

**INSTRUMENTALIZATION OF RELIGIOUS NATIONALIST SECURITY
DISCOURSE IN THE CASE OF THE AFRIN OPERATION: PERSPECTIVES
OF MUSLIM CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS AND ANTI-WAR ACTIVISTS**

by
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ABSTRACT

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This thesis analyzes the Afrin cross-border military operation, also known as Operation Olive-Branch, which was launched by the Turkish Armed Forces in Syria on 20 January 2018 as a case study. Through discourse analysis method, this thesis first examines the role of religious nationalist rhetoric of the governing elites in securitizing both the Afrin operation and compulsory military service. The study interrogates the ways in which security discourses are sanctified and instrumentalized by the political elites in light of the scholarship on the Critical Security Studies. This study secondly investigates the alternative discourses put forward by non-state actors, in this thesis, the Muslim conscientious objectors and anti-war activists, on the securitization of the Afrin operation and conscription. In the fieldwork conducted with the participants, focus group analysis method was used. As a result of the central findings obtained from the case study, this thesis argues that the religious nationalist rhetoric, which have shaped the Afrin operation discursively, aims to legitimize the operation in the eyes of the general public and to restrain the generation of any other critical discourse. On the contrary, the Muslim conscientious objectors and anti-war activists have opposed to the instrumentalization of religion on matters such as security, militarism, and nationalism at political and discursive levels by putting forward an alternative dissident discourse.

ÖZET

DİNİ MİLLİYETÇİ GÜVENLİK SÖYLEMLERİNİN AFRİN OPERASYONU VAKASINDA ARAÇSALLAŞTIRILMASI: MÜSLÜMAN VİCDANİ RETÇİLER VE SAVAŞ KARŞITLARININ PERSPEKTİFLERİ

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UYUŞMAZLIK ANALİZİ VE ÇÖZÜMÜ YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ, TEMMUZ 2019

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Anahtar Kelimeler: Afrin Operasyonu, dini-milliyetçi söylemler, güvenikleştirme,
yönetici elitler, Müslüman vicdani retçiler

Bu tez 20 Ocak 2018 tarihi itibari ile Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri tarafından Suriye sınırlarında başlatılan sınır ötesi Afrin Operasyonu'nu, bir başka adıyla Zeytin Dalı Harekâtı'nı, vaka çalışması olarak ele almaktadır. Bu çalışma öncelikli olarak operasyon sürecinde yönetici elitlerin kullanmış oldukları dini-milliyetçi söylemlerin, Afrin operasyonunun ve zorunlu askerlik hizmetinin güvenikleştirilmesinde nasıl bir rol oynadığını söylem analizi yöntemini kullanarak incelemektedir. Eleştirel Güvenlik Çalışmaları literatürü ışığında güvenlik söylemlerinin siyasal elitler tarafından kutsallaştırılarak nasıl araçsallaştırıldığı bu araştırma kapsamında sorgulanmaktadır. İkinci olarak, devlet dışı aktörlerin, bu çalışma kapsamında Müslüman vicdani retçilerin ve savaş karşıtlarının, Afrin operasyonun güvenikleştirilmesi ve zorunlu askerlik hizmeti konularında ortaya koydukları alternatif söylemler araştırılmıştır. Katılımcılar ile yapılan saha çalışmasında odak grubu analiz yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Vaka çalışmasından elde edilen temel bulgular sonucunda, Afrin operasyonunu söylemsel olarak şekillendiren dini-milliyetçi ifadelerin, operasyonun kamuoyunda meşrulaştırılmasına katkı sağlama amacı taşıdığı ve operasyon ile ilgili eleştirel bir söylemin ortaya konmasının zorlaştırılmasına sebebiyet verdiği savunulmuştur. Buna karşılık, saha çalışması sonucunda gözlemlendiği üzere Müslüman vicdani retçiler ve savaş karşıtları alternatif ve muhalif bir söylem ortaya koyarak, dini söylemlerin güvenlik, militarizm ve milliyetçilik ile ilişkilendirilen herhangi bir konuda siyasal düzeyde araçsallaştırılmasına karşı bir tavır sergilemişlerdir.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AKP:	Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi)
CHP:	Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi)
CO:	Conscientious Objection
CoE:	Council of Europe
COr(s):	Conscientious Objector(s)
CSS:	Critical Security Studies
DİB:	Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı)
FSA:	Free Syrian Army (Özgür Suriye Ordusu)
LGBT+:	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender +
MHP:	Nationalist Movement Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi)
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organization
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan)
PYD	Democratic Union Party (Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat)
TAF:	Turkish Armed Forces
TIS:	Turkish-Islamic Synthesis
US:	The United States
YPG	People's Protection Units (Yekîneyên Parastina Gel)

1. INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the case of Turkey's cross-border military operation in Syria's Afrin, which was launched by the Turkish Armed Forces on 20 January 2018. Turkey's primary strategic and security objectives by carrying out such a military campaign include, but presumably not limited to; territorial integrity and sovereignty of Turkey, and controlling and defeating 'terror problem' that has long been a threatening factor on Turkey's southern and southeastern borders. Here, it is important to note that the Afrin operation, also known as the *Operation Olive-Branch*, was born out Turkey's long-standing and unchanging sense of security concerns, which have been tried to alleviate with Turkey's myriad of cross-border military campaigns represented as Turkey's defensive security maneuvers aiming to uproot terrorism.

In this regard, the PKK (*Kurdistan Workers' Party, Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*) is long assumed to get mobilized by using its transborder capacity in and from Syria. Therefore, the presence and intentions of the PKK is one of the grave and consistent threats that Turkey has perceived vis-à-vis its territorial integrity and sovereignty both inside and outside the country. In a similar vein, Turkey perceives other Syria affiliated Kurdish groups, namely, the PYD (*Democratic Union Party*) and YPG (*People's Protection Units*) as the ideological offshoots of the PKK, whose intentions are assumed by the state as to establish an autonomous Kurdish state alongside Turkey's borders. As a corollary to that, the Afrin operation was launched to eliminate security concerns, generating the 'problem of national survival' on behalf of Turkey, that are firmly linked to the threat of Kurdish separatism, the presence of 'Kurdish cantons' and paramilitary activities of aforementioned rebel groups on Turkey's borders. As seen, the Afrin operation as just part and parcel of Turkey's long historical struggle with 'terrorism' was neither a coincidence nor unusual, while the Turkish state has constituted its national and border security as insuperable redlines that cannot be crossed by anyone.

There are many reports demonstrating that the Afrin operation was a required

military effort to eliminate the PKK affiliated terrorist groups and their influence in Northern Syria (Kibaroglu 2018; Kasapoğlu and Ülgen 2018; Anas 2018).¹ As the reports stated, Turkey successfully operationalized the Afrin campaign through dispelling both the physical and ideological presence of the terrorist groups in territories they previously controlled. Therefore, the Afrin operation as a security matter of the utmost importance in the Turkish political agenda is deeply connected to provide safety and security for Turkey, Turkish and Syrian citizens against the threat of the armed-wings of the PKK. Indeed, there are also a few articles and conference papers which mostly explain the way the Afrin operation was completed with minimum risks and maximum benefits, which are related to the provision of peace, stability and security in the region where terror was experienced vehemently (Demir and Demir 2018; Umunç et al. 2018; Köseadağ and Ertürk 2018). As seen, the Afrin operation was addressed as a security need for Turkey, given that the de-facto Kurdish political authority constitutes an existential security threat for Turkey.

However, the way, by whom and for what purposes the public image of the operation was constructed receive scant attention, given that the operation newly emerged and yet understudied by scholars in both Turkish and international scholarship. As represented in the media, discursive groundwork of the Afrin operation, which was mostly determined by the governing officials and especially by the current president of Turkey, was very significant to attribute legitimacy to the operation to garner support from the public and diplomatic environment.² In this respect, this study is motivated by the argument that Turkish nationalism, which is infused by religious undertones, was made use of by the governing elites in structuring the securitization framework of the Afrin operation to ensure its legitimacy and sacredness in the eyes of population. Very recently, the president Erdoğan made the below speech on the role of security and the military to the students of the National Defense University during the *Iftar* time:³

¹ It is noteworthy to tell that there is vastness in terms of reports delving into the operational and security defense dimensions of the Afrin operation and most of them were irregularly published by the Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (SETA). However, instead of informing the public on the domestic implications of the operation or public image of the operation, these reports intensively were based on the success of the operation under the rubrics of security politics, defense, international security and terrorism. See the SETA's following webpage on this body on work: <https://www.setav.org/?s=Afrin> [Accessed on 20 June 18, 2019]

² 'Metin Gürcan: Zeytin Dalı Operasyonu: Mevcut durum ne, olası riskler hangileri, olası senaryolar neler? Operasyona yüksek kamuoyu desteği var.'

<https://t24.com.tr/haber/zeytin-dali-operasyonu-mevcut-durum-ne-olasi-riskler-hangileri-olasi-senaryolar-neler,541222> [Accessed on 20 June 20, 2019]

³ 'Milli Savunma Üniversitesi Öğrencileri ile İftar Programında Yaptığı Konuşma'

<https://www.tccb.gov.tr/konusmalar/353/105291/milli-savunma-universitesi-ogrencileri-ile-iftar-programinda-yaptigi-konusma> [Accessed on 20 June, 2019]

“On these blessed days, I would like to express my gratitude to our soldiers who served for the security of our country and for the peace of our nation both inside and outside the borders. Military service is one of the oldest and most honored professions in the world, which emerged out of the constant security need of humanity. The Turkish nation has always been the best military power of its region and the world. As descendants of an ancestor, who has long been known as a ‘military-nation’, we gave direction to our victories. This is the victorious army which made the history in Independence War, Çanakkale, Korea, Kut-al-Amara, Afghanistan, Bosnia, Euphrates Shield and Olive-Branch operations. Our heroic army continues to be the sole guarantor of our nation’s independence and future. You are the one who signed many victories that fascinated the world. Because you are the Turkish soldier, who faithfully believes that heroism is not to come back and to say I will be a martyr if I die; I will be a veteran if I survive.”

In this respect, characteristic of Turkey as ‘nation-in-arms’ is a historically and culturally embedded tradition, which is filled with nationalist, militarist and religious references to the role of conscription. The above-cited statement of the president attributing the military to the role of being a sole protector of the national security in a particular context of the Afrin operation illustrates that both the military service and the operation were considered to be ‘above-politics’ and ‘above-party’ issues. This, in turn, makes it hard to discuss either the role of soldiering or the purpose of the operation in any public or political debate. Indeed, the institution of conscription in Turkey is perceived as a vital instrument not only to eliminate any kind of imminent threats, but also to preserve national interests of Turkey both inside and outside the country through perpetuating the ‘strong army’ tradition. Considering the pivotal role of the military in Turkey, the way the ‘national security or interest’ has been understood and sought in Turkey always come alongside with the idea of militarist means.

Hence, it is not surprising that the Afrin operation launched by the *Turkish Armed Forces*, after all, is just an exemplar where the number of militarist motifs and values such as ‘heroism’ and ‘sacred cultural role of soldiering’ are reproduced. In fact, there is a voluminous literature examining the role of soldiering in Turkish culture as a phenomenon that is highly imbricated and intertwined with nationalism. However, my argument is that the literature is still dearth of scholarly interest drawing attention to how religion closely relates to nationalism, militarism and security despite omnipresence of the role of political Islam in Turkey’s scholarship regarding the military context. Hence, this thesis aims to scrutinize the recent case of the Afrin operation as the most current

cross-border military crisis to illustrate how ‘national security rhetoric’ is framed and formulated by use of specific values and references of the governing elites, and whether and how these references are questioned by the Muslim COs and anti-war activists. In that sense, I adopt the *Critical Security Studies* (CSS, hereafter) as the theoretical outlook of the thesis for the following objectives. First is to investigate whether and to what extent the Islamically infused national sentiments are used by the governing elites. This study secondly intends for developing a critical re-evaluation of this military campaign by questioning the rationale behind the instrumentalization of religious nationalist security rhetoric during the crisis moments. To that end, I employ discourse analysis as a methodological channel to empirically assess the Afrin operation along with the securitization attempts of the elites. In brief terms, I analyze how securitization framework of the Afrin operation effectuated by the elites fits well within the larger framework of the sanctification of the security politics. Such an analysis is much needed in Turkish politics, given that puzzling interrelations between religion, nationalism and the military receive scarce attention, even in critical scholarship on security studies.

