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Governing Anxiety, Trauma, and Crisis: The Political Discourse on Ontological (In)security After the July 15 Coup Attempt in Turkey

Abstract

Concern about the ontological security of the state has been at the center of Turkish politics since the beginning of the republican regime in 1923, shaping both the domestic and the foreign policy of Turkey. Taking the July 15 coup attempt in 2016 as a case, this article critically analyzes the political discourse on ontological (in)security in Turkey. It begins the discussion by locating the discourse on the survival of the state (*beka meselesi* in Turkish) in a historical and sociopolitical context. Building on this discussion, the article investigates how unprecedented political instability caused by the failed coup attempt created a political space for the ruling Justice and Development Party to re-articulate the state's survival discourse and related security practices. The article argues that governing elites followed a double strategy. On the one side, they aimed at simplifying the sociopolitical space with a 'one nation, one state, one homeland, and one flag' discourse. On the other side, they actively prevented public contestation by keeping the political dimension of the coup at bay. To advance this argument, the article develops a discursive-theoretical framework by cross-fertilizing Ontological Security Theory with Post-foundational Discourse Theory.

1. Introduction

Catastrophic events experienced during the collapse of the Ottoman Empire left significant marks on the political and social structure of its successor, the Turkish nation-state. In Anatolia alone, three to four million people, making up one-fifth of the Empire's total population, lost their lives on the field of battle or because of disease and forced migration policies. The survivors who later formed Turkish society were active participants and/or victims of these massive atrocities. Perhaps the clearest result of these traumatic experiences—which remain as distant but powerful reminiscences—has been the ever-resonating politics of 'state survival' since the foundation of Turkey, presupposing that Turkey's utmost objective is to save the state and secure its existence in a dangerous geography.[1] Since then, governing these sedimented fears and insecurities by foregrounding national security and preservation of the state has been a typical characteristic of Turkish politics.

The politics of state survival in Turkey is two-layered. Firstly, it relates to the physical dimension of survival, meaning that the territories and citizens of the state must be protected under watchful eyes as there are internal and external forces constantly seeking to destroy Turkey's unity. This society-wide anxiety, also known as Sévresphobia, refers to 'the feeling of being encircled by enemies attempting the destruction of the Turkish state'.[2] This fear has made the survival of the state the key element in Turkish political life and established the legitimate background for the politics of emergency and fear. For example, 78 percent of those surveyed in the 2006 National Public Opinion Survey agreed that "the West wants to divide and break up Turkey like they broke

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[1] F. M. Gocek (2011) *The Transformation of Turkey* (London: I.B. Tauris).

[2] D. Jung (2001) The Sevres Syndrome: Turkish Foreign Policy and Its Historical Legacy, in: B. Muller (eds), *Oil and Water: Cooperative Security in the Persian Gulf*, pp. 131–159 (London: I.B. Tauris).

up the Ottoman Empire."[3] Therefore, a discussion of state or survival cannot be divorced from hegemonic discourse on so called Sévresphobia. The second dimension of the politics of state survival transcends the physical dimension. This dimension refers to the national self-identity with a heavy emphasis on preservation, glorification, and unity of the state. Articulating a specific framework of belonging, this national self-identity is based on the homogenization of society and the fusion of the state identity with its nation. Overall, the cornerstone of the homogenous Turkish national self-identity is to save the state and secure its being by uniting the state with its people under a common reference of belonging and a singular social imaginary.

> '*The state must survive. We can replace the government whenever we want, however, if we overthrow the state it would mean that our state collapses and our flag disappears… Then, we would be subjugated by someone else.*'[4]

There are two vital elements of this imaginary. First, Kemalists' imagined collective identity was a holistic project. It had crystalized and become fixed into certain behavioral codes and social practices extending into capillaries of the newly born state's society and political institutions since the 1920s. Crucially, this project clearly defined who gets included in this collective identity and who gets excluded. Materialized hand in hand with the exclusionist policies towards ethnic and religious minorities, the project assigned those who did not fit the Kemalist imaginary as a potential threat to state security. By doing so, the homogenous Turkish national self-identity and related security practices were normalized and routinized. Second, these practices led to a concept of citizenship that does not necessarily opt for empowerment of the people. As such, the republican citizen-subjects who were supposed to be protected by the state, were paradoxically reduced to collectives of 'subordinated individuals'.[5] They were obliged to give a normative primacy to the realm of duties and responsibilities over their rights and freedoms. These aspects of the collective social imaginary were taken for granted until the late 1990s. The capture of Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan (PKK) leader Ocalan and Turkey's European Union (EU) membership application were followed by a democratization program seeking to improve the sociopolitical conditions of marginalized communities, particularly the Kurds. This political relaxation coincided with the rise of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) which pioneered discussions on democratic and plural models and emphasized the well-being and rights of the citizens.

The AKP portrayed itself as an emancipatory party and gradually replaced the strong central polity and 'survival of the state' discourse with a democratic agenda and cosmopolitan Ottoman nostalgia. This democracy-in-the-making vision would not only liberate the citizens in face of the strong state institutions but also empower them to call the state authorities to account for their wrongdoings.[6] The goal of this political agenda was twofold. It would first develop the 'subordinated individuals of Anatolia' into 'active political agents' against the Kemalist regime's

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[3] Gocek, '*The Transformation of Turkey'.*
[4] S. Aydin (2009) *Amacimiz Devlet Bekasi* (Istanbul: TESEV), p. 9.
[5] Aydin, '*Amacimiz Devlet Bekasi,*' p. 8.
[6] Mahcupyan (2015) Yeni Turkiye (5). Available at: https://www.aksam.com.tr/etyen-mahcupyan/yazarlar/yeni-turkiye-5-siyaset/haber-397467, accessed November 11, 2019.

state–citizenship asymmetry.[7] Second, it would help the AKP to democratically situate itself at the heart of *cumhur* (the people),[8] a positioning the AKP believed would harvest solutions towards Turkey's sedimented socioeconomic problems.

However, the AKP's normative agenda that sought to build a democratic society and empower active citizens made a U-turn in 2016. The introduction of Erdogan's strong-man regime has replaced the emancipatory agenda with an authoritarian one which has silenced all democratic dissent. Noteworthy in this new regime has been the resurrection of the once-criticized politics of state survival where the leader-centric regime is presented as integral to the survival of the state.[9] Although this authoritarian turn has been analyzed in various works,[10] what is not yet clear is the impact of the failed coup on the new regime, and particularly its role in the return to a politics of state survival. This article provides new insight into this reversal, and articulates two questions: How can we account for and characterize the political discourse on survival of the state after the July 15 coup attempt? And, why is the discourse on survival of the state so powerful in Turkey?

Accordingly, the article is divided into five sections. Following the introduction, the article develops a discursive-theoretical framework by cross-fertilizing ontological security theory (OST) and post-foundational discourse theory (PDT). This framework informs the analysis on the construction of the state security discourse. Before proceeding with empirical analysis, the third section briefly explores the sociopolitical environment in Turkey prior to the July 15 coup attempt. Following this, the fourth section focuses on the coup itself and the articulation of ontological (in)security within the politically and socially insecure environment in Turkey. Specifically, in this section we make three sets of main arguments. First, we argue that in the wake of the traumatic event and increasing sense of insecurity, a context-specific discourse on ontological security was carefully constructed to stabilize the situation by simplifying the complexities of the coup. Second, we show how this discourse utilizes emotional and affective frames to capture the collective mode of being and insecurities. Third, we show how the hegemonic discourse on ontological security was utilized by AKP cadres to actively prevent public contestation and keep the political dimension of the coup at bay. Finally, the article concludes in section five.

2. Cross-fertilizing Ontological Security Theory and Post-foundation Discourse Theory

The limited scope of this paper cannot do justice to all aspects of the OST and PDT. Instead, starting with the former, we will briefly overview central concepts, arguments, and debates of these theories, then explore the areas where there is a possibility for cross-fertilization of their arguments.

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[7] Mahcupyan, E. (2015) Yeni Turkiye (2). Available at: https://www.aksam.com.tr/yazarlar/etyen-mahcupyan/yeni-turkiye-2/haber-394807, accessed November 11, 2019.

[8] Mahcupyan, '*Yeni Turkiye (5)*'.

[9] Sozcu (2016) Erdoğan'dan 'tarihi' açıklama!. Available at:
https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2016/gundem/erdogandan-tarihi-aciklama-1139642/ , accessed November 11, 2019.

[10] B. Baser & A. E. Öztürk (2017) *Authoritarian Politics in Turkey: Elections, Resistance and the AKP* (London: I.B. Tauris); and M. H. Yavuz & B. Balci (eds) (2018) *Turkey's July 15th Coup: What Happened and Why* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press).

Simply put, ontological security is the need for the individual agent to feel oneself as a whole and comprehend one's sense of self.[11] Agents therefore need to formulate a stable way to exist to feel secure *vis-à-vis* their unique autobiographical narratives and self-identity.[12] Articulating this self-identity requires a certain cognitive setting from which agents formulate and persist in their behavioral routines in light of their self-narratives. By doing so, agents alleviate the driving impact of existential questions that trigger ontological insecurity.[13] Such insecurity is considered as forceful anxiety stemming from the disruption of agents' behavioral routines and incapability to pursue their long-attached self-narratives about 'doing, acting, and being'.[14] Thus, the ontological security-seeking process can be seen as a 'homeostatic tendency'- a tendency to maintain or restore stability and social order[15].

Likewise, states demonstrate individual-like behavior by not only seeking physical security, but also adopting a subjective sense of self. The latter pushes states to be a consistent and unwavering entity.[16] OST therefore represents a shift of focus from physical security to the idea of security of *being*, and a new focus on the agents' identity formation. Accordingly, OST theorize the security of state at two levels. Firstly, the state provides the institutional arrangements and identification opportunities that maintain a sense of order and continuity for society.[17] Secondly, the state itself has a sense of self - an identity - which it needs to maintain for its ontological security.[18] The ontological security of the state accordingly relies on articulating a stable and coherent biographical narrative of the self that provides meaning for its past and current actions. The ontological security is then maintained and reproduced by routinization of the state identity and stabilization of social relations at the societal level.

PDT can provide us with an analytical tool and explanatory and critical framework to explore the political discourses on ontological (in)security. However, understanding the post-foundational perspective on discourse, meaning and identity requires an engagement with its ontological assumptions. Firstly, by problematizing the structuralist notions of fixed meaning, PDT considers the creation of meaning as a social process in which meaning is constantly negotiated and constructed by competing agents. There is always a constant play between the possible (i.e., the potential) and the positive (i.e., the actualized) meanings.[19] Secondly, PDT emphasizes the radical contingency and structural incompleteness of all meanings and identities. Here radical contingency refers to the impossibility of fixing social meaning and identity in any

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[11] A. Giddens (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press).

[12] J. Mitzen (2006) Anchoring Europe's Civilizing Identity: Habits, Capabilities and Ontological Security, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 13(2), pp. 270–285.

[13] Giddens, '*Modernity and Self-Identity*'.

[14] C. Kinnvall (2004) Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity and the Search for Ontological Security, *Political Psychology*, 25(5), p. 746.

[15] J. Mitzen & K. Larson (2017) Ontological Security and Foreign Policy, *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. pp. 1–26.

[16] J. Mitzen (2006) Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma, *European Journal of International Relations,* 12(3), pp. 341–370.

[17] Kinnvall, '*Globalization and Religious Nationalism*'.

[18] Mitzen, '*Anchoring Europe's Civilizing Identity*'.

[19] T. Marttila (2016). *Post-foundational discourse analysis: From political difference to empirical research* (London: Palgrave MacMillan), p. 43.

context.[20] Overall, for PDT, any system of meaning or identity is essentially incomplete and subject to change and contestation by alternative articulations and identifications.

Building on these assumptions, PDT considers discourse to be the sole possible origin of socially meaningful understanding of the self and the world. It conceptualizes discourse as meaningful and contingent structured totalities which form systems of meaning and practices that in return constitute the identities of objects, practices, and subjects.[21] Discourse in this conception is 'a decentred structure in which meaning is constantly negotiated and constructed'.[22] Moreover, the notion of discourse is extended by PDT to cover the entire range of social phenomena. This means the conception of discourse in PDT switches the focus on meaning-making from spoken and written language (linguistic phenomenon) to wider social practices.[23]

Working on this ontology, PDT takes the regime of practices (e.g., an ontological security regime) as its object of inquiry and conceptualizes such regimes as discursive and contingent entities that are product of hegemonic struggles.[24] Any regime of practice comprises two types of practices: social and political. Social practices are continuous, routinized forms of human and societal reproductions that, under OST, create *a sense of order and continuity*. Due to their recurrent nature, these practices are usually not articulated by actors' self-conscious reflexivity. If fact, following Bourdieu, Glynos and Haworth argue that social practices are inscribed on our bodies and ingrained in our human dispositions.[25] Whether intended or not, these practices are responsible for reproduction of a wider system of social relations and their routinization. For example, the ontological security regime in Turkey includes not only an autobiographical narrative and an institutional order, but also a network of social practices. These practices in turn not only contribute to the construction of biographical narratives, but also help subjects to experience themselves as a whole person by backgrounding fear of uncertainty.[26]

However, no matter how sedimented it is, any ontological security regime is constantly disturbed by dislocations—times when *sense of order* is disrupted. These dislocatory moments are the times when actors do not know how to 'go on'.[27] The coup attempt for example can be understood as a moment that creates radical insecurity around a rupture in the sense of order, continuity, and self. Under dislocatory conditions, subjects are called upon to confront the radical contingency of social relations more directly than at other times.[28] Giddens conceptualizes these moments as 'critical situations' that trigger ontological insecurity.[29] During dislocations, the subject's mode of *being* is disrupted and 'a break with what is knowable, consistent and comprehensible to the self' emerges.[30] As they reveal the limits, incapacity and contingency of

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[20] J. Glynos & D. Howarth (2007) *Logics of critical explanation in social and political theory* (London: Routledge), p. 127.

[21] E. Laclau (2005) On Populist Reason (London: Verso).

[22] J. Torfing (1999) *New theories of discourse: Laclau, Mouffe and Zizek* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers), p. 40.

[23] *Laclau, 'On Populist Reason'.*

[24] Glynos & Howarth, '*Logics of critical explanation'.*

[25] Ibid.

[26] Mitzen, '*Ontological Security in World Politics'.*

[27] Glynos & Howarth, '*Logics of critical explanation,'* p. 129.

[28] Ibid., p. 110

[29] Giddens, '*Modernity and Self-Identity,'* p. 61.

[30] C. Agius (2017) Drawing the discourses of ontological security: Immigration and identity in the Danish and Swedish cartoon crises, *Cooperation and Conflict*, 52(1), pp. 111.

regimes, dislocations opens up more space for political practices. Political practices can shape, modify, or reorder the regime itself. And if these practices become successful in reconstructing the hegemonic order, they also redefine the key parameters of a range of practices.[31]

       Insofar as there is no public contestation of social practices, they reproduce the ontological security regimes. During times of dislocation, exemplified here by the July 15 coup attempt, these social practices can be mobilized to prevent them from becoming a source of political practice. Or when this is not possible, the ontological security regimes can be re-ordered with political practices. Overall, this dialectic relationship between regimes and social and political practices is shown as follows:[32]

Regime of Practices

Structuration

Hegemony

Social Practices

Political Practices
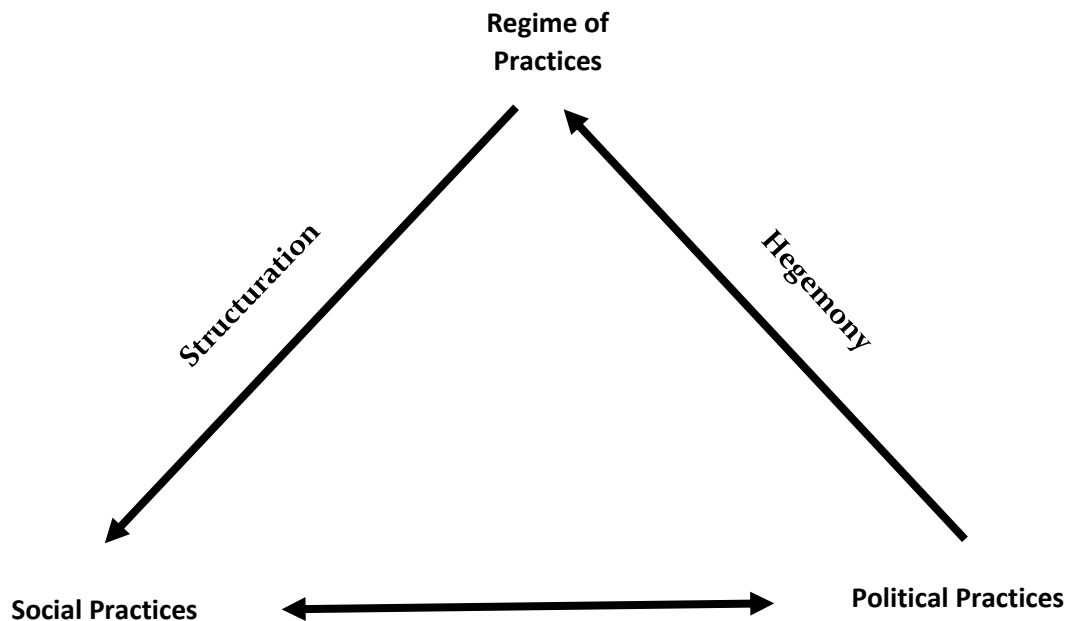
3. Before the July 15 Coup Attempt: 'Pax Ottomana' versus Politics of State Survival

       Modern Turkish history has been marked by the political practices of the Kemalist bureaucracy that created an ontological security regime. These practices were not solely driven by the need to secure the state's physical existence. They were also carried out to maintain hegemony of the homogenous Turkish national identity and Kemalist social imaginary against counterhegemonic projects that are based on articulation of an Islamic or Kurdish identity. The most vivid examples of these political practices were chronic interventions towards re-ordering the security regime and the progress of civilian democracy (in 1960, 1971, 1980, and 1997) by the Turkish military (TAF) which has been assigned as the guardian of Kemalist values (Adisonmez 2019). After each intervention, military bureaucracy released articles justifying their move to maintain the Turkish state and identity. For example, while in its first coup in 1960, the TAF articulated its aim as preserving 'Turkish homeland and the Republic [values]', its reason for

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[31] Glynos & Howarth, '*Logics of critical explanation,*' p. 106.
[32] Ibid.

intervention in 1980 was to stabilize the 'institutional and moral parameters of politics'[33] *vis-à-vis* Kemalist principles.

The AKP came to power against this background. As the Kemalist ontological security regime and its hegemonic social imaginary had gradually fallen into decline, the AKP emerged as a counterhegemonic project with its progressive political agenda. Like its predecessors, as an Islamic movement, the AKP elites idealized a vision towards Turkey's Ottoman past—and particularly towards the Ottoman Classical era which represented a zenith in Islamic civilization.[34] This era was mythified as one of cosmopolitanism founded on peaceful, inclusive, and harmonious governance. The resurrection of the 'imagined Ottoman past' in Turkey and the 'Pax Ottomana' ideal in the foreign sphere is acknowledged as neo-Ottomanism which was not only seen as a political ideology but a framework to re-imagine Turkey's past, present, and the future 'self'.[35] Neo-Ottomanism was effectively instrumentalized by the AKP elites. In the domestic sphere, the idea was mobilized as a challenge the homogenous national identity and the statist political legacy of Kemalism. It offered a new framework for Turkish collective identity based not on monolithic secular elements but on the Ottoman multi-ethnic and Muslim community structure. In the foreign sphere, it was used to fulfill Turkey's 'Islamic duty and historic mission,' after which Turkey would 'once again meet [its] brothers' living on the former Ottoman domains.[36]

However, in the wake of the Arab Spring, this political agenda was marked by the AKP's swift retreat into the old survival-of-the-state discourse. First, the turbulent environment of the Syrian Civil War (2011–ongoing) triggered Turkey's deep-seated fears of a Kurdish statehood project in the region.[37] Second, set against this deteriorating regional dynamic, the AKP lost its majority position in the parliament for the first time in the June 2015 general elections. These developments created conditions for the collapse of the peace process (2013-2015) and a return to *politics of fear* and a complete securitization of the social and political space in Turkey. Building on this, the AKP exploited the political vacuum and employed a punitive agenda in Kurdish-majority towns such as Sur and Nusaybin. During this period, the opposition parties could not form a coalition government, and a snap election was called by Erdogan in November 2015. Having won the snap election, the AKP has further sedimented its return to survival-of-the-state discourse and its securitization move. All these authoritarian moves, however, were soon to be eclipsed by the most critical development: a military coup.

4.1 Governing Anxiety: Articulating Ontological Security After the July 15 Coup Attempt

The July 15 coup attempt was in many ways dislocatory. It has put these sedimented discourses on security into question and triggered society-wide anxiety— 'a feeling of inner turmoil over the uncertainty of anticipated events'.[38] Within this political terrain, political actors struggled to articulate a credible ontological security narrative upon which subjects can maintain

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[33] U. Cizre (2008) Ideology, Context and Interest: The Turkish Military, in: Resat, K. (eds) T*he Cambridge History of Turkey*, pp. 301–332 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

[34] M. H. Yavuz (2006) *The Emergence of a New Turkey* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press).

[35] M. H. Yavuz (2005) Islamic Political Identity in Turkey (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

[36] A. Davutoglu (2001) *Stratejik Derinlik* (Istanbul: Kure Yayinlari).

[37] U.C. Adisonmez (2016) Making Sense of Turkish Mainstream Media: Identity, Foreign Policy, and Change, *Asian Politics & Policy*, 8(4), pp. 629–635.

[38] F. Ejdus (2020) *Crisis and Ontological Insecurity: Serbia's Anxiety over Kosovo's Secession* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), p. 9.

a sense of biographical continuity to read their past, present, and future. In the wake of this traumatic event and increasing sense of uncertainty and instability, the AKP elites articulated a context-specific discourse on ontological security to stabilize the situation and 'make the present readable'.[39] To do so, the discursive space was ordered by constructing relations between different signifiers: one nation, one state, one homeland, and one flag. Against this anxious background, this network of signifiers was mobilized not only to simplify the complexities of the coup as a phenomenon, but also to give the collective body a sense of identity, order, and a future direction by channeling their desire for ontological security.

For Kinnvall, the search for such a unitary, consistent, and singular identity plays a crucial role in the linear narratives that people/groups articulate to make sense of their selves.[40] Articulated based on the already-existing hegemonic discourses (e.g., religion, nationalism, militarism, masculinity) in Turkish politics, the AKP elites articulated a unitary, consistent, and singular ontological security discourse by constructing a homogenous collective entity (one nation) around an inseparable unity (one state), a single space (one homeland), and an ever-present symbol (one flag). This linear ontological security discourse has attempted to cancel out the political, social, and cultural differences and demands within the society to facilitate a *sense of order* and maintain a *coherent sense of self*. On multiple occasions, Erdogan has called all citizens—regardless of their differences and domestic political positions—to unite around a common goal against foreign economic and security threats as 'we are all in the same boat'.[41] Included in this articulation of ontological security is the idea of a society in which there is no political difference, therefore no ontological insecurity. In this way, the solution to ontological insecurity was articulated as the unification of many within a singular body (one nation), a single space (one homeland), under a single authority (one state), and around a single symbol (one flag) to create what Hobbes calls a 'single will'.[42]

Integral to these types of identity construction is demarcating the frontiers between an '"inside" from an "outside," a "self" from an "other," a "domestic" from a "foreign"'.[43] Similarly, the ontological security discourse after the coup has formed an antagonistic frontier. On the one hand, by articulating the above-mentioned network of signifiers, this discourse established a collective identity. On the other hand, it located this collective identity against common enemies both within and without. Accordingly, the Fethullah Gulen Terrorist Organization (FETO) and its links, such as the PKK and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), were positioned against the emergent forces of the 'New Turkey': the Domestic and National Bloc (*Yerli ve Milli*) and their pure spirit (*Yenikapi Ruhu*). Despite the significant ideological differences and historical points of origin, the FETO, PKK, and ISIL were articulated as substitutes for each other with reference to a

[39] S. Zizek (2004) The Structure of Domination Today: A Lacanian View, *Studies in East European Thought*, 56(4), p. 393.

[40] C. Kinnvall (2018) Feeling Ontologically (In)secure: States, Traumas and the Governing of Gendered Space, *Cooperation and Conflict*, 52(1), pp. 90–108.

[41] Hurriyet (2019) Erdoğan urges all citizens of Turkey to unite against 'foreign threats'. Available at: http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/erdogan-stresses-national-unity-against-threats-143605, accessed November 11, 2019.

[42] Hobbes, T. (1991) *Leviathan* [1651]. Richard Tuck, (eds) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 72.

[43] D. Campbell (1998) *Writing security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), p. 9.

common threat. These threatening Others that lie beyond the political frontier were considered as a block to ontological security, the identity of the inside, the collective being, and the sense of self.

The need for certainty and being was achieved not only by these enemy images, but also with the resurrection of national myths. Along this line, the process of Othering within the coup context included not only these enemies but also a mythical agent that is not visible: the Mastermind (*Üst Akıl*). According to the hegemonic discourse, the FETO, PKK, and ISIL are only the puppets of this invisible figure which orchestrates them.[44] The Mastermind is the real actor who is responsible for ontological insecurity and thus a threat to the promise of a unified and harmonious society. With this articulation, the government has simplified the entire social and political space by transforming it into two antagonistic camps. On the one hand, a certain degree of certainty and readability was achieved with the one nation, state, motherland, and flag discourse. On the other hand, the remaining uncertainty and ambiguity was projected onto a network of visible and invisible Others that stabilizes the collective mode of being. This context-specific ontological security discourse was further cemented with affective frames, as explained next.

4.2 Governing Trauma: Channeling Desire for Ontological Security

Why is the hegemonic discourse on ontological security in Turkey so powerful? The first step to answer this question was to understand the main characteristics of the discursive articulation on ontological security at the macro level. The second step is to move the debate to the subjective level to account for the affective/emotional appeal of ontological security discourse. Whereas OST tends to emphasize subjects' search for some degree of certainty with a coherent self-image and autobiographical narratives, PDT explains the force behind these narratives by foregrounding the role of affective frames. These frames connect subjects to social orders and channel their desire for continuity via socially constructed objects: political goals, ideologies, symbols.[45] Hence, here we move on to emotional/affective aspects of the articulation of ontological insecurity after the coup and the way in which the ontological security discourse aimed to govern the trauma and capture a collective mode of being.

Firstly, the July 15 coup attempt (a single/temporal trauma) cannot be viewed apart from historically sedimented discourses and spatial emotional structures on ontological insecurity in Turkey. This is because any political discourse on ontological insecurity is grounded on temporal and spatial emotional structures through which individuals, societies, and states make sense of themselves and the world around them.[46] Similarly, the AKP elites employed a discourse that integrated both temporal and spatial emotional structures in their ontological security discourse. In their attempt to govern the trauma and respond the crisis, the July 15 coup attempt was articulated both as an isolated and temporal incident but also part of Turkey's ongoing traumatic experience and persisting condition: Sévresphobia. Articulated as a 'chosen trauma'—defined as

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[44]Hurriyet (2016) Millions stand for democracy in Turkey. Available at: http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/millions-stand-for-democracy-in-turkey-102510 , accessed November 11, *2019.*

[45] Laclau, '*On Populist Reason*'; and J. Eberle (2019) Narrative, desire, ontological security, transgression: fantasy as a factor in international politics, *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 22(1), pp. 243–268.

[46] Kinnvall, '*Feeling Ontologically (In)secure,*' p. 94

the collective memory of a calamity that once befell a group's ancestors—[47] this sedimented anxiety has played a key role in capturing and mobilizing the collective insecurity and fear during the coup.

Secondly, subjects are both located in and transformed by these discursive and emotional structures through identifications. The discourse on ontological security is powerful because it channels the historically sedimented desires and provides identification options for subjects who experience insecurities. Most importantly, these options are created through the articulation of the past and the reconstruction of a national identity. Giddens calls this 'the use of history to make history'.[48] Accordingly, the discourse on ontological security requires identification with collective symbols (e.g., the founding father, nation, state, flag) and a collective national identity which 'seems to promise identity security or to offer "the solution" to the often-ineffable sense that "we" are missing something that would make us "whole"'.[49] Following this logic, the solution to mitigate the ontologically insecure environment after the coup was provided by the re-articulation of a linear and unique past with many turning points and identification options. As a temporal event, the July 15 coup attempt has not only become a link between the present and the future, but also a critical turning point that informs the national identity. The national identity, Zizek argues,[50] exists as long as a specific enjoyment of its identification continues to be materialized in a set of practices and transmitted through national myths that structure these practices. The continuation and materialization of these myths can be seen in social and political practices followed the coup: government rituals, building historical monuments, renaming well-known landmarks, and disseminating a single/linear articulation of the past and present.

The capacity of a national narrative to stand as an object of inquiry largely depends on its capacity to sustain the solidarity and belonging that define the collective body in space and time. However, while a certain level of historization (space) and temporalization (time) is required for a consistent articulation of the national identity, the enjoyment that subjects obtain from these articulations and collective symbols comes from the affective frames.[51] By promising to fill ontological security needs and responding insecurities experienced by the collective body, these frames shelter subjects from anxiety, feeding their 'hunger for certainty' and showing them their place in the world—a relatively whole, stable, and complete identity.[52] Typically, affective frames are articulated around two scenarios: beatific (an idealized scenario) and horrific (a disaster scenario). The beatific dimension of fantasy foregrounds the narrative that promises an imaginary fullness-to-come (e.g. oneness) once a named or implied obstacle (e.g., the coup, the FETO) is overcome, while the horrific dimension of the fantasmatic narrative emphasizes the disasters (e.g., actualization of Sévresphobia) to come if the obstacles prove insurmountable.[53] Expressed in this

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[47] V. Volkan (1997) *Bloodlines: From Ethnic Pride to Ethnic Terrorism* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux), p. 48.

[48] A. Giddens (1990) *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press), p. 243.

[49] T. Solomon (2015) *The Politics of Subjectivity in American Foreign Policy Discourses* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press), p. 16.

[50] S. Zizek (1993) *Tarrying* with the Negative, (Durham: Duke University Press), p. 202.

[51] S. Zizek (1998) The Seven Veils of Fantasy, in: Nobus, D. (eds) *Key Concepts of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, pp. 190–218 (New York: Other Press).

[52] Eberle, '*Narrative, desire, ontological security, transgression*'.

[53] J. Glynos & D. Howarth (2007) *Logics of critical explanation in social and political theory* (London: Routledge).

excessively simplified and clear-cut fashion, fantasmatic frames leave no room for ambiguity and uncertainty.[54]

> 'As you know, above all, we will be 'one.' We will be great, alive and brothers. It is all together that we will be Turkey, and do not forget this: One nation, one flag, one homeland and state. They will not be able to divide us, break us up, and if we are 'one,' great and alive, with the help of God, we will walk toward [the goals of] 2023, 2053 and 2071 in very different ways. '[55]

As exemplified in this quote, the ontological security discourse that followed the coup simultaneously promised a unified, harmonious, and prosperous society to come with 2023, 2053, and 2073 aims (a beatific scenario). For Zizek, articulated in this way, fantasmatic frames have a stabilizing dimension which points to the state of *ontological security* as it refers to 'a dream of a state without disturbance'.[56] However, this beatific scenario was also coupled with a disaster one which argues that 'Anatolia is a wall and if this wall collapses, there will no longer be a Middle East, Africa, Central Asia, Balkans or Caucasus'.[57] Unlike the beatific scenario, the horrific scenario has a destabilizing dimension where the state of *ontological insecurity* articulated by presenting a threatening Other that must be destroyed.[58] This is because according to the horrific scenario, the Others are responsible for stealing enjoyment from the people and blocking their collective identity/security. The promise of unification of many within a singular body (one nation), a single space (one homeland), under a single authority (one state), and around a single symbol (one flag) is threatened and undermined by an invisible figure and its symptoms—the FETO, PKK, and ISIL. For Erdogan, these Others must be destroyed with 'a new war of independence'.[59] These affective frames played an important role in depolitization of the coup, as discussed next.

4.3 Governing Crisis: The De-contestation of the Essentially Contestable

The dislocation experienced after the July 15 coup attempt could have been articulated and acted upon in different ways. Nevertheless, the AKP elites aimed to govern the dislocatory event and ensuing crisis before it could become the source of a political struggle, by mobilizing the above-explained discourse on ontological security and related regime of practices. This discourse has been successful in two ways. First, it has cancelled out alternative articulations and responses towards the coup. Second, it actively prevented public contestation by keeping the political dimension of the coup at bay. Consequently, the hegemonic discourse on ontological security and related affective frames have maintained the depolitization of the coup by suppressing other potential articulations. The very question of 'how did we end up with this coup in the first place' was actively prevented by the AKP, and the political dimension of the coup was removed from the

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[54] *Eberl*e, '*Narrative, desire, ontological security, transgression*'.
[55] Hurriyet (2018) Erdoğan: The issue is about Turkey, not me. Available at: http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/erdogan-the-issue-is-about-turkey-not-me-136159, accessed November 11, 2019.
[56] Zizek, '*The Seven Veils of Fantasy*,' p. 192.
[57] Hurriyet, '*Erdoğan: The issue is about Turkey*'.
[58] Zizek, '*The Seven Veils of Fantasy*,' p. 192.
[59] Hurriyet, '*Millions stand for democracy*'.

public debate by instrumentally using the anxious environment provoked by the coup. As such, the moment of dislocation has not been grasped politically.

The search for ontological security thus includes power, exclusion, and depolitization. Having divided the discursive space into sharply antagonistic camps and built a political frontier that clearly separates excluded and included signifiers, the discourse on ontological security has controlled the public/political discourse. This discourse was mobilized to determine what is 'sayable' and what is 'not sayable' about the coup. Especially, the FETO signifier was used not only to antagonize those who oppose the AKP policies, but also to antagonize the meaning and the practice of public contestations towards these policies. Any public contestation of these policies has gradually been reduced to the point where they can only be signified as a threat to ontological security. This is where the power of security discourse come from. When put into practice, these discourses leave no room for idea that 'things could have been different' by forcing the audiences to accept the 'taken-for-grantedness' of a contingent social and political reality.[60] In other words, they function as a form of closure by foreclosing alternative becomings and articulations.[61] Additionally, it is crucial to note that the coup was governed within the context of state of emergency and securitization process. Typically, the latter entailed the process of presenting and accepting the coup as an existential threat and making reactions outside the normal space of the political procedure acceptable.[62] The former, meanwhile, justified extraordinary politics where during the chaotic moments, security is presented as the only solution.[63]

The affective frames played a crucial role in this depolitization and securitization process. Firstly, by providing subjects with the false safety of a clear-cut choice between two scenarios—beatific and horrific—these frames ensure that the dislocation of everyday life is experienced as accepted.[64] Here the role of affective frames is not to provide a false picture of reality, but to ensure that the political dimension of a practice remains in the background.[65] Soon after the coup, for example, Erdogan argued that the coup 'is something way beyond politics, this is either our freedom or death'.[66] Therefore, those who suffered directly ('martyrs' and 'veterans') and the majority of the society were forced to believe that they had to accept this earthly suffering to maintain a collective ontological security. Secondly, while these frames provide a certain level of certainty, continuity, and readability, the remaining uncertainty or the risk of ontological insecurity is projected onto a network of Others. This means affective frame 'is a means of an ideology to take its own failure into account in advance'[67]. Overall, following the coup, affective frames were mobilized to crowd out alternative articulations and responses to the coup and to consolidate the above-discussed version of the social-political reality as the only option by keeping the political dimension of the coup at bay.

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[60] Solomon, *'The Politics of Subjectivity,'* p. 17

[61] Rossdale, C. (2015) Enclosing Critique: The Limits of Ontological Security, *International Political Sociology*, 9(4), pp. 369–386.

[62] Kinnvall, *'Feeling Ontologically (In)secure'*.

[63] W. Walters (2006) Border/control, *European Journal of Social Theory*, 9(2), pp. 187–203.

[64] Eberle, '*Narrative, desire, ontological security, transgression*'.

[65] Glynos & Howarth, '*Logics of critical explanation,'* p. 145.

[66] Hurriyet, '*Millions stand for democracy*'.

[67] S. Zizek (1989) *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso), p. 126.

5. Conclusion

Since the inception of the Turkish Republic, the politics of state survival has a special importance in political landscape and Turkish national identity. While foregrounding national security and preservation of the state has been a typical characteristic of Turkish politics, the preservation, glorification, and unity of the state have also been the main elements of the homogenous Turkish national self-identity. This accordingly has created an ontological security regime that has evolved around an ongoing traumatic experience – Sévresphobia – and structured by political practices of the Kemalist hegemony. The July 15 coup attempt is one of the most significant traumatic events in this ontological security regime. As a dislocatory event, it triggered a society-wide anxiety, increasing sense of uncertainty and political instability. By taking the coup attempt as an empirical object of investigation, the article has re-read the discourse on ontological security by looking at the social, affective, and political dimensions of the ontological security regime in Turkey.

By cross-fertilizing OST and PDT, the article fleshed out an analytical framework upon which it advanced three main arguments. First, we argued that in the wake of the traumatic event and increasing sense of insecurity, the discourse on one-state, one-nation, one-homeland and one-flag was articulated to stabilize the political environment and simplify the complexities of the coup. This discourse provided the collective body with a sense of identity, order, and a future direction. Secondly, we argued that the discourse on ontological security has been powerful as it channeled the sedimented desires for security and provides identification options for insecure subjects. Then, we presented how affective frames played a key role in capturing and governing the collective insecurity and fear during the coup. Finally, we argued that the AKP cadres have articulated a specific ontological security discourse to govern the dislocatory event, actively prevent public contestation and keep the political dimension of the coup at bay. We argued that this depolitization was done by systematically backgrounding the very question of 'how did we end up with this coup in the first place' and by strictly controlling what is 'sayable' and what is 'not sayable' about the coup.

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