, dispersed practices embedded across society, technology, and governance rather than fixed lines on maps (Parker and Vaughan-Williams 2009, 583). According to Agnew (2008, 175), borders must move beyond being seen as simple 'artefacts on the ground' and instead be recognised as 'artefacts of dominant discursive processes through which chunks of territory and people have been fenced off from one another.'

This processual understanding reveals how borders represent 'a gradual evolution of the conceptualisation of the border from a territorially placed boundary and filter, to a semantically constructed, ritualised, and performed symbolic border, and finally to a discursive (textual) construction' (Kurki 2014, 1055). Borders, in this view, are not simply inscribed on maps but actively produced through everyday practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural representations. They function as sites where

identities are negotiated, differences are constructed, and belonging is determined (Rumford 2006).

The discursive construction of borders is intimately connected to processes of national identity formation. As Anderson (2006) argues, nations are 'imagined communities' that are both limited and sovereign. These imagined boundaries do not simply describe pre-existing differences but actively produce the distinctions they purport to reflect. Nationalist discourses construct borders as natural expressions of cultural, ethnic, or historical differences, thereby obscuring their contingent and political character (Billig 1995). Through processes of symbolic bordering, national communities are imagined as bounded, coherent entities with clear inside/outside distinctions (Lamont and Molnár 2002, 168). This imaginative geography creates what Said (1978) termed 'imaginative geographies,' which are spatial representations that construct 'ours' and 'theirs' distinctions independent of any recognition by those deemed to be outside.

Performativity also plays a crucial role in understanding borders, as borders are not static lines but dynamic processes that are enacted, materialised, and performed in multiple ways. Border discourses actively construct borders through repeated acts that both delineate and reinforce their meaning. The performativity of borders thus resembles Butler's (1990, 140) notion of the 'stylised repetition of acts,' wherein boundaries are constituted through practices that sustain their legitimacy. As Paasi observes, borders are 'enacted and performed not only as "discursive or emotional landscapes of social power" [...] but also as "technical landscapes of control and surveillance,"' underscoring their dual nature as both symbolic and material constructs (Johnson et al. 2011, 62). From this perspective, the legitimacy of national subjects – like that of refugees, whose 'genuineness' emerges only through recognition (Nyers 2006, 92–95) – is also produced through discursive practices that define authentic citizenship in opposition to various forms of otherness. The performativity of borders reveals that they are never fully complete or secure, either materially or discursively; thus, they demand constant reiteration and reinforcement. Each act of border crossing, policy speech, and media representation participates in

the ongoing construction of the border as a meaningful and contested boundary (Johnson et al. 2011, 66). This understanding opens space for analysing how borders may be challenged, reimagined, or transformed through alternative discursive practices.

Emphasising the ‘polysemy’ and ‘heterogeneity’ of borders, Balibar (2002, 75) argues that it is impossible to ‘attribute to the border an essence which would be valid in all places and at all times.’ However, one can argue, using the discourse-theoretical vernacular, that borders resemble hegemonic articulations that temporarily stabilise territorial and identity configurations. Border discourses construct chains of equivalence linking territory, security, identity, and sovereignty while positioning various others as threats to national coherence (Balibar 2002). However, no hegemonic border construction can ever be complete or permanent. They remain vulnerable to dislocation through counter-hegemonic contestations, just as any hegemonic discourse (Laclau 1990, 28). Alternative articulations may emerge that challenge dominant border imaginaries, proposing different ways of organising space, identity, and belonging (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013, 281–84).

The Geopolitical Context of *Mavi Vatan*

Turkish geopolitics in the Eastern Mediterranean has developed from the Ottoman Empire’s collapse into an assertive maritime strategy shaped by history, territorial disputes, and energy competition. Following the ‘inward-looking first decades’ (Mufti 2009, 31) of the Republic, the post-World War II period marked Turkey’s integration into the Western security architecture (Chiozzo and Neves 2024, 261–62). However, tensions with Greece over Cyprus and Aegean disputes, disagreements with the United States, and the Cyprus question pushed Turkey to diversify its foreign policy (Ayanoğlu 2022, 10). Towards the end of the Cold War period, most visibly during the Özal era, strong pro-American alignment reconfigured Turkey’s foreign policy towards a more economy-oriented trajectory, in which processes of economic liberalisation sought to reconcile Turkey’s traditional Western orientation with deeper engagement in the Islamic world, emphasising economic integration and advocating for Turkey as a bridge linking East and West while promoting liberal market reforms (Aral 2001).

The early twenty-first century witnessed a paradigm shift under the AKP government. With the 'Strategic Depth' doctrine, Anatolia began to be seen 'as a hub between Europe, Africa, and Asia,' calling for active engagement in areas of former Ottoman influence (Areteos 2020, 4; Denizeau 2021, 11). This strategic reorientation overlapped with the maritime strategy of the *Mavi Vatan* doctrine. The doctrine has become a key element of Turkey's foreign and security policy, which seeks to position Turkey as a regional naval power in the Mediterranean (Areteos 2020, 2). As one of the most significant maritime geopolitical developments in contemporary Turkey, *Mavi Vatan* has fundamentally reshaped Turkish foreign policy and regional dynamics, marking a departure from traditional defensive postures towards an assertive maritime nationalism and the 'remilitarisation of Turkish foreign policy' (Chiozzo and Neves 2024, 263).

The doctrine emerged from within Turkey's naval establishment as a strategic response to perceived maritime encirclement and the country's diminishing access to sea-based resources. It was initially conceptualised by Admiral Gürdeniz in 2006 (Moudouros 2021, 465). From 2009 onward, Admiral Yaycı took an interest in the outline of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) claimed by Turkey and contributed significantly to the development and popularisation of the doctrine (Denizeau 2021, 7). In outlining his approach, Gürdeniz criticised the EU's reliance on the Seville map, arguing that it lacked legal justification and further calling on Turkey, which is not a party to the Montego Bay Convention, to assert a broader EEZ, which he termed the *Mavi Vatan* (Chiozzo and Neves 2024, 265; Denizeau 2021, 7). The doctrine established a comprehensive framework asserting Turkish claims over approximately 462,000 square kilometres of maritime territory. In doing so, it reflects a broader maritime sovereignty strategy, as Parlar Dal and Matsumoto (2024, 7) note: 'the doctrine reflects a maritime sovereignty approach and a growing trend towards the territorialisation of the maritime domain.'

The doctrine's rise as a core element of Turkey's security policy is tied to ongoing power struggles in Ankara (Areteos 2020, 2). In its early years, the doctrine remained largely confined to naval circles (Stergiou 2022, 80). The transformation of *Mavi Vatan* from a fringe naval concept to a central pillar of Turkish state policy represents a significant shift in contemporary

Turkish geopolitics. This transition was catalysed by the failed coup attempt in 2016, which fundamentally altered Turkey's ruling coalition and created space for previously marginalised nationalist voices within the security establishment (Denizeau 2021, 4). The coup attempt resulted in the dissolution of Turkey's existing power bloc and the formation of a new 'survival of the state' coalition (Moudouros 2021, 461). The *Mavi Vatan* doctrine became a unifying element within this coalition, providing a framework for Turkish assertiveness that appealed to both Islamist and secular nationalist constituencies.

The political uptake of the doctrine was facilitated by its adaptability to different ideological frameworks within the Turkish governing coalition. For (ultra-)nationalist and Kemalist elements, the doctrine represented a return to Atatürk's vision of Turkish maritime power and resistance to Western attempts to confine Turkey to a limited coastal zone (Areteos 2020, 2–3). Gürdeniz consistently emphasised the Kemalist credentials of the doctrine, which he viewed as protecting state interests against neo-Ottoman expansionism and Islamist influences (see, Gürdeniz 2015). However, the doctrine simultaneously accommodated neo-Ottoman and Islamist interpretations that resonated with the AKP's ideological base (Moudouros 2021, 467). This dual character allowed *Mavi Vatan* to serve as what could be described as a legitimising axis unifying disparate elements of Turkey's ruling coalition around a common assertive agenda.

The doctrine's nationalist imaginaries extend beyond immediate maritime claims to encompass broader visions of Turkish regional leadership. In this view, Turkey is constructed as a bastion of stability in the middle of Eurasia (Yeşiltaş 2013, 667). This pan-Turkic dimension adds another layer to the doctrine's ideological appeal, while also expanding its perceived strategic significance.

The Eastern Mediterranean contains significant energy reserves, making control over maritime zones economically and strategically valuable (Stergiou 2022, xi). *Mavi Vatan*, which challenges the claims of Greece and Cyprus, has transformed the region into what some describe as a volatile 'geopolitical battleground,' marked by competing claims over maritime rights, energy resources, and regional dominance (Evriviades 2025).

Turkey refuses to recognise Cyprus's EEZ agreements, arguing that such arrangements violate Turkish continental shelf rights and ignore the interests of Turkish Cypriots (Yiallourides and Sözen 2025). This position has led to repeated confrontations, including Turkey's deployment of drilling vessels within Cyprus's claimed EEZ and naval interventions to prevent Cypriot exploration activities (see Henderson 2019).

The Turkey-Libya maritime agreement represents the doctrine's most controversial practical application (Stergiou 2022, 71). The memorandum of understanding with Libya claims maritime boundaries that cut through Greek-claimed waters south of Crete, effectively invalidating Greek and Egyptian maritime zones (*ibid.*, 72). It also provides Turkey with a strategic foothold in the Mediterranean while breaking its regional isolation, though it has been widely condemned by the EU, Greece, and Egypt as legally invalid. Implementation of the doctrine has severely strained NATO cohesion and transatlantic relations. Its assertive maritime posture has led to direct confrontations between NATO allies, including a June 2020 incident between Turkish and French warships (Marghelis 2021, 18). These confrontations highlight what analysts describe as Turkey's challenge to NATO's collective defence coherence and its potential to undermine vital NATO-EU cooperation in the Mediterranean region (Conley and Ellehuus 2020).

The doctrine's regional implications extend beyond immediate Mediterranean concerns to encompass broader questions of international legal order. Turkey's rejection of UNCLOS and its preference for 'equitable principles' over established maritime law challenge the foundation of contemporary maritime governance (Stergiou 2022, 7). This position aligns Turkey with other revisionist powers while undermining the legal frameworks that have governed Mediterranean relations for decades.

The doctrine has established Turkey as a disruptive force in Eastern Mediterranean geopolitics, challenging established maritime arrangements while pursuing energy security and regional influence. Its implementation has created lasting tensions with Greece and Cyprus, strained NATO cohesion, and established new frameworks for Turkish assertiveness that appear likely to define regional dynamics for years to come. The doctrine's success in unifying Turkey's domestic political coalition around an as-

sertive nationalist agenda suggests its continued prominence in Turkish strategic thinking, even as its regional implications continue to generate significant international opposition and concern.

Research Design and Methodology

This study applies Discourse Theoretical Analysis (DTA), developed by Carpentier and De Cleen (2007). DTA was developed to operationalise DT by establishing a link between the conceptual framework of DT and the methodology of qualitative research. It does so primarily by using sensitising concepts, which provide 'a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances' (Blumer 1986, 148), as methodological tools that guide empirical inquiry.

DTA, as a qualitative research method, employs a retroductive approach (Glynos and Howarth 2007), allowing for a dynamic and iterative movement between theory and empirical material. This approach emphasises the cross-fertilisation between the theoretical framework and the analytical process, in which neither precedes nor determines the other. To this end, DTA draws on sensitising concepts derived from DT and complementary theoretical perspectives to guide the analysis without constraining its interpretive openness. Within this study, 'discourse' operates as the central sensitising concept, supported by others such as 'nodal points,' 'articulation,' and 'antagonism,' as well as notions drawn from mediated nationalism and geopolitical imagination. These sensitising concepts initially orient data collection and preliminary coding, but are reflexively adjusted in dialogue with empirical insights. Accordingly, these concepts were developed in parallel with the empirical analysis, ensuring that theoretical reflection evolved alongside the examination of the material rather than being imposed upon it. This iterative process took shape through successive cycles of coding and categorisation, following Saldaña's (2016) approach, whereby theoretical insights gradually informed the structuring of empirical categories, leading to increasing levels of abstraction and conceptual refinement. This ensures a theoretically sensitive yet grounded approach to the empirical material, resisting reductionist applications of theory.

Since the analysis concerns a documentary film, DTA is further strengthened by multimodal analysis techniques that help examine the multiplici-

ty of communicative modes and the interactions among them (Kress 2010). The combination of multimodal analysis techniques with DTA allows for the investigation of communicative interactions between different modalities and how these contribute to the discursive construction of geopolitical frontiers and antagonisms.

The empirical corpus is composed of the 47-minute TRT documentary, *Mavi Vatan* (2020), offering a state-produced story of the *Mavi Vatan* doctrine, and 460 YouTube comments from the documentary's page, incorporating all comments to capture vernacular audience perspectives. Both the documentary and audience responses are treated as discursive sites. The analysis attends to how geopolitical antagonisms and frontiers are articulated officially, as well as how they are re-articulated, contested, or amplified in participatory digital forums.

Coding began with the identification of sensitising concepts from DT and border studies, as well as emergent themes from initial documentary viewing and audience comment sampling. Through sequential coding cycles, an analytical coding tree was developed, capturing both discursive logics and substantive themes (Saldaña 2013). Iterative analysis was maintained, ensuring continual cross-fertilisation between theoretical categories and empirical patterns. Where relevant, visual and audio elements were annotated with reference to their position in the documentary's narrative structure, allowing for integration of multimodal evidence into the broader DTA framework. This strategy ensures that both the construction and contestation of the doctrine are examined through a lens sensitive to the complexity of discourse and the multiplicity of communicative modes.

Analysis: Discursive Construction of Borders through *Mavi Vatan* Doctrine

The analysis identifies three nodal points that structure the *Mavi Vatan* discourse: *Vatan* [Homeland], *Adalet* [Justice], and *Güç* [Power]. Each of them operates through distinct discursive logics, while contributing to the overall hegemonic project of naturalising Turkey's maritime territorial claims. The analysis also indicates that the construction of the antagonistic Other as the constitutive outside further strengthens the hegemonic claims of this discourse.

Vatan [Homeland]: Sacralising Space

The concept of *Vatan* functions as the privileged signifier that transforms the contested maritime space into a sacred national territory. This nodal point operates through what can be termed territorial sacralisation; that is, the discursive transformation of geographical space into an embodied extension of national identity.

The documentary's opening sequence immediately establishes this central articulation through a seamless geographical transition: 'the mainland ends here, but from this point the blue homeland begins.' This utterance performs a crucial discursive operation, extending the boundaries of sacred national space beyond terrestrial limitations into maritime domains. Three discursive elements operationalise this nodal point: 1) temporal anchoring, 2) spatial seamlessness, and 3) corporeal embodiment.

In the analysed materials, the maritime claims are legitimised through deep historical time, with the 3,200-year-old Gelidonya/Kilidonia shipwreck serving to establish civilisational continuity: 'This place has been Turkish homeland for a thousand years.' This temporal depth naturalises contemporary territorial claims by inscribing them within a narrative of an eternal Turkish presence in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The documentary constructs maritime space as an organic extension of the terrestrial homeland through metaphors of continuity. For example, Yaycı's declaration that 'Our Blue Homeland borders are our national pact at sea' explicitly parallels maritime boundaries with the foundational territorial compact of the Turkish Republic.

The sea becomes literally incorporated into the national body through biological metaphors. The documentary's emphasis on *Mavi Vatan*'s multiple layers, for example, 'sea surface, underwater living nature, and underground riches beneath the seabed,' constructs maritime space as a living, breathing extension of the national organism.

The analysis of the YouTube comments indicates a successful hegemonic uptake of this nodal point through expressions of embodied attachment. Comments such as '[...] my paradise homeland, we will never allow this homeland to be divided' perform a metonymic operation through which the homeland is equated with paradise, thereby sacralising national territory and underscoring the inviolability of its borders. This chain of

equivalence not only naturalises the extension of homeland into maritime domains but also serves to mobilise collective investment in its defence as a moral imperative.

Similarly, the recurrent slogan ‘Blue Homeland is our life’ exemplifies how the sea is re-conceived as living flesh of the national body, fostering a somatic attachment that collapses the distinction between personal and national well-being. By declaring the blue homeland to be ‘our life,’ commenters enact what Laclau and Mouffe (2001) describe as the conversion of particular demands into empty signifiers. Here, for example, the homeland functions as an empty signifier that aggregates diverse affective investments, such as pride, fear, and longing, into a unified call for collective resilience.

Such utterances also function performatively. Each repetition not only expresses individual affection but also reiterates and reinforces the wider discursive formation, closing off alternative constructions of maritime borders. In this way, the YouTube comments indicate that homeland, far from remaining a static concept, is continually re-articulated into a lived, embodied horizon of expectation and duty, one that renders dissent virtually unthinkable within the parameters of the *Mavi Vatan* discourse.

Furthermore, the ubiquitous appearance of the patriotic formula ‘How happy is the one who says I am Turkish’ indicates the successful articulation of maritime claims within an essential national identity, transforming territorial disputes into questions of existential belonging. Initially coined by Atatürk to cement loyalty to the secular Turkish Republic, this formula resurfaces in YouTube comments as a shorthand affirmation of belonging that now extends to the sea.

Adalet [Justice]: Historical Rectification

The nodal point of *Adalet* functions as the linchpin that retroactively legitimises contemporary maritime claims by inscribing them within a narrative of historical redress. This nodal point constructs *Mavi Vatan* as the rectification of historical injustices through what can be termed restorative nationalism, committed to completing the nation’s unfinished liberation. This discursive operation relies on a referential chain of equivalence that binds *Mavi Vatan*, anti-imperial resistance, and national liberation

into a single signifying bloc, linking contemporary maritime disputes to historical grievances, particularly the Treaty of Sèvres.

Erdoğan's declaration in the documentary serves as the key articulation establishing this equivalential chain: 'As we tore up and threw away Sèvres as a nation a century ago, today we will not bow to the Sèvres being imposed on our country in the Eastern Mediterranean.' This articulation constructs a chain of equivalence where the elements of *Mavi Vatan*, anti-Sèvres, historical justice, and national liberation operate as the rings. Furthermore, this explicit parallel between the tearing of the Treaty of Sèvres and current Eastern Mediterranean disputes activates the logic of historical revenge.

This complex formulation situates *Mavi Vatan* not simply as a geopolitical strategy, but as a continuation of the anti-imperial struggle that birthed the republic. By equating contemporary map impositions with Sèvres, the documentary constructs a temporal equivalence where past humiliation and present encroachment become morally indistinguishable, warranting the same resolute defiance.

The documentary extends this logic through proportionality discourse. The Meis/Kastellorizo Island vignette dramatises geographical injustice through a visceral cartographic demonstration. The 2-kilometre distance of the island to Turkey versus the 580-kilometre distance to Greece becomes a self-evident index of moral absurdity. This technique reifies spatial relationships as legal and ethical facts, foreclosing nuanced treaty interpretations in favour of a logic that equates proximity with rightful ownership, thereby rendering any opposition as both legally and morally illegitimate.

The analysed YouTube comments seem to amplify this nodal point through emotional incitement and the invocation of agency. Statements such as 'Turkey must be strong, otherwise no one will give it its rights' employ a modal logic that frames strength as a prerequisite for justice. This assertion transforms justice from a universal norm into a contingent achievement, dependent on collective will and capability. Moreover, the recurring metaphor of national awakening, such as 'Turks will not sleep or give up anymore,' invokes a phantasmatic logic wherein the Turkish nation transitions from a passive subject of history to an active agent of its destiny. This shift in temporal orientation, from sleep to vigilant resistance, consolidates collective identity around a shared mission of historical redress.

Comments that recall the Turkish War of Independence, such as, for example, ‘The puppet prime minister of Greece [...] when they were thrown into the sea in Izmir [...]’ extend the chain by linking Greece’s contemporary diplomatic posturing to past military defeats. This retrospective articulation reaffirms the justice nodal point, but it also naturalises perpetual enmity, casting any Greek claim as an echo of a century-old betrayal.

Through these discursive moves, *Adalet* emerges as an empty signifier that aggregates diverse demands, such as territorial integrity, historical dignity, and energy security, into a unified call for redemptive action. In this way, this nodal point legitimises expansionist policy and galvanises popular mobilisation, ensuring that *Mavi Vatan* is perceived not as an aggressive gambit, but as the moral restoration of a nation’s rightful heritage.

Güç [Power]: Independence and Great Power Status

The third nodal point transforms maritime disputes from territorial questions into issues of national survival, technological sovereignty, national power projection, and energy independence. This articulation fundamentally changes the terms of engagement, what might otherwise be a technical argument over maritime law becomes reframed as a struggle for existential autonomy and regional leadership. Thus, this nodal point operates through civilisational discourse, positioning Turkey’s maritime claims within broader narratives of great power competition and technological advancement.

The documentary foregrounds *Güç* by binding energy independence with the desire for national resurgence. Yayıcı’s assertion in the documentary emphasises ‘enough natural gas reserves to supply Turkey for 572 years’ and elevates the extraction of maritime resources from routine economic activity to a symbolically charged act of national emancipation. Yayıcı further argues that ‘If we solve the energy problem, no one can stand in Turkey’s way.’ This actively positions the nation within a hierarchy of global powers, suggesting that technical mastery over nature and energy translates directly into geopolitical agency and respect.

This articulation elevates maritime disputes from legal-territorial questions to existential national imperatives. The documentary’s systematic demonstration of Turkish maritime capabilities, through the images of

drilling ships, each presented as a national achievement largely independent of foreign intervention or expertise, functions as visual proof of technological sovereignty and power-projection capacity. These multimodal cues produce what could be called an 'affective regime,' wherein the spectacle of maritime technology serves both to demonstrate capability and to inspire confidence in the nation's trajectory towards energy autonomy.

The articulation of energy competition as a civilisational struggle appears in the declaration: 'This is the real reason for this struggle. This is an energy struggle.' Within such articulation, maritime conflict is not only about resources or law, but becomes a field where the superiority or survival of the Turkish nation is weighed against external threats, effectively recoding material interests as existential imperatives. Thus, it transforms technical disputes over EEZs into existential contests over civilisational hierarchy.

The analysed YouTube comments vividly internalise and reproduce the nodal point of *Güç* through formulas affirming maritime supremacy. For example, statements like '[...] whoever dominates the seas dominates the world,' enact a popular uptake of geopolitical doctrine, transforming strategic naval capacity into a lived sense of agency, pride, and historical destiny. The phrase 'whoever controls the water controls the land' condenses centuries of theorising about power and territory into an easily circulated aphorism, amplifying the hegemonic claims of *Mavi Vatan* discourse at the level of everyday identity.

The discovery of natural gas in the Black Sea receives especially enthusiastic treatment, functioning as affective proof of Turkey's ability to transcend dependency on Western energy markets and expertise. Praise for domestically engineered exploration and extraction technologies reflects a broader desire for decoupling from structural dependencies, resonating with postcolonial logics of self-reliance and resistance to external domination. These themes are not just decorative, but they perform the critical function of phantasmatic investment, projecting hopes, anxieties, and collective aspirations onto the *Mavi Vatan* doctrine. Through these mechanisms, the nodal point of *Güç* articulates economic aims, technological pride, and nationalist affect in a manner that mobilises support for assertive policies while simultaneously rendering any form of dissent as signs of weakness or betrayal of the national cause.

Thus, the articulation of *Güç* accomplishes a double move. It legitimises far-reaching territorial claims as necessary for national development, and it motivates public commitment to such claims by making power a matter of moral and emotional urgency. In the *Mavi Vatan* discourse, energy independence and military capacity are no longer future aspirations, but they are presented as unfolding realities, compelling the audience to see themselves as both actors and beneficiaries in the nation's ascent to regional and global prominence.

Others as the Constitutive Outsides

The efficacy of the three nodal points is amplified by their continual opposition to antagonistic others, which are strategically constructed as existential threats. In the documentary and its YouTube reception, antagonism is not merely incidental; it is methodically woven into the narrative to delineate clear boundaries between 'us' and 'them.' The analysis reveals three primary antagonistic positions: 1) Greece as an illegitimate usurper, 2) Western powers as neocolonial orchestrators, and 3) regional exclusion mechanisms.

The documentary routinely casts Greece as the principal antagonist, whose territorial claims are depicted as both historically baseless and geographically irrational. This is achieved by foregrounding facts such as the proximity of Meis/Kastellorizo Island to Turkey and its distance from Greece, illustrating the 'absurdity' of Greek claims. Such representations are coupled with references to historical episodes, such as the Treaty of Sèvres and Greek campaigns during the Turkish War of Independence, which frame Greek actions as part of a long-standing pattern of betrayal and encroachment. Through this logic, geographical anomalies become moral transgressions, and Greece is discursively positioned as an unnatural, external force violating the organic boundaries of the Turkish homeland.

The antagonism extends beyond Greece to encompass a broader array of Western actors, including the EU, the US, and international institutions. The documentary and YouTube comments often suggest that Western powers act as covert orchestrators, bolstering Greek claims and seeking to circumscribe Turkey's geopolitical agency. This is reinforced by references to policies, diplomatic initiatives, or military posturing seen as designed

to 'extract Turkish resources' or 'trap' Turkey in territorial confinement. Such narratives activate the historical memory of Western intervention during moments of Turkish vulnerability and recast contemporary energy competition as an extension of neocolonial rivalry and a civilisational confrontation in which Turkey must assert its autonomy against persistent schemes of domination.

Projects like the EMGF and the EastMed pipeline are not simply noted as technical or commercial initiatives. They are presented as deliberate strategies of exclusion. The documentary constructs these as regional alignments calculated specifically to leave Turkey out of lucrative energy cooperation and strategic decision making, bolstering the perception of an encirclement that threatens both national power and economic development. In YouTube comments, such exclusions are interpreted not only as diplomatic challenges but as existential manoeuvres meant to undermine Turkey's rightful place as a regional leader. This further consolidates public support for assertive policies and resistance to compromise.

Such antagonistic constructions serve a dual function: they generate a climate of external threat necessary for consolidating internal unity around the three nodal points, and they legitimise defensive or expansionist action as both natural and morally imperative. The continual invocation of antagonism thus closes the discursive frontier, rendering dissent suspect and alternative regional arrangements infeasible, and confirms the hegemonic claims of *Mavi Vatan* as an existential project defined by perpetual contestation with powerful others.

Conclusion

This article discusses how *Mavi Vatan* discursively constructs Turkey's maritime borders, where Turkey's maritime claims are rendered intelligible, legitimate, and affectively charged through the articulation of three nodal points: *Vatan* [Homeland], *Adalet* [Justice], and *Güç* [Power]. The analysis illustrates how these nodal points articulate national territory, historical grievance, and aspirations for technological and geopolitical agency, thereby transforming legal and technical questions of maritime sovereignty into existential matters of national identity and destiny. Through the discourse-theoretical analysis of the documentary and its reception

on YouTube, the study illustrates how the hegemonic claims of the *Mavi Vatan* doctrine stabilise and reinforce these nodal points. The result is not merely a discursive ‘naturalisation’ of Turkish claims, but also a performative investment that binds individual affect, collective memory, and state policy into a unified project of belonging and resistance. The construction of antagonistic others as the constitutive outsides, further strengthens this hegemonic articulation, closing the frontier of debate and rendering dissent within the public sphere increasingly more difficult.

The findings contribute to border studies and critical geopolitics by highlighting how contemporary border imaginaries rely on discursive formations, rather than mere ‘facts’ of geography. The way in which the legal and technical matters of maritime sovereignty are transformed into existential issues of national identity offers an analytical lens for understanding how nation-states construct borders as antagonistic frontiers to maintain hegemonic claims. Also, by discussing the communicative practices that underpin the doctrine, the article highlights the central role of media, both traditional and digital in this case, in performing, disseminating, and contesting border narratives.

By exploring the capacity of both institutional/traditional and digital media to disseminate and reinforce border discourses, this text provides a potential frame for examining other regional conflicts. This underscores the significant role of media in the formation of border imaginaries and provides a point of departure for future comparative analyses of the discursive construction of regional tensions.

This research also offers insights that extend beyond the Turkish case, suggesting implications for comparative or transnational analyses of border practices by positioning the mediatisation of the *Mavi Vatan* doctrine in relation to discourses of maritime nationalism and the evolving role of media in regional geopolitics. *Mavi Vatan* might serve as an illustrative instance of a globally intensifying tendency towards the territorialisation of maritime space.

However, the analysis also encounters important limits. Since the analysis was limited to specific media platforms such as the TRT documentary and YouTube comments, it may fall short of fully capturing the reflections across all social strata or the counter-hegemonic discourses that

may emerge on different platforms. Moreover, as DTA and the retroductive approach employed in the study require a continuous iterative movement between theoretical concepts and empirical data, the findings are shaped within the interpretive boundaries of the contextual and theoretical framework.

In sum, the analysis illustrates that borders are not merely inherited cartographic lines, but always-in-the-making discursive frontiers. These manifest as sites where struggles over meaning, identity, and sovereignty converge, from which new configurations of geopolitical possibility may yet emerge.

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