This research has another important site where the other side of the story is deciphered; namely, how Islamic dissent to the conscription and Islamic disavowal of instrumentalizing religion in security politics as a state-led practice come to fore. In this thesis, I aim at exploring this puzzle by looking at the perspectives and approaches of the Muslim conscientious objectors (COs, henceforth) and Muslim anti-war activists. To recapitulate a point made earlier, performing in the military constitutes one of the most unquestioned and perennial practices in Turkey both at the state and societal level. What is more, fulfillment of the military service as a ‘sacred’ and ‘patriotic’ citizenship duty is directly coupled with serving the good and security of the whole nation. As a corollary to that, rejecting or at least challenging to perform the military service is linked with ungrateful, sacrilegious, and unpatriotic practice to the state and the nation as a whole.

In this respect, the cases of the Muslim COs and anti-war activists are more puzzling and perplexing. Firstly, the presence of the Islamist COs and anti-war activists, and their critiques towards the political system attracts a considerable attention. This is because Islamism has gained prominence as the state’s dominant discursive apparatus and ideology in the current political conjuncture in various contexts including the military, especially under the AKP governance (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, Justice and Development Party*). On the contrary, Muslim COs and anti-war activists constitute a noticeable crack in this system in a way that they reject both Islamic and nationalist

valorization of militarism. This is because they ground their act of objection to the compulsory military service and wars on Islamic understanding which is incompatible with the state's use of religion. Therefore, both Islamically oriented CO and anti-war activism are, indeed, a pretty marginal debate in Turkey. Hence, as anticipated, their Islamically oriented oppositional stances and discourses are restricted mostly by the state's unanimous disapproval.

Therefore, the second part of the research puzzle focuses on the perspectives of the Muslim COs and anti-war activists and the way these non-state agents perceive and interpret political rhetoric of the elites in shaping the role of soldiering and the military operation in the case of the Afrin military crisis. To add an agent-based value ensuring a holistic elaboration besides the way the institutional discourse on the Afrin operation has been constituted, I utilized a focus group methodology to provide Islamist non-state actors with a space in which they expressed themselves and performed their own meaning-making capacity. In this regard, by adhering firmly to the principles of the CSS, my primary aim here is to empower non-state agents with a voice to produce alternative discourses on political and military-focused issues which are mostly under the monopoly of the state officials as it is in the case of the Afrin operation. Taking into account the understudied nature of the cases of Muslim objectors, such analysis is invaluable to understand that security matters pertaining to the military are of utmost importance and priority from their own lenses. In brief terms, adding their perspectives into the analysis gives us more complete picture and provides theoretically affluent account on the role of religion-nationalism nexus along with its attachments in the security discourse, especially in a particular context of the Afrin operation.

This thesis comprises seven chapters and proceeds as follows. The next chapter starts with the literature review going over the concepts such as 'nationalism', 'religion', 'religious nationalism', and 'CO' in the military context. Such literature survey further allows me to think about the phenomenon of religious nationalism within constellation of many historical and cultural factors rather than investigating the current discursive practice in isolation, namely, only in the case of the Afrin operation and under the rule of the incumbent party. The third chapter firstly overhauls the CSS literature from the perspectives of both states and non-state actors as a theoretical outlook of the thesis. Throughout this chapter, I also introduce the way the security politics in general is sanctified by invoking sacred cultural idioms or norms through providing palpable examples from both Turkey and other parts of the world. In doing so, I further aim to

enunciate how this umbrella term closely relates to the use of religious nationalism, specifically in the securitization framework of the Afrin operation in which the purpose of this thesis can be encapsulated. The fourth chapter is the place where discursive portrayal of the Afrin operation was made by close examination of the official statements and speeches of the governing elites along with its media representations. In this chapter, both the discourse methodology and analysis part were packed in a relational perspective rather than of explaining the methodological advantages of using discourse analysis under a separate rubric. The fifth chapter explains the reasons why the focus group methodology has been made within the scope of this research through stressing its shortcomings and advantages in comparison to other qualitative methods in conducting such a fieldwork. In addition to that, I also turn my attention under this chapter to the way the focus groups designed and conducted in which I explained all practical and ethical details. Then I move to analyze the data gathered from each focus group in the sixth chapter. Here, each focus group meeting analyzed separately under the same discussion themes to be able to point out in-group interactions between the participants. However, throughout that chapter, I also trace the cases of agreements and disagreements amongst all participants by comparing across group discussions. Such process enables me to ensure a holistic elaboration of the participants' worldviews and subjective interpretations in terms of capturing both within and across group dynamics. In the last seventh chapter, I gather together the insights of the previous chapters by reviewing the central findings of each analysis chapters. In the conclusion part, I also discuss the main contributions of this research to relevant scholarships, especially on the cases of Muslim COs and the CO movement in general.

2. DEBATE OVER THE ENIGMATIC RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM APPROACH IN THE LITERATURE

Within the extant literature on nationalism it is possible to identify different conceptual frameworks and typologies, each focusing on a different level of nationalist analysis; ethnic, linguistic, civic, cultural and ideological (secular, religious, liberal and revolutionary) approaches. This chapter emanates from the scholarly interest in ideological account of nationalism and raises the question in the case of Turkey; whether there is a supposedly *a priori* bifurcation between the secular and religious forms of nationalism or Turkey is an idiosyncratic case experiencing a novel symbiosis between the two.

When the long-standing discussions based on protean nature of nationalism studies are taken into consideration, it can be clearly stated that there is no ample scholarly work delving into the relationship between religion and nationalism. Besides problematizing the relationship between different ideological forms of nationalism, this chapter also calls for attention to explain the ways in which religious and nationalist sentiments are militarized in Turkey. Although the literature has well-grounded assessments on the interrelations between the politics and religion, or between the politics and the military, there are few academic studies problematizing the dynamics between the religion, nationalism and the military. To disentangle the stated puzzles above, the literature review will proceed as follows: first it will assess how nationalism as a political project and modern construct is inextricably intertwined with the creation of nationalist and militarist societies; then it will explore the religious nationalism approach by describing the conflict between the Islamist and secularist dyad on nationalism; and it will conflate the implications of religious nationalism approach with the elites' discourse. To provide more concrete examples relating to the stated literature above, the Turkish case will be analyzed at the end of each section.

2.1 Nationalism in Relation to the Military Service

It is hard to come up with a generalization on what nationalist ideology is and how it is performed across different cases since there are few typical characteristics that all forms of nationalisms share. However, as Lawrence (2005, 84) noted from the studies of Smith in the book of *Nationalism*, the growing significance of the study of nationalism stems from its political ideology and movement facets and it is a subject of investigation in its own right. Therefore, it is important to examine what nationalist ideologies do in a given society through an effective discourse. Both Lawrence and Tzidkiyahu put forth the idea that nationalism as an ideology needs to be conceptualized by referring to its political and social function. As both authors reflected, the conceptualization of nationalist ideology either within the state or in the national movement is made through the dissemination of pre-cultural symbols, norms and histories (Lawrence 2005, 168-169; Tzidkiyahu 2015, 8). Hence, it is significant for this study to comprehend how nationalist ideology, by using different instruments, actualizes the objective of norm dissemination and the way citizens are affected by nationalist ideology.

In that sense, among the myriad -either complementary or competing- definitions of nationalism, this study puts the ideological nationalism at the center to accentuate how nationalist ideologies serve to legitimize particular power structures and narratives. As Eriksen (1991, 264) argues that nationalism as an ideology creates a conscious mobilizing force on its adherents and one side of this ideology can be both aggressive and expansionist within and outside of a country. Nationalist ideology expects from its citizens to become nationalists to protect the needs and interests of a nation against outsiders for the maintenance of its symbolic and practical norms. Similarly, Renan (1996, 58) explains how the nation-state has a right to exist and sustain its presence by demanding sacrifice from individuals for the benefit of the whole community. Renan (1996, 58-59) also states that the idea of nation and nationalism were formed by the realization of individual sacrifices in the past, and its reproduction is heavily reliant on people who are unconditionally prepared to make the same thing in the future.

The notion of sacrifice is quite natural for nationalist ideologies as it is indicated in Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (2006, 7-8) since "national imaginings" which bring people together as a community overcome any personal consideration based on

individualistic well-being. As a corollary to that, the notion of sacrifice and readiness to kill and die for a nation are exalted. How nationalist ideologies call upon individuals to make sacrifices in terms of killing and willingly dying to defend a nation is explained by both Anderson (2006, 7-9) and Stern (1995, 99-101) through relying upon “cultural roots of nationalism”. Since the national and cultural identifications consisting of religion, customs and language are strong enough to surpass individuals’ selfish interests and considerations, it is unproblematic for individuals to sacrifice their lives for the sake of protecting their nations (Stern 1995, 100-101). It can be inferred that individuals are expected to live in accordance with aforementioned constructs and to collectively mobilize for serving the benefit of common interest, namely, the nation as a consequence of invented overarching loyalty which trumps over the individual ‘selves’.

Given that so much curiosity about where nationalist ideologies are promoted and reproduced, it is worth analyzing the role of compulsory military service in generating nationalist and militarist societies along with obedient citizen-soldiers. As it is argued by Altınay and Bora (2002, 140), militarism and nationalism are complementary and intertwined ideologies in determining the destiny of nation-states and the dynamics of civil-military relations in all over the world since approximately the last two centuries. As Posen (1993, 81) noted, nationalist ideologies aggrandize the role of the military in mobilizing “the creative energies and the spirit of self-sacrifice” of conscripts to increase the combat power of states on battlefields. Along the same line of this thought, Huntington (1994, 33,94) argues that nationalist ideology favors a powerful nation and state with a strong standing army in which the supremacy of nation is emphasized over individuals. To show how the compulsory military service is competent in weakening individual rationality and identifications, Ian Hamilton (1910, 44) portrays the army as a “greatest engine, the world has been encountered so far, to manufacture of a particular human intellect and body”.

In light of these arguments, states purposefully use the military as a core being of nationalism because of its utility in indoctrinating and disciplining people in accordance with nationalist and militarist ideals. Therefore, to provide well-grounded examination unfolding the organic nexus between militarism and nationalism, it is significant to have a look at how citizen-soldiers are disciplined and trained in the military barracks. The military service in which disciplinary practices are developed and perfected aims at creating ‘docile’, ‘nationalist’ and ‘productive’ minds/bodies whose rationality and morality is masterminded by national ideals and objectives (Mosse 1975; Foucault 2000;

Altınay and Bora 2002; Altınay 2004). By utilizing the compulsory military service, nationalist ideologies admittedly contribute to the spread of the idea that a shared identity and common fate which are constituent elements of a culture and history can only be protected by the collective efforts of individuals. In doing so, the ideological aspect of nationalism and militarism shape the ways people do, see, feel and even think in order to be sure that they live as nationalist and militarized compatriots of a country.

To demonstrate how the purpose of producing better soldiers and citizens is realized by the nation states, the educational system and training which are fraught with both nationalist and militarist content can be given as an example. The literature illustrates that the creation of nationalist and militarist societies strongly correlates with the educational process in which citizens are taught in line with the militarist and nationalist spirits (Altınay 2004, 69; Parlak and Kaftan 2016; Posen 1993, 87). As it can be clearly seen, education as an essential component of the compulsory military service creates “ideal citizen-soldiers” and a strong connection between the national identity and citizenship (Altınay 2004, 68; Mosse 1975, 14). As both Verdery (1996) and Mosse (1993) clarified, the political side of military education aims at attributing the identity of ‘national and collective self’ to people in order for turning them into disciplined national and obedient subjects of the nation. The terms such as “nation-in-arms”, “military-nation” and “men in uniform” are used by Mosse (1993, 14) as entrenched norms through which people are socialized and culturalized into them. According to him, there is nothing else that perfectly illustrates the significance of the role of education in the military than the militarist content of most national anthems and heroic narratives as a cultural and historical relic (Mosse 1993). Since the previously stated heroic narratives consisting of nationalist and militarist notions are practiced in almost every corner of social life, it helps nation-states to sustain their presences in the way they want. As it is expected, the interwovenness of nationalist and militarist ideals is solidified by education, which culminates in the culturalization of these ideals on the masses as a part of ordinary life.

To provide more concrete examples about what and how nationalism teaches its adherents, Turkey seems to be a well-suited case. The Turkish military is considered as a true owner and symbol of nationhood and national pride (Bora 2011, 64; Jenkins 2001). Therefore, the military as an ultimate guardian of the nation-state, national unity and Republican principles is seen as a main *raison d'etre* of the Turkish state (Sarigil 2009, 712). Given the state and nation-founding character of the military, the army constitutes an indispensable aspect of traditional Turkish nationalism and culture. As a consequence

of the perennial militarist attributes to the Turkish nation and nationalism, it is then quite natural to see that the phenomenon ‘military-nation’ is treated to be a-historically and unquestionably existed.

The entrenched question in the literature based on the way the military serves for the will of the Turkish nationalism is scrutinized by Jenkins (2001, 83) to show the power of the army in terms of setting parameters for the state policy on national interests and needs. The military and military virtues are an inextricable part of Turkishness, which occupies the cadets with a sense of almost religious responsibility in the duty of protecting the Turkish legacy (Jenkins 2001, 84) . Given the superiority of being a draftee, personal rectitude and virtue are closely connected with performing in the military. By using the “myth of military-nation” metaphor, Altınay (2004, 3) displays a conscious historical process in Turkey in which both militarism and military ethos are historicized as primordial attributes of the Turkishness. In her insightful analysis about how this ‘myth’ functions over time, the Turkish nation and the military are assumed to have an organic relationship where both characteristics benefit from the existence and maintenance of the another. Therefore, the interwovenness of nationalism and the military duty is used as a hereditary trait to shape culture, politics and identities in Turkey (Altınay 2004). This historically and politically orchestrated inculcation process culminates in the insuperable use of ‘military-nation’ or ‘nation-in-arms’ rhetoric in Turkey. Similarly, Bora (2004, 163-169) addresses the role of *Turkish Armed Forces* (TAF, hereafter) in Turkey as a ‘subject’, is assigned with the duty of producing and reproducing nationalist ideology. The military itself as part and parcel of Turkish nationalism is accepted as an ultimate bearer of the cultural and historical symbols of “the nation-state, the national anthem, the flag and the star and crescent” (Bora 2011, 64).

As both Bora (2004, 165-168) and Altınay (2004, 180-181) highlighted, the coalescence between the peremptory language of the army and burdening language of nationalism aim at making devout and nationalist citizens, who unconditionally embrace national targets and strategies as a transcendent and legitimate source. The omnipresence of the nationalist and militarist slogans such as “all for Turkey” (*Her şey Türkiye için*), “striving for the nation” (*Vatan için mücadele*), and “for Turkey willingly” (*Türkiye için gönüllü*) illustrate the perpetual marriage of militarism with Turkish nationalism (Altınay 2004, 115; Altınay and Bora 2002, 143; Altınay and Kancı 2007; Altınay 2009; Bora 2011, 65). It is, then, only natural and unavoidable that the slogan saying, ‘Every Turk is born a soldier’ is internalized by every citizen in the givenness nature of the

‘military-nation’. This, in turn, displays that the sense of militarized history and identity is not simply a coincidence, but it is an inseparable part of the Turkish nation and culture. In fact, all these previously stated old sayings or mottos are just overt manifestations where the tie-in between being a Turk and a soldier reinforced each other. As seen, the historical and cultural arguments explaining the role of the military from the lens of nationalism in Turkey have always been central in the academic inquiry. As a consequence, it is hard to analyze the baggage of the idea of ‘military-nation’ without looking into the vastness of the scholarship focusing on the link between the militarism and nationalism in Turkey.

Jenkins (2001, 89), Bilgin (2010), Cizre (2003, 217-218) and Öztan (2014, 24) added new values to the studies on Turkey’s nationalist and militarist practices by claiming that Turkey’s so-called unique “historical, political and social context” along with its ‘warning security environment’ has also shaped the role of the military forces.⁴ Briefly, Turkey often attributes the military power and strong state tradition as their most invaluable and indispensable characteristics as a nation. This leads to the continuity in Turkey’s insistence on thinking and implementing security by imposing conscription, which prioritizes the collective defense of the nation over the individual rights and liberties (Jenkins 2001, 89). In the words of Sinclair-Webb (2004, 32), intermingling the military service with the essence of Turkish culture and nation paves way for an “authoritative tradition” over the morale and rationality of individuals. Since this ‘authoritative tradition’ reflects the military service as a ‘duty’ which is immune from ‘violence’ and ‘unjust war’, it disassociates soldiering from all its negative consequences such as dying, killing or, last but not least, harming another human being (Altınay and Bora 2002, Sinclair-Webb 2004). This authoritative tradition is practiced within the military barracks to naturalize the notions of killing and dying for the benefit of the nation and to make embodiment of these notions and practices in and through the acts and thoughts of citizen-soldiers.

⁴ These historical, political and social context-bound realities of Turkey are assumed to constitute necessary condition in justifying the compulsory military service in the following way: (1) Turkey’s context-bound and peculiar historical realities (both Turkishness and the army as a constituent element of Turkish legacy); (2) long-standing cultural and social traditions (norm diffusion based on nationalist, militarist and pious soldiers, Turkey as a military-nation); and (3) geographic location (locating in a conflict zone making Turkey vulnerable to foreign security and terror threats).

2.2. The Uneasy Marriage of Religion and Nationalism

The goal of this section is to examine what role religious nationalism plays and to explore the overlap between religion and nationalism. Therefore, the focus will be on assessing the relationship between the two in a relational and dialectical perspective instead of unpacking them separately. At this stage, it is essential to search for answers to the following questions: are the religion and nationalism one and the same thing or are they reinforcing each other in some contexts and under specific conditions? As it is widely discussed in the literature, the definition of religion seems to be less important than how the religion plays a paramount role in constituting a vital source of nationalism (Fox 2000; Tzidkiyahu 2015, 10). Therefore, the focus here is not on what religion is but what religion does in relation to nationalism since the relationship between the two is complex and multi-layered.

However, despite the strong influence of religion on deep and compelling emotions and ideologies that nationalism provokes, most of the academic studies seem to walk on the line of secular tradition in defining both the origin and functions of nationalism. As Brubaker (2012, 15) states, the study of nationalism in general hinges on “secularist bias” and this makes it difficult to understand the intrinsic connectedness between nationalism and religion. The modernist account of nationalism relies upon such notions as “secularization of nationalism”, “nationalism as a secular form of consciousness”, and “nationalism as a new religion of people” to emphasize incommensurable distinctiveness between the two side in the history of the world, especially after the decline of religion as a unifying force (Zawadzki 2010, 209-214; Greenfeld 1996, 169). Similarly, Juergensmeyer (1993, 6-13) explains how the nation-states have chosen to secular nationalism as “a suprareligion” in order to aspire the society beyond religious allegiances. Given the strong emphasis on the secular nationalism as a new and superior religion, it is worth to ask why secular nationalism has been raised as an alternative discourse by nation-states? Is it because religion has failed to inspire nation-states, or religion along with its transcendent facet and spiritual/moral goals has failed to meet the materialist needs of the states. Juergensmeyer (1993, 18) partially answers the questions above by saying that secular nationalism is thought to be responsive to the same needs for collective identity, loyalty and moral authority /duty that religion traditionally and parochially responded. Put differently, both religious and

secular nationalistic thought conceive the world in coherent and manageable ways and they both provide the authority, social and political order. This tendency in the academic tradition deepened the secular bias by designating religion and nationalism as potential rivals at the expense of understanding how religion and nationalism simultaneously can become ultimate guarantor of authority or orderliness in a society.

The antagonistic relationship between religion and nationalism in today's world politics finds its roots in the question of modernity and the French concept of *laïcité* (laicism). The adaptation of Western notions of modernity such as 'urbanization', 'increase in the level of development', 'industrial civilization' and 'the philosophical evolution of the enlightenment' is the main determinant leading to the secularism in nationalist notions (Tzidkiyahu 2015, 5). In addition to that, the notion of *laicism* negates the role of religion in the nation-states' affairs as one of the fundamental principles of the modernity and secularism (Dressler and Mandair 2011, 29). By embracing the prevailing arguments of secularization, it is quite easy to anticipate the reasons why religion was marginalized and characterized as something belonging to the past.

The studies on classical nationalism suppose that there is an incompatibility between religion, especially Islam, and secular nationalism, and that the religion is necessarily replaced with secular nationalism in the Western societies (Gellner 1981; Gellner 1993; Eickelman 1998). Gellner (1996, 28), as one of the spearheads of nationalist theories, elaborates the aforementioned argument by pointing out that an innate distrust and incongruence between religion and the state stem from the former's attachment to the God's will and divine rule, which culminates in "secular resistant" characteristic of religious societies. However, scholars did say little about mutually reinforcing relationship between the religion and state-organized nationalism in religious societies, especially when the co-operation between the two is *sine quo non* for national interests. As it is elucidated by Juergensmeyer (1993, 35), incorporating religious elements into nationalism provides religious legitimacy for a state; helps to give nationalism a religious aura; and enables national leaders to borrow various elements of a society's religious culture to accomplish their goals. To show the reality that the use of religious nationalism keeps up with the contemporary world politics, Tzidkiyahu (2015, 4) says, "the world mobilizes religion for political ends and *vice versa*: such a phenomenon can be witnessed in all over the world and in its purest and most powerful manifestation in the Middle East's political Islam". As opposed to the conventional wisdom distinguishing the domains and functions of religion and nationalism, as it is

previously shown, religion has something to do with both nationalist ideologies of states and politics. In other words, notwithstanding the marginalization of religion within merely small Western-oriented intellectuals, religion still politically masterminds the masses around the world.

Even though the secularist approach in the literature construes the value of religious nationalism with a peripheral social role, it pays scant attention to the way how religious nationalism perceives the socio-political order and establishes relationship between citizen-soldiers and the state. *Religious Nationalism* approach is scrutinized by both Brubaker and Friedland in more detailed way. In their renderings, religious and nationalist discursive practices concomitantly constitute the identity of state, cultural identity of people and regulatory state practices in every aspects of social life (Friedland 2001, 126-128; Brubaker 2012, 12). By following this argument, “religious nationalism as a state-centric project” (Friedland 2001, 137) paves way for the instrumentalization of nationalism by religious rhetoric or vice versa to define proper state practices, state mentality and citizenry of a nation rather than treating religious and secular nationalist vision of a state as an adversary worldview. The understanding of the syncretism between religion and nationalism is significant in terms of its regulatory social, cultural and political dynamics in a nation-state. As it is indicated by Friedland (2001, 133-137), religious nationalism is not just a set of myths or doctrines but institutionalization of discursive practice in cultural, social and political spheres since it aims transforming set of religious values and imageries to the real-life setting. In that sense, the study of Friedland shed light on how religious nationalism creates an institutional political program and overarching discursive practice in the hands of a state. Religious nationalism as an institutionalization of discourse represents a “language of ultimate order” which is fraught with “martial metaphors, sacred battles and religious narratives” to create a collective loyalty on behalf of the state (Friedland 2001, 128; Brubaker 2012, 9; Juergensmeyer 1993).

Religion as a deeply intertwined phenomena with nationalism constitutes a bastion for states since they bolster their rulings by using transcendence and absoluteness of religion (Brubaker 2012, 9; Friedland 2001, 126). To comprehend in an in-depth way where the potency of religion comes from, Juergensmeyer’s explanations hinging on the aspects of ideological religious-nationalism are highly useful. According to him, religious nationalism approach religionizes politics and history by putting political issues and national struggles within a sacred context in which heroes of the nation sacrifice

themselves for the good and faith of their communities, and they are also tantamount to the prophets and messiahs (Juergensmeyer 1993; Tzidkiyahu 2015, 13). It is obvious that religion has significant imprints on both the origin and development of nationalist symbols and narratives. By the same token, seeing religion as highly imbricated and intertwined with nationalism seems more plausible than as something external and antithetical. As it can be plainly seen that there is no reason to support givenness of dichotomy between the religion and nationalism since the former became an ideological and discursive partner of nationalism. To illustrate the inseparability and interdependence of religion and nationalism nexus even in a secular form of a state, Friedland (2001, 144) argues that the nation-building process requires moral boost which can only be achieved by the conflation of nationalist and religious fervor and the less control on religion in political and social surroundings.

After discussing what sorts of meanings are associated with religious or secular nationalism in the literature, it is worthwhile to analyze how these contentious nationalist approaches manifest itself in the case of Turkey. Let me begin by asking whether “the loss of faith in secular nationalism” (Juergensmeyer 1993, 11) is the case in Turkey or whether Turkey is still a peculiar case of a secular nationalism in the Muslim world like its western counterparts. There are some claims which are scrutinized by scholars in a way that the Turkish state separates religion from the public sphere or at least controls the existence and role of the religion under the strict state surveillance to ensure the “securityness of secularism” (Bilgin, 2008, 593; Gürbey, 2009, 372; Kemerli, 2015, 282). The previously stated argument is heavily reliant on the principle of *laicism* which enables the state to control religion in the public and state affairs, but the way the state’s implementation and interpretation changes over time due to the erratic socio-political conditions (Gözaydın and Öztürk 2014, 11). However, taking into consideration the difficulty of fulfilling laicism principle in dominantly Muslim country, some argue that western notion of secular nationalism is used just as an artifact which shapes the image politics of Turkey in the eyes of western intellectual circles (Bose 2018). As a corollary to that, most of scholars approach Turkey’s secularization process skeptically since avowed instrumentalization of religion by the Turkish state make distinction between the secularism and religion blurred (Kandiyoti 2012, 515).

However, to understand the true source of Turkish nationalism and the duality between the religious and secular notions in the state affairs, it is needed to go back to the Republican era of Turkey. Since the creation of the modern-nation state along with

nationalist principles dates back to the early Republican era, it is significant to investigate whether the present religious nationalist policies and rhetoric have their roots in the past. As it is claimed by the historical institutionalists, once social and political patterns are formed, they tend to be constant (Rueschemeyer and Stephen 1997).

Kuru (2009, 163-164) argues that the state-religion debate in Turkey represents the antithetical convictions of both the Kemalists and pro-Islamists since the Islamic groups designate Kemalists to employ “assertive secularism”, which aims to eliminate Islam from the public. This claim admittedly is buoyed by other scholars who see the Kemalist era as a pure representation of modernization and secularization in which Islamism is designated as an anti-progressive path (Şen 2000, 74-75). According to Şen (2000, 74-75), the fathers of the Republican period initiated a political program to regulate religion under the state control as a way of showing the new Republic’s rupture from the Muslim and Ottoman past. This officially guided/controlled religion as a requisite of secularism and national security was employed to rule over religion through pushing legal and political manifestations of religion outside of the state affairs (Bilgin 2008, 597). As Ihsan Yilmaz puts it (2005, 392), “In Republican epistemology, religion is imprisoned in the conscience of the individual [...] and is not allowed to mix with and interfere in public life”. As part of the nationalism paradox manifesting itself in the relationship between secularism and religion, this part of the study accentuates the need for understanding the way the integration of Islamic values into Turkish political culture took place. Even though the Turkish Republican regimes’ restrictions on religious practices and doctrines are portrayed as a matter of national security (Shively 2008; Bilgin 2008), today it is possible to see how these religious norms are instrumentalized and used as an inciting factor for the sake of national security.

Given the sharp differences between a secular and religious vision of the Turkish nation, Cizre (1996) usefully explains the timeless ubiquity of this double discourse in Turkey’s historical past. Instead of establishing rigid segregation between Islam and political realm, it would be useful to construe state policies towards religion in a strategic way since the incorporation and accommodation of Islamic politics into the Turkish national system has happened in various ways. Along the lines of Cizre’s monumental study on the parameters explaining Islam-state interactions (1996, 231-232), the stance of the Turkish state towards religion can better be explained by referring to the continuity of interactions than of discontinuity since the state has always maintained a strategic relationship with Islam. Although the exponents of discontinuity view, which highlights

a radical path break from the past, the recent role of religion in Turkey would be better understood with the lens of continuity which does not promote secular nationalism vs. religion rhetoric. For the same reason, some scholars reject taken-for-granted incongruity between the religion and secular nationalism since it obscures multifaceted interaction between the two, especially when the state interests matter (Azak 2012; Gürbey 2012; Turam 2012).

The scholarly repercussions against the predominant juxtaposition of Islam with the secular state are based on the assumption that the contestation between the two have been transformed into the co-operation in modern Turkish politics. As Turam (2004, 277) asserts, there has been a gradual transformation from a relatively hostile separation and control of the religion from the public to a recent friendly compartmentalization between the two. In her later research, she strongly emphasizes the role of using shared loyalties such as religious/nationalist and historical/cultural allegiances by religious-oriented governing elites and society in general to describe incorporation of religion to politics (2012, 5). The significance of the argument proposed by Turam is that it seeks to turn the lens back on how the secularist and religious accounts mutually shape and inform each other given the ‘torn’ country characteristic of Turkey.⁵ Following the same logic of inquiry, both Gürbey (2012) and Azak (2012) try to display how difficult it is to decide whether Turkey staunchly sticks to the notion of secular state or the state uses the amalgamation of religion and secular nationalism strategically in line with its interests and needs. Gürbey problematizes the putative role of the Republican era in denying or removing Islam from the politics. Contrary to this assumption, she argues that the state aims at producing a certain kind of religion under its domain, that is central to the creation of good citizens (2012, 40). The process of making good and obedient citizens has always been a duty of the Turkish state, which necessitates the integration of religious norms and doctrines into the national projects of homogenization and disciplining (Gürbey 2012, 40-41). Her study has much acclaimed contributions to the literature by illustrating that even in the early republican era, “the use of Islam was nothing more than a discursive tactic on the part of nationalists to mobilize the masses during strategical moments such as the *National Independence War*” (2012, 42).

Another promising research relying upon the quarrel between secular and

⁵ In fact, the term ‘torn country’, describing the civilizational characteristics of Turkey, originally belongs to Huntington. As he stated in the *Clash of Civilizations*, Turkey is one of the most prototypical cases for such attribution, given that the history, culture and traditions of Turkey have long been stuck in Western (modernism, secularism) and non-Western (Islamic revival, Muslimism and Middle Eastern) qualities (1993, 42).

religious versions of nationalism was produced by Azak. Her study addresses the stated dilemma by claiming that the presence of religious-oriented agents in the Turkish society inevitably uncover the notion of ‘conservative nationalism’, that is on and for religion (Azak 2012, 61-64). Azak claims that the state just “intervened” in what genuine religion of the society is by instrumental use of secular discourse instead of separating or controlling religion (2012, 61).

Drawing from the insights of previously stated arguments, instead of seeing relationship between religion and secular nationalism as a zero-sum game, it is more reasonable to try to understand how these two accounts are intermingled with each other in the Turkish historical tradition. The persistence of religion in defining what Turkish nationalism is also elaborated by Eissenstat and Tank with the idea that these two are inseparable in the essence of the Turkish legacy. Both Eissenstat (2005, 245) and Tank (2005, 6) claimed that neither the idea of Turkishness nor the conflation of Turkishness with Muslim identity was entirely new in defining the principles of nationalism. In the same vein, Yeğen (2007, 138) also suggests that “Muslimhood has been the key to achieving Turkishness”. In general, Peter van der Veer in his veracious study (1999) argues that despite the proclivity of nation-states to change the meaning of religion, they do not eliminate it from the public sphere nor do they see any obstacle to interfere in the private sphere to promote a specific conception of religion. All in all, although the religious nationalism is depicted as a contested phenomenon in the extant literature, explaining how the term cherishes the role of military in Turkey may be seen as a foremost analysis.

Since the question of where and how exactly the religious nationalism is performed has received scant attention in the literature, this part will examine what role religious nationalism plays in the military. Despite the voluminous literature on military’s supposed constituent characteristic in Turkish history, one part of the literature remains relatively intact in terms of figuring out whether the military is strictly and staunchly committed to secularism, or the military is a pious defender of the nation and the Muslim faith. Some of the scholars have tendency to identify critical junctures – such as the emergence of the Republic, military coup in 1980, and Islamist-oriented parties’ coming into power- in the Turkish politics to explain the shift in the military’s approach towards secularism or religion over time (Arik 2018, Yavuz 2003). Therefore, this part of the literature survey has more focus on the armed forces’ true source of morality. As it is discussed in the incisive article of Sarigil (2009, 717), the role of the military is assumed

to stay outside and above the politics. Similarly, Shively (2008) argues that the military is supposed to be neutral and to remain outside of the religious activities as it is a place where people with distinctive religious worldviews and motivations to act towards the same set of political and military principles. Given the ambiguity about the role of military, Heper (2005, 228) claims that the military makes a crucial distinction between Islam at the level of the individual and Islam at the level of the state. Consequently, as far as the military is concerned, it is plausible to be both pious and secular at the same time since the TAF is not against Islam as a source of morality (Heper 2005; Heper 2012). In spite of the presumed jostle between secular and Islamic notions, the assumption made by Heper illustrates that it is not necessary to see any contradiction between the secular Republic and Islam since they are both legitimate sources and sympathetic to each other in the military. Even though Heper does not see any inherent contradiction in the secular nation's understanding of religion, his arguments seem questionable when the governing elite uses Islamic rhetoric intentionally to permeate its overarching authority in the military missions. Hence, regardless of how divisive the opinions on religion and secularism in Turkey are, the use of the religious nationalist rhetoric within the military needs to be analyzed to understand the effect of this rhetoric on nationalizing and sanctifying political issues.

2.3 The Role of Religious Nationalism in the Turkish Army

The Republican era is assumed to bring a new discourse about the religion and the role of the military. Kandiyoti (2012, 515) and Yavuz (2003, 49) assert that the traditional narrative depicting the history of the modern Turkey represents the dubious struggle between the values of secular state/military and a traditional Muslim society. While the mission of military is associated with the protection of a secular-nation state and modernization of the society, the Muslim population enriches the military by referring to its defender role in protecting sacred values of Turks; the survival of the state and religion (Kandiyoti 2012; Yavuz 2003). Despite either latent or visible co-operation between the Islam and secular practices in the military during the Republican period, Şen (2000) argues that the army negates the role of religion in its training and educational system. He claims that the military embraces the irreplaceable essence of the notions such as

Turkishness, *laicism* and progressive Turkish nationalism and it prioritizes these norms over religious allegiances (2000, 101-102). Contrary to this argument, the literature proves that *The Book on Religion for the Soldier*⁶ written by Akseki (1946) is as an example of an undoubtful religious-based inculcation process held by the state and military elites since the book aims to stimulate and incentivize the religious feelings of the draftees. The book clearly reveals the way the social-engineering process in the army is actualized and how the religious and nationalist sentiments are used to shape perceptions of conscripts/citizens about the military duty. The aim of the military education book can be summarized with the following words:

As a sixth pillar of Islam, performing in the military, that is, *jihad* is different from the duty of prayer, fasting, hajj and *zakat*. A citizen who did not fulfil the duty of being a soldier cannot properly accomplish other holy duties as well [...] Performing in the military is a liability to the state and Islam and it is a matter of blood and life. A person who loves his Allah and the Prophet should go to the military willingly [...] The status of being a soldier is peerless in our society. If a soldier dies, he will become a martyr, who is awarded with Allah's heaven. If a soldier stays alive from a sacrosanct defence of the homeland, he will be a war veteran [...] The essence of Islam and nationalism requires strong conscripts for the protection and well-being of the state until the final day of judgement [...] In Islam, each and every person is a soldier. Therefore, people who desert from the military or who pretends to be sick will be seen as rebels against Allah and the Prophet. These people even cannot be seen as human beings and the punishment will be so harsh for them (Akseki 1946, 195,285,286,287).

As seen, the presented book illustrates the institutionalization of the religious nationalist discourse within the military and how conscripts are trained and socialized in line with these principles. Bora (2004, 164-165) deems the discursive mechanism as “pedantic” which is used by the military and governing elites to aestheticize Islamist practices and doctrines within the nationalism. As Bora (2004), Gürbey (2012) and Kemerli (2015) point out, by coupling ‘sacred’ notions such as ‘jihad’ and ‘martyrdom’ with nationalism, the elites expected to establish collective ideal and incentives which are in favor of the national interests and security. Kara (2007, 48-53) also comes up with a phrase similarly showing the engagement between the military and religion, that is, “a good soldier means a good Muslim and a good Muslim means a good soldier”. He stresses

⁶ The book was written right after Fevzi Çakmak, who was an important elite figure in the Republican era, demanded from Akseki to shape perceptions of conscripts/citizens about the military duty and to create devout and patriotic citizens (Kaplan 2005).

the importance of the religion lessons in the barracks since they were essential instruments to lift soldiers' morale and nationalist sentiments as a result of destructive wars, harrowing losses and rise in the number of deserting soldiers following the *National Independence War* and *World War I* (2007, 48-49). Kandiyoti (2012, 521) argues that state actors tried to create a religious commitment to the military service by aggrandizing 'holy' war histories and narratives of Turks to eliminate the stated problems above. The reason behind the pivotal role of religion inside barracks is also explained by Karpat who turns attention to Muslim societies and their traditional way of living. He asserts that young draftees living in the villages grown up with a traditional understanding of authority, thereby their loyalty and discipline can be revitalized by using religious norms rather than by using modern and secular indoctrination. (1970, 1672). As a result, the core of the religious nationalism finds its reflection in the military, where the notions such as 'nation of soldiers', 'self-sacrificing Turks', and 'defender of Muslim faith' are reiterated as a transhistorical basis of the nation.

Considering the presented arguments, it is hard to find evidence to support given tension between the military and religious nationalism. Since both nationalist military ethos and Islam have become timeless attributes of Turkish citizens, religion as an ideology provides guidelines with propitious behavior for citizen-soldiers and with the ability for states to legitimize their actions. In appearance, the literature focusing on the intuitional and historical development of the army agrees on the military's legacy coming from the "Turkish heritage, Islam, experiences of Ottoman Empire and the Republic" (Karpat 1970, 1656). To express the continuity in the military's tradition, Karpat (1970, 1656) claims that how citizens were indoctrinated with regard to the survival of the nation state is as identical as the survival of the Islam. The centrality of the notions such as 'religion', 'holy war', 'martyrdom', 'fighting against infidels' in the military stem from its embeddedness and longevity in the Turkish political culture (Karpat 1970, 1657; Kaplan 2002; Kaplan 2005).

Besides, Kaplan, Shively and Altınay discuss the role of these religion-laden norms and notions in the national educational system. Authors assert that systematic usage of religious discourse, which is orchestrated in the hands of governing and military elite, valorizes a master narrative about the military heritage at the societal level (Altınay 2004; Kaplan 2005, 667-668; Shively 2008, 668). As Kaplan (2002, 113) and Kemerli (2015) indicate, culturally diffused norms - such as 'Every Turk is born a soldier', 'Military is Prophet's heart' and 'Turkish soldier is a little Mohammed' - also are

integrated into the official education system to implement social-engineering process in terms of creation of willing and devout citizen-soldiers for the military service. The power of Islamist concepts is considered to be a *sine quo non* apparatus for enhancing social cohesion since they have an undeniable impact on boosting the combat morale of soldiers, and employing as a stimuli on them (Komsuoğlu and Eskişar 2013, 208-209). Therefore, when the military service itself is not adequate to galvanize citizens who are ready to sacrifice themselves for the well-being of the nation, religion as a national and cultural relic of the past undertakes the role in producing both pious and patriotic soldiers. Gürbey (2012, 48-50) describes this religion-nationalism nexus in the military as a divine shackle which systematically reproduces Islam as a sacred religion of the Turkish nation and the military service as a religious worship and patriotic duty. In that sense, it is important to understand what kind of theological function is taken over by the state in defining military service along with the principles of religion and nationalism.

The function of religion in the army relatively changes in accordance with political environments and ideological orientations of incumbent parties. However, Komsuoğlu and Eskişar (2013, 208) stress the continuous engagement between the military and religion since the use of Islamic rituals, symbols and sentiments within the military dates back to the Republic's predecessor. Arik (2018) stresses the importance of the date 1980 as a critical juncture since after the military coup, the TAF is assumed to have a role in "secular risk governance" against the threat of political Islam. Due to the possibility of rise in Islamist obscurantism, *irtica*, the military as a self-proclaimed defender of the secular state has staged various military interventions and took precautions in the post 1980 era. In the literature, the time period following the military coup is described with a secularist agenda of the state and the military as an institution with an aim to prevent Islamist infiltrations from the public and political sphere (Arik 2018; Kaplan 2002; Cizre 1996). The state's nervousness about the potential power of Islam to shape politics during the 1980s and 1990s led the various state institutions and the military to become hypervigilant to any incursions of Islam in their domain (Shively 2008, 691). Therefore, the duty of the military service is shaped by the secular discourse to fight against the risks of political Islam as an internal threat.

However, this critical turning point is insufficient to explain what changed the status of Islam which is previously perceived by the state as a vital threat against the state security? Yet, far from eliminating the role of religion in the public sphere, the period after 1980 would be better understood by referring to the reconstruction of the religion

which is based on ‘safer’ and ‘enlightened’ version of the *Sunni* Islam (Arik 2018, 308; Grigoriadis 2013, 50-51; Yavuz 2003, 58). This re-articulation process also takes place in the constitution and the state explicitly argued that the state would impart proper Islam that is compatible with nationalism and religion (Shively 2008, 697). What sorts of meanings are associated with proper Islam and what are the political fortunes of this term in the state and the military? Shively (2008, 707) argues that proper Islam is expected to produce good Muslims who are modern, secular and westernized rather than of producing disgruntled Muslims who pose a threat of obscurantism against the progressive secular structure and mentality of the state and military. Given the definitional boundaries of ‘good Muslims’, Heper (2005, 2012) refuses to see any threat coming from the pious and patriotic agents -i.e the state elite and society in general- to the secular state. In contrast, he claims that the pious Muslims in Turkey have secularized, not only superficially by the enforcement of the state, but also “cognitively” (2012, 80). In a critical way, Tank pays attention to the possible threats that secularism has encountered during the rule of Islamist-oriented political parties, including the AKP. She clarifies her concerns about the coexistence of secular/democratic state and Islamist politics after the AKP came to power with 2002 election since the party’s strong Islamist orientation reminds the contentious relationship between the *Islamist Welfare Party* and the military in 1997 (2005, 4). It is obvious that the author’s concerns are centered on the exploitation of the religion by the governing elite as a political and pragmatic tool to achieve nationalist ends and idealize military/state craftsmanship. Similarly, Kaplan (2002) and Shively (2008, 697) portray various political and military leaders in Turkey who have looked to Islam as a mean and strategic asset to unify fractious political interests and movements in modern Turkish history. Despite the apparent controversy in the literature resting upon whether the incumbent party and elite enshrine political Islam with the aim of bringing back the state and military based on Islam, Heper strongly resists this presumed dichotomy. He argues that the elites may be devout Muslims in their private spheres and concurrently, they may employ secular policies in the public (2012, 79). However, the broad part of the literature problematizes the way the elites use religion as a political to justify their own goals in the name of national interests (Tank 2005, 3-6; Kaplan 2005; Kemerli 2015; Gürbey 2012).

In the post-1980 era, it is also significant to analyze *Turkish Islamic Synthesis* (TIS hereafter) and its imprints on the relationship between religion, nationalism and the military. As Kandiyoti (2012, 519) argues, the military as a guarantor of secular nation-

state has been turned into a significant ally of the right-of-center of the political spectrum and notably proponents of the TIS. With the rise of TIS, religious form of nationalism is reinforced and strongly entrenched in the Turkish political lexicon. As Kaplan (2002, 668) suggests, TIS inserts its moral imaginary and political vision into the public sphere which results in novel reproduction of sanctity in Turkey. After the 1980 coup, religious heritage is recognized as a source of unity with the help of discernible presence of religious agents. Tank also explains the political program of TIS by stressing its ideological role. Since after the 1970s the anti-system ideologies, such as communism was resurged, the state reconstructed and normalized the use of Islamic discourses, which ultimately culminated in the Islamic revival (Tank 2005, 10). Therefore, TIS as a counterbalance ideology and a strong discursive weapon was projected against the leftist ideology to reinforce national identity with Islamic values (Kaplan 2002; Komsuoğlu and Eskişar 2013; Tank 2005; Cizre 1996, 240). To strengthen the Turkish identity with the use of Islamic values, TIS was put at the hearth of “family, mosque and the military barracks” (Tank 2005, 11). This utilitarian approach of the state illustrates that when the other ideological and security issues are perceived as greater threats, the religion is used as a tool for ensuring survival of the state instead of constituting a threat against the secular state.

2.4. Elite Discourse, Nationalism and Religion

Although the previous section reflected little nuances about the elites’ discourses and how they are instilled by various Islamic and nationalist references, in this part, the main focus will be on when and for what purposes the elites resort to religious nationalist discourses. Following this aim, I will try to answer the following question. How is the religion used to reinforce nationalism to regulate and construct new Islamic and nationalist citizen-soldiers?

As it is stated by Van Djik (1993), elite discourse creates a powerful narrative in politics since their discursive practices have a control over the public opinion. Brass (1991, 74-75) analyzes the discursive power of the elites in organizing and mobilizing people in a certain direction, especially when this skillful process targets significant facets of the group’s cultures, traditions and norms. The elites’ practical usage of perennial

aspects of the culture including but not limited to religious values enables them to attach new values and meanings to the pre-existing ones in order to revitalize people to defend their interests and to compete with others (Brass 1991; Bosco 2014). Brass calls this process as an ‘instrumental adaptation of discourse’ since the goal of the leaders is based on manipulating cultural symbols and norms to create an insuperable and constant loyalty over distinctive identities. The value of the instrumental adaptation of discourse stems from its competency of motivating and coordinating people, especially when the heterogeneity among people is taken into consideration. Van Dijk (1993) also states that people are more vulnerable to the ideological appeals of the leaders, and they can be easily seduced by elites’ discourse. To concretize the significance of linguistic in building up norms and traditions, Hobsbawm’s studies on nationalism and nation-states can be given as an example. As Hobsbawm (Hobsbawm 1983, 11-15) stated, the nationalist language is utilized and invented by the elites to promote the unity and solidarity among the individuals, which, in turn, serves the political interests of the elites. This deliberate craftsmanship of the elites culminates in a tailored nationalist discourse which is fraught with the images of the past including heroic narratives, and which is inculcated to people as a result of ‘social-engineering mechanism’ (Hobsbawm 1983, 13; Özkırmılı 2008, 146-147).

To give certain answers and provide examples to the question, which was posed at the beginning of the section, it would be good to look at the ‘securitization’ literature which is closely linked with the study of discourse. The literature on the security studies also broaden the ‘security-religion nexus’ by establishing close link between the military activities and powerful discourse of religion (Hassner 2013). This extant literature raises the questions on the conflation between the sacred, security and the secularity through stressing the role of religion as a strategic and discursive apparatus in the hands of state/governing elite. As Eroukhmanoff (2016, 366) argues, the presented nexus abolished the traditional assumption relying on the demise of religion since the modernity led the resurgence of religion as an incentivizing discursive element. In that sense, Both Bosco (2014) and Hassner (2013) contribute to the literature on the military and securitization by showing the pervasiveness of religion in the domain of military and in the secular states. Bosco (2014, 1) explains how secular states and governing elite grasp the relationship between religion and national security, and how they securitize religion with their discursive power both at home and in the international arena. As it is argued by him (Bosco 2014, 2-3), when the elite in a secular country engages in manipulating

religious beliefs for its own national security ends, their discourses transform into national policies as a ‘thing’ which definitely needs to be protected by the total defense of individuals. The fascinating highlight of Bosco’s book is that it seeks to empirically show that the securitization of the religious sentiments is first and foremost a discursive practice in which governing elite has a monopoly on. Similarly, Hassner (2013, 5) tries to widen paucity of extant literature on religion in the military since the religious ideology is used to mobilize and revitalize the moral sentiments of soldiers. Within the framework of securitization, religion plays a decisive role to identify threats, legitimate political goals and national values which are worth to defend (Hassner 2013, 5). According to Al (2015, 109) especially nationalist and militarist discourses are instrumentally and strategically embraced by the political elites as a part of their elitist political projects to create a large base of mobilization effect. The elites’ strategic use of discourse illustrates that they aim to create a common language for explaining their just causes for any action or policy adopted by themselves, and also to mobilize their adherents in the way they wanted. In that sense, discourse of the elites is an omnipotent instrument for coordinating and especially for generating support at the societal level.

Kinnvall approaches the issue of discursive power of the political elites differently. She mostly refers to the importance of ‘ontological insecurity’ and ‘uncertain environment’ to understand why and under what conditions we experience a specific set of discourse. Kinnvall (2004, 741) asserts that the combination of religion and nationalism in a certain narrative is used as a powerful rhetoric to minimize the risks of uncertainty and insecurity, which are more likely to occur either during the time of crises or possible rapid changes. Ontological insecurity comes to fore when the pre-constructed narratives about the ‘self’, including religious, national identity and pre-determined ‘securityness’ of a state, are threatened in an environment which is fraught with uncertainties and asymmetries (Kinnvall 2004, 743-746; Rumelili ve Çelik 2017). As Kinnvall (2004, 756, 763) argues, religious nationalism constitutes a strong reservoir and discourse which has an ability to secure the ‘home’ from intruders since it contains common symbols, myths, memories and heritage. From her insightful analysis, it can be inferred that military crises are exactly where the notion of insecurity and uncertainty occur and in which the elites need to instrumentalize an ardent religious nationalist discourse to protect their selves.

In Hassner’s volume of the book, Komsuoğlu and Eskişar shed light on the role of religion in TAF by taking the Korean War in the 1950s and Cyprus Intervention in

1974 as departure points. To show the legitimized use of Islamic rhetoric in cross-border military operations, the authors depict Turkey's military participation in the Korean War "as a fight between the believers and infidels" (2013, 212-215). Within this military crisis, the role of the *Presidency of Religious Affairs* (DİB) and *Democrat Party* should be analyzed to see how religious and nationalist sentiments are instrumentalized by religiously-oriented actors and how the political issue outside the country is easily securitized by using common sense of people. *Democrat Party* legitimized the military intervention in Korea since it was a fight against "communism" which is long accepted to be antagonistic towards Islam (Komsuoğlu and Eskişar 2013, 212-213). The DİB prompted the idea that "who died during the war would be counted as martyrs", meaning that people sacrificing their lives to the well-being of their fatherland and Muslim faith would be awarded with heaven (Komsuoğlu and Eskişar 2013, 212-213). In a similar way, Yavuz (2003, 49) pays attention to the role of DİB, as a trusted and respected organization, in utilizing Islamic concepts such as "soldiers of Mohammed" and "martyr" to nationalize the military duty as sacrosanct. The importance of Turkey's participation in the Korean War also scrutinized by Kaplan by stressing the reality that this was the first time for the TAF in terms of fighting outside of the country's borders. The war was represented by the government as a sacred war between the Turkish Muslim warriors and blasphemers, and the army was described to fight in the name of Islam (Kaplan 2002, 118). Similar to the religious dynamics of the Korean War, in the Cyprus conflict in 1974, Erbakan, a religious figure in the government, was seen as *Mujahideen* (mücahit) of the military operation, and he used many Islamic concepts as a means to lift morale of the conscripts and to incentivize them around the same military objects (Komsuoğlu and Eskişar 2013, 214-215). The two aforementioned cases are good at illustrating how overt Islamic discourse held by the governing elite reshapes the role of religion in the military, especially during the time of crises.

In this regard, what I would like to contribute to the literature is based on the exploration of whether religious rhetoric and Muslim identity are used as a common denominator for nationalist and militarist ends of the Turkish state in a particular case of the Afrin operation. Trying to understand how religious nationalism is used as a channel, especially when the military crisis needs legitimization, to create overarching loyalty over the preferences of people in the case of Afrin operation would contribute to the extant studies on the military, nationalism and security. The studies of nationalism are generally limited to the ethnic, linguistic and cultural ties of the Turkish state and the military as a

part and parcel of this big picture is generally left out to the domain of military historiography instead of conducting in-depth case study. By referring to the presented cross-border military conflicts, studying the Afrin operation as a new phenomenon would contribute to understand whether there is a continuum in the state's theological function in instrumentalization of religion in the military context or not. The literature is also heavily reliant on the socializing power of the military in terms of creating collaborative spirit and breaking down individualistic preferences. Therefore, this study would like to contribute to the literature by adding citizen-soldiers perspective through the use of fieldwork to show whether they are passive receivers of this indoctrination process or whether they do not lack in capacity to reflect themselves in a challenging way. More on that will be discussed in the following section.

2.5 Conscientious Objection: An Unorthodox Stance in Turkey

As it can be clearly seen, there is an ample literature delving into the nationalist and militarist mottos in the Turkish context. What is more striking than the vastness of this scholarship on militarism and nationalism is its relative thin attention to way in which dissent to the impregnation of militarist and nationalist notions come out. Hence, CO is a very crucial concept to understanding the political, philosophical and ethical roots of dissidence towards the military, militarization and state-led security practices. Additionally, it is important to note that the literature on the CO and the objectors is concise but at the same time it is dispersed. Some of the early writings on the CO focused on either the religious or secular contexts in which the CO has developed as a resistance to the conscription (Eller 1991; Moskos and Chambers 1993). The remainder part of the literature mostly analyzed the CO from the lens of human-rights based discourse, which is in search for the recognition of the objectors' basic human and political rights in country-specific contexts, especially within the scope of the Western societies (Ruesga 1995; Major 2001; Musalo 2007; Takemura 2009). As Erol (2013, 156-157) argues, the cases in which the CO and COs has extensively discussed and gained prominence in the literature are the World Wars and the Vietnam War.

First, it is needed to define what CO means and who the objectors are. As Çınar argued, the tutelary role of the military and conscription culminate in a 'hegemonic' and

‘top-down’ security understanding and practices over the preferences of citizens (2009). Therefore, how this intentionally organized ‘social-engineering’ mechanism, in other words, “the military as a school for the nation” (Krebs 2004), creates objectors or disobedience rather than merely contributing to the reproduction of ideal citizens needs to be intrigued. As Çınar and Üsterci (2009, 1) clearly assert that “the objection to participation in war and violence is as ancient as war and violence itself”. As anticipated, many people have refused to participate in wars and to perform in armies throughout history for various reasons. This is mainly born out of people’s discontent with different forms of military organizations, military services and warlike practices of states which are, in fact, imposed on people as a legal or cultural obligation of citizenry. In this regard, the Amnesty International’s following official clarification is useful to draw both conceptual and practical framework on the CO and COs:

“Conscientious objector to be any person liable to conscription for military service or registration for conscription to military service who refuses to perform armed service or any other direct or indirect participation in wars or armed conflicts for reasons of conscience or profound conviction. Their profound conviction may arise from religious, ethical, moral, humanitarian, philosophical, political or similar motives. But regardless of the basis of their objection, the right of such individuals to refuse to carry weapons or to participate in wars or armed conflicts must be guaranteed. This right also extends to those individuals who have already been conscripted into military service, as well as to soldiers serving in professional armies who have developed a conscientious objection after joining the armed forces.” (1997, 1)

As seen in the above-cited explanation, CO is a very inclusive concept which, in fact, does not discriminate reasons and identities of people when they are objecting to the military service or any given war in their contexts. Besides, the foregoing definitional boundary on the CO and COs is, without exception, agreed by scholars and other researchers (Seeley 1982; Wiberg 1985; Çınar 2009; Esmer 2012; Çınar 2014) focusing on this subject not only in the Turkish context but also in other parts of the world. However, studying either the right to CO or the cases of COs is still needed in Turkey since CO to the compulsory military service is still an unusual and alien concept both at the state and societal level. For this reason, analysis of both CO movement itself and COs are conceptually and practically necessary to unfold a deeper and complex understanding of the relationship between individuals and the Turkish state.

CO to military service is described as one of “the most meaningful, demonstrative

and difficult forms of non-violent direct action in the repertoire of the world's anti-militarist, anti-war and peace movements" (Cockburn 2009, 9). As a part of this civil disobedience movement, COs can be described as counter-hegemonic actors "who refuse to participate in war and violence or to bear arms on several moral or political grounds such as freedom of thought, conscience and religion" (Erol 2013, 154-155).⁷ Even though the history of CO movement in Turkey stretches back to the beginning of 1990s, as many argued, the movement has gained momentum especially after the mid-2000s (Altınay 2004, 89; Bröckling 2008; Kemerli 2015, 287; Kemerli 2018). As Kemerli (2015, 287-288) pointed out, the CO movement in Turkey as an anti-militarist and anti-war stance initially comprises of the prominent voices of Kurds, passivists, peace activists, women and gays. It is neither surprising nor coincidence that the CO movement has firstly outreached as a resistance against the sexist and patriarchal character of the military and continuous repression on Kurds, given the intractable conflict between the Turkish state and Kurdish people (Altınay 2004; Erol 2013). In her further elaboration, Kemerli (2015; 2018) also displays that religiously oriented refusal of the military service and militarism in Turkey was not notable until 2007, that is the date when the first pious Muslim declared his CO. In this regard, Muslim COs and anti-war activists are the ones who lately joined in the CO movement. As a corollary to that, the literature on Muslim objectors' presence and their struggle within the CO movement has not very much flourished yet.

In fact, there are many instances making the CO movement and the cases of COs peculiar and legally ambiguous in the Turkish context. Firstly, both Başkent (2010, 102) and Erol (2013, 156) interpret CO as a publicly declared commitment for an objector not to participate in any phase of militaristic manner of living. In their renderings, the CO is described to be an act of objection which needs to be performed in the form of a visible and audible statement. However, it is important to note that there are many people living in Turkey, who do not declare publicly their COs, but see themselves as anti-war, anti-militarist or peace activists. That is to say CO is a flexible concept that can be extended beyond the solemn declaration and publicization of CO in the public sphere.

Indeed, the core reasons making people unable or unwilling to declare their COs

⁷ In fact, CO is recognized as a legitimate exercise of the "right to freedom of conscience, thought, expression, religion and belief", which are guaranteed by the United Nations, European Convention on Human Rights and other international agreements that Turkey is part of it. The relevant agreements and clauses regarding the recognition of CO as a human right are as follows: The Article 18 of the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights; <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx> and the Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; https://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf [Accessed on 27 June, 201

have explained in the previous sections by making explicit references to the cultural, historical and religious dimensions of militarism in Turkey. However, it has also another important aspect, that is Turkey's uncompromising stance towards the CO in the international arena and among mostly its western counterparts. Turkey does not recognize the right to CO in its legal system, and COs are punished by the state for various reasons.⁸ To spell out the obvious, COs are perceived to commit to the following crimes; "alienating people from the military service", as indicated in the Article 318 of the Turkish Penal Code, and also "persistent insubordination", as defined by the Turkish Military Criminal Code.⁹ In fact, a CO is prosecuted in a more serious way and even his/her punishment is aggravated if declaration of the CO is made through the use of mass communication means such as issuing a statement to the print media.¹⁰ Therefore, it is quite understandable that, many potential COs in Turkey prefer to remain in silence without making a public declaration to refuse the compulsory military service. What is more, Üçpınar (2009, 241-242), a human rights lawyer, describes the arduous struggle between the COs, the military and the state by referring to the severe punishments such as imprisonment and fines that COs have exposed for a long time. As plainly seen, Turkey is far away from legalizing and recognizing the right to CO despite its promotion as an internationally recognized human right, and even it renders CO as an offense to the state.

Another factor contributing to Turkey's peculiarity on the CO is its insistence on the maintenance of conscription as a foremost institution in Turkey. As it is widely discussed in the literature, many countries in the world replaced conscription with alternative systems including the professional army and alternative public services, especially after the Cold War (Karaosmanoğlu 2000; Akyürek 2010, 3; Demirtaş 2012; Aydın and Ereker 2014, 138). Contrary to this global trend in the post-Cold War era,

⁸ Turkey and Azerbaijan are, indeed, the only members of the Council of Europe (CoE) that do not recognize the right to CO in their political systems. The way Turkey diverges from the international consensus on the recognition of CO as a legal right and its imprints on the citizenship rights of the COs are discussed in the article "Turkey's Conscientious Objectors and the Contestation of European Citizenship, which was written by Rumelili, Keyman and Isyar (2011).

⁹ To see the further details on the punitive mechanism that COs have encountered in Turkey:

"The Current Situation Regarding Conscientious Objectors"

<https://www.wri-irg.org/en/story/2012/current-situation-regarding-conscientious-objectors-turkey> [Accessed on 28 June, 2019]

"Turkey: Conscientious Objector at Risk of Imprisonment"

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/press-releases/2007/10/turkey-conscientious-objector-risk-imprisonment-20071003/> [Accessed on 28 June, 2019]

¹⁰ For further details on COs' right to freedom of expression and the way it is limited by the Turkish state: "Safeguarding Freedom of Expression and the Right of Conscientious Objection"

<https://www.hrw.org/reports/2000/turkey2/Turk009-03.htm> [Accessed on 28 June, 2019]

Turkey did not undergo substantial reforms in its security agenda, conscription system, and civil liberties as a necessity of democratization, albeit the consistent international pressure.¹¹

Besides Turkey's distinctive and uncompromising approach to the CO in the international area, the context of CO movement also differs in Turkey. As Moskos and Chambers (1993, 6) argue, there is a "new conscientious objection movement" in the world, which follows the pattern of "secularization of conscience". However, Turkey still experiences rise in the military rejection based on the religious subjectivities due to the Muslim objectors' backlash against the discourse of the elite who has the monopoly over securitizing the national political agenda by instrumentalizing religious nationalist sentiments. Therefore, this thesis aims at elaborating the cases of Muslim COs and Muslim anti-war activists through gathering a first-hand information about their stances and worldviews, as discussed in the sixth chapter.

¹¹ The challenges on the democratization process of Turkey pertaining to the refusal of CO as a political and human right explained in-dept by Rumelili et al. (2011) by providing examples from the rulings of the European Court of Human Rights and European Commission reports on Turkey.

3. CRITICAL SECURITY STUDIES AS A THEORETICAL OUTLOOK

This part will trace the trajectory of critical security thinking given the high securitization of the Afrin military operation in the Turkish political agenda. Afrin military operation is one of the issues framed as a ‘security problem’ which could be seen as a consequence of the AKP’s skilled maneuvering capacity in maximizing number of ‘security’ issues which are projected as a matter of survival for Turkey. As a broader analytical perspective, my aim is to open up the security discourses of the Afrin military operation as of interest not only to the political elites, but also to the non-state agents to pave way for a possible re-thinking in politics of security going beyond state-led, militarized and security/insecurity dichotomy. In doing this, I take the theory of securitization from the lens of Critical Security Studies (CSS, hereafter) in which ‘security speech act’ is not limited to the state. Although there are myriad dimensions to study the Afrin military operation within the scope of security politics, my aim here is not to investigate all possible reasons why Turkey has launched military operation in Syria from a foreign/defense policy or international public law perspective. Quite separate from constructedness of security studies in defense or foreign policy, conducting such an in-depth case study in the context of Turkey to analyze the theoretical premises of securitization theory allows us to increase the presence of this theory informed re-thinking in security outside the ‘Western Europe’.¹²

Since Turkey’s current security policies have been carrying imprints of the realist security legacy, first, I explore the divergences between the two antithetical streams of security studies. In what follows, I discuss the need for thinking, writing and theorizing on security from a critical angle as a foremost practice of CSS to create new security discourses. As crux of the study, I conclude the chapter by turning to the security-religion

¹² As it is highlighted by many scholars, “the invisibility of securitization theory in much of the world” has been stemmed from its theoretical development on the empirical cases of European Experiences in which “different configurations of state-society dynamics” in other cultural and historical contexts have relatively remained negligible (Tickner and Wæver 2009, 335; Bilgin 2010; Bilgin 2011, 401).

nexus in both international and Turkish scholarship to inquire the role of religious nationalist elements in the security discourse with palpable examples.

3.1. The Battle between the Two Steams of Security Studies in the Literature

As it is stated before, the field of Security Studies mainly revolves around the two antithetical streams in the literature which are not unrelated since the CSS has been built on the traditional mainstream security literature resulting in a discontent with the way security had been thought and practiced. Therefore, despite many divergences of critical security approach from the traditional one, it is *sine quo non* to consult to the most important classical readings of security to comprehend the way CSS radically stands against the global prevalence of the concepts such as “power, security and national interests” (Tickner and Wæver 2009, 334; Bilgin 2011, 400). As Williams (2003, 515-516) suggested, the roots of critical re-thinking in security cannot be found without looking at Schmitt’s understanding of political order, which is fraught with the notions of ‘enmity, exclusion and politics of emergency’ (Schmitt 1996 (1932)). As an essence of realist security tradition, Schmitt places security beyond ‘normal politics’ and ‘public debate’ since as he puts, the politics is about antagonism which requires a friend-enemy grouping decision of the state to keep it secure and non-threatened (Schmitt 1996 (1932)).

Even though the term ‘security’ has myriad of different connotations and assumptions, the classical realist tradition treats security as a taken for granted concept that is only related with the “national security”, “survival of the state” and “existential threats” (Wæver 1995, 52-53; Williams 2003, 516). In such a traditional and reductionist conceptualization of security, it is quite possible to see that societal or individual security is distinguished from the states’ understanding of security as a separate issue due to the inertia of states on expanding ‘security referent objects’ axis. The reason why the realist account of security provides a one-tiered picture of world is closely tied up with its anarchic perception of the international politics. As a basic premise of the classical realist theory, the absence of a “supra-state Leviathan” in the anarchic world politics forces states to survive in an unavoidable and perpetual competition, which is called “security dilemma” (Herz 1951). As a necessity of this perception, states must be concerned with their own survival to handle with the insecure environment and any possible

encroachment against their selves. Although determining what threat or encroachment faced by a state is and what the “correct” national security or “interest” is fundamentally open to interpretation, these are treated by the realist account as ‘self-evident’ and objective criteria (Weldes 1996, 279). As a result, the focal point of the realist paradigm of security is easy to identify: it is the phenomenon of ‘danger’ and ‘war’ which requires taking the state as the referent object of security and the military dimension for seeking it (Waltz 2001, 179; Waltz 1979, 112; Herz 1959, 40-2). Since the military power or use of force is taken as a perennial coping strategy with insecurities, it is difficult to claim that there are other types of (in)securities besides the external threats and the military as sources of national security.

As it can be claimed from the preceding arguments, this side of the literature approaches security with a “top-down, state-centric, and military-based” understanding which avoids recognizing insecurities of other possible actors (Krause and Williams 1996; Booth 1991). Contrary to the intellectual realist legacy constituting an ultimate authority in speaking and enacting security only on behalf of the state, CSS aims to broaden the security agenda to non-military dimensions and to include multiple referents of security other than the state, which has been traditionally determined as the only supreme agent of security (Booth 1997; Buzan, De Wilde and Wæver 1998; Buzan 1983; Bilgin 2007; Bilgin 2011). Rather than ratifying and naturalizing the discourse of the ‘national security problem’ which leads to conflicting prescriptions in both foreign and domestic politics, CSS provides a more ethical and critical perspective on security by situating it in a wide-range spectrum. As Laustsen and Wæver (2000, 708) clearly stated, Copenhagen School of thought (CS, henceforth), as part of critical tradition, studies the ways security issues are generated by states, which illustrate something as existentially threatened and dangerous to have a right to use extreme security measures. In line with this theoretical approach, security is both intersubjective and political process along with its securitizing actors, referent objects and the degree of securitization effect on the masses (Laustsen and Wæver 2000, 708). Contrary to the realist perceptions on security aiming to securitize as many issues as possible to keep the national security agenda “too broad, too general and too vague” (Weldes 1996 quoted in Sonderman 1987, 60), CSS is much more ‘de-securitization’ oriented in which the issues are not lifted above normal politics. The purview of too broad and statist national security agenda is to make highly difficult to de-securitize issues which are put in the political agenda by the visible set of political actors. Hence, the desire for achieving de-securitization in the CSS scholarship

stems from the conflict-driven characteristic of traditional security and its possible anti-democratic effects which are triggered by using extreme and urgent security measures. Despite the 'customary security mechanism' in the traditional scholarship, 'de-securitization' is a much more preferable strategy for critical scholars to challenge the monopoly of the states over "security-speak", which in turn aims to end democratic debates on security and justifying to launch 'zero-sum' militarized measures (Wæver 1995, 56; Bilgin 2007, 556). As it is anticipated, the use of securitization rhetoric and extreme defensive measures left little room for the audience to question the course of action or policy taken by the political actors.

As CS has argued, security can be seen as a confluence of different security 'sectors' which have their own particular referent objects and security agendas (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998). Among these sectors, the most visible ones are defined as the military sector with its referent object of territorial integrity and the political sector, whose stake is based on the legitimacy of the political authority (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998; Williams 2003, 513). Given the supremacy of territorial integrity and political legitimacy as referent objects of security, the possible threats are strongly connoted with external threats, such as 'terrorism' requiring a state-led military action. When we think about the long-standing embodiment of hegemonic discourse in the state and military practices, it can be clearly stated that securitization theory from a critical angle is closely linked with the study of generating new security discourses, which are attentive to the needs and insecurities other than the statist and militarist ones. In clarifying the general principles of the CS, Williams (2003, 512-513) and Wæver (1989) stress the importance of 'speech-act' as the core ethico-political argument and concept of this tradition, which accepts security practices and its discursive legitimation susceptible and subject to criticisms and transformation. Given the debate over the meaning of security in politics, CS is surrounded with the idea of deepened and broadened security agenda encompassing the needs of societal actors to achieve a progressive change as a way to loosen the grip of realist thinking about security. In a broader sense, this stream of security studies takes security concerns of varied actors into account, which ranges from individuals to other non-state actors by deconstructing pre-given semantics of security and interests of states.

3.2. The Quest for Change in Security Discourse

To understand what constitutes an image of ‘threat’ or ‘danger’ for states, it is significant to look at the meanings ascribed to issues and the securitizing actors as a way of disentangling politics of meanings. Therefore, as an anchor of critical security thinking, discursive practices are *sine quo non* in explaining how security problems emerged and politicized (Balzacq 2011, 1). This is because, as Williams (2003, 513) argued, security is an outcome of specific social and political process in which we need to consider “who or what is being secured and from what”. On the similar ground, Bigo (2002, 75-76) argues that those who tell what security is must have the capacity to produce a political rhetoric on the images of enemy and threat, and to impose their constructed meaning of security to enough audiences. As it can be clearly seen, the capacity to generate a security discourse and its indoctrination to the masses in order to find a societal support are closely relying on the political position the actors hold. Given the problem of articulating the notion of security from an institutional, namely, the elites’ voice (Wæver 1995, 57), it is worth asking why and for what purposes these contextually and culturally specific connotations of words, images and enemies are constructed in the way the elites do. The answer of the preceding question is straightforward. On a more general level, the elites act in this way since in the absence of a challenging discourse of security by relatively unable relevant actors, it is quite easy for the elites to resort to extraordinary defense measures in the form of militarized actions. States’ unilateral security rhetoric related to the national security and interest, meaning that homeland is potentially under attack, makes security and militarism ‘above-politics’ and utter issues at the societal level. As Wæver (1995, 53) summarizes it in his security analysis:

“[...] In naming a certain development a security problem, the ‘state’ can claim a special right, one that will, in the final instance, always be defined by the state and its elites. [...] Power holders can always try to use the instrument of securitization of an issue to gain control over it.”

Given the privileged position of the state in framing and implementing security, it can be argued that political elites are naturally endowed with the ability to deem a certain issue as a great threat against something else which is worth to defend collectively. In a nutshell, it is not possible for us as the audiences to see a ‘security problem’ as it is since

it is generally adorned with culturally relevant linguistic resources to create a total mobilization. As Weldes (1996, 286) has shown, words, images, events and actions do not simply manifest themselves in a “self-evident fashion” because their meanings are produced and construed by different “linguistic elements” in order to render them persuasive for us. Although the study of security is not limited to the linguistic part of it, it is essential to comprehend how the messages are conveyed to us through either statements and speeches of the elites or other communicative tools which help to the institutionalization of the securitization process. To enunciate the importance of bringing the communication channels into the agenda of securitization theory, Williams (2003, 527) wrote:

“Security policies today are constructed not only with the question of their linguistic legitimation in mind; they are now increasingly decided upon in relation to acceptable image-rhetorics”.

Since the securitization is depicted as a “performative speech act” (Buzan et al. 1998; Aradau 2004, 391), it is critical to understand the way the language is used when the elites talk about security and security problems related to the context-specific issues. Ignoring how messages, words and statements of political rhetoricians are conveyed culminates in a less satisfactory scholarly work since it is a necessary work to do to comprehend the way messages are translated to people. In addition, the understanding of discourse as a rhetorical device allows us to see how and on what grounds the states generate legitimacy and political support for their actions. To spell out more obvious, Henry Kissinger’s following statement can be given as a self-explanatory example to elucidate the way the states form the basis of their actions and policies with regards to security issues. “When you are asking Americans to die, you have to be able to explain it in terms of the national interest” (quoted in Weldes 1996, 276). Given the central and vital role of the national security and national interest in enacting security policies, it is needed to ask what it means to secure national interest and the insecurities of people who are even expected to die for their nations.

Taking into consideration how much the issue of ‘terrorism’ is closely related to the national (in)security, the subject deserves a special attention in the agenda of the security studies. In the face of global concerns about terrorism, the concept of ‘terror’ and the usage of it to reproduce the discourse of danger and threat has received serious attention by the CSS as a way of revealing the power of security. In addition, terrorism is

given utmost importance by the states given the targets and goals of terrorist attracts vis-à-vis territorial integrity and national security/interest of states. Fierke (2015, 57), as one of the most influential critical security theorists, argues that use of the word ‘terror’ as with the word ‘security’ makes the construed danger is existential one which endangers the existence and the essence of the whole community. When the threat is intentionally framed by the elites as existential, it is quite possible to see that extensive militarist security measures and normative politics of the elites are easily justified over the “human rights, dignity and the law” (Fierke 2015, 60; Van Munster and Aradau 2004). There is thus an obvious political incentive of the states by coupling terrorism with the problem of security and survival. That is to facilitate urgent security moves without opening it up to the public or political debate and to engender and deepen the idea of ‘insecurity’ not just for states but also for the whole community. In the similar vein, Booth (2007, 96) argues that traditional realist camp in security studies advocates not only the use of conventional military instruments against terrorism to ensure state interests but also the use of intensified fears and political temptation in order to strengthen their domestic control over its inhabitants. For that reason, the word ‘terror’ itself enables the state authorities to nationalize the problem of terror in the name of national and societal security by using violent means and instrumentalizing (in)security rhetoric.

In what follows, the event of 9/11 can be taken into account as a turning point in which the ‘preemptory’ or ‘precautionary’ actions of states, particularly US, against terrorism under the rubric of ‘war on terrorism’ has emerged for the first time. As Booth (2007, 96-97), Agathangelou and Ling (2004, 517) have shown in their analyses of September 11, the distinctiveness between the two camps of security studies has been deepened in the aftermath of the terror event more than it had been previously due to overt and hypervigilant militarization in the world politics. The terror attack paved the way for high dramatization of the understanding of security, survival and sovereignty in the elites’ arguments which in turn has been made the national security legitimate motive to demand sacrifice from the whole society (Agathangelou and Ling 2004, 517-518). Additionally, this historical event creates a novelty in terms of incorporation of the notions of “just war, pre-emptive action or even civilizational clashes” to the scene of the world politics with a great uncertainty (Van Munster and Aradau 2004, 90). To call more attention to the societal effects of this novel terrorism, both Beck (2002; 2003) and Rasmussen (2004) highlight the significance to deem terrorism as an obvious manifestation of the “world risk society”, that is a society routinizing urgent statist

security practices against uncontrollable and unpredictable dangers. As Rasmussen (2004, 382) and Booth (2007, 98) have argued, US military campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan have spoken for themselves in terms of explaining the way the ‘war on terror’ manifested and justified itself with an excuse of ‘homeland security’. As many have argued, the invasion of both Iraq and Afghanistan was seen a just and justified response to the 9/11 terrorist attack on US to prevent another fearful attack coming from the “barbaric other” (Fierke 2015, 57; Agathangelou and Ling 2004, 525).

As it can be seen from the above arguments, the state elites can easily mobilize discourse and politics of fear on the masses in order to justify their militarist practices (deepening the self vs. other dichotomy) through the suspension of normal politics. By adhering firmly to the CSS, a human-centered facet of the theoretical understanding favors diplomatic and dialogue-based methods to resolve the conflicts, rather than practicing war and militarization which are costly in terms of both human suffering and democracy (Fierke, 2015; Newman, 2010). The belief stems from the fact that although the militarist means have long been used to solve the problem of terror across globe, it instead exacerbates and deepens the problem. Therefore, by way of a conclusion, it is needed to ask what should be the consistent policy to address terrorism? As Fierke (2015, 60) argues, instead of relying on exclusionary war and military-oriented policies resulting in “violation of human rights, international law and failure to listen alternative voices”, the most palatable strategy is to encourage dialogue and diplomacy based framework in which human rights, dignity and law are respected. Since thinking and implementing security in a monolithic form creates possible security predicaments for individuals, it is more desirable to create a flexible environment where the issues can be negotiated without an exclusionary and antagonistic friend-enemy grouping.

3.3 Concerns over Human (In)security

After discussing the ways the elites form collective securitizing attempts on the issue of terror, it is essential to understand what CSS aim to do by placing human (in)security at the center of its framework. Even though there is not necessarily a stark contrast between the security concerns/interests of individuals and the states, CSS argue that individuals and societies have their own stake in security regardless of their

compatibility with the state agenda. Hence, the concept of ‘human security’ receives a considerable attention in the agenda of CSS in order to challenge the elite privilege in defining what and whose security needs to be protected and to broaden our view about security and peace. To define and assess the facets of human security, Buzan (1983, 19-20) and Fierke (2015, 118) aggrandize the notions of “human rights, safety and development” as requisites of individual security to protect them from being shattered by the states’ social, economic and political policies.¹³ Even in case of any chaos either which is triggered by terrorism or dire economic crises, individuals are not expected to sacrifice their freedom, rights and liberties to increase the level of security at the state level. Booth (1991) puts the preceding argument in a different way in order to explain why the (in)security of individuals should come first. In his pathbreaking article, unlike the conventional wisdom, states are not depicted as a provider of security at all time since they have a tendency to risk the lives of their populations in order to secure themselves and to guarantee their interests (1991, 318). Therefore, emphasizing the individual/human referent of security has shown that individuals also need to protect themselves and even to block any social or political predicament to ensure “their survival, dignity and livelihood”.¹⁴

In this regard, the concept of emancipation is well brought out by Booth (1991, 317) in his *Security and Emancipation* article to transform prevailing intellectual legacy of realism on social and power relationships. Given the precedence of status quo, power and military oriented approaches in mainstream security studies, Booth stresses the importance of developing emancipation and security concepts which are not actualized at the expense of somebody’s else and their insecurities. Rather than implementing the term ‘national security’ as a cloak for the interests and political gains of states, Booth (1991, 319) made an explanation in the following way:

“Security means the absence of threats. Emancipation is the freeing people (as individuals and groups) from those physical and human constraints which stop them carrying out what they would freely choose to do. War and the threat of war is one of those constraints [...] together with political oppression and so on.”

¹³ As Buzan (1983, 19-20) has stated, the threats to individual security can take variety of forms such as death, imprisonment, injury, denial of civil rights, denial of access to resources, public humiliation and so on.

¹⁴ For further discussion on what the individual and societal security are meant to be, see Laura Shepherd and Jutta Weldes (2008), Ken Booth (2007, 321-327), Karin Fierke (2015, 118-122) and Pinar Bilgin (2003).

As it can be explicitly seen from the above statement, people are put at the center and the desire is to treat them as ‘ends’ rather than of treating them as the ‘means’ to achieve the objectives of state security. However, quite separate from the understanding of placing people and its emancipation at the center of security, in reality, states’ security comes first, and its interests are taken as a primary and immanent referent object in lieu of the rights of the people. In short, somehow individual and societal security are supposed to be sacrificed in order to safeguard the state security.

Aradau (2004, 390, 397) envisaging the difficulty to shift traditional state/military-laden concept of security to a broader constructivist concept highlights the necessity of deep political commitment to the notion of emancipation in order to challenge pre-constructed security mentality and to create social transformation. To accomplish preceding goals of emancipation, the term ‘emancipation’ should be linked to “democratic politics” which is interspersed with equality, fairness and contested voices of security (Aradau 2004, 400-401). Since it is overtly declared, the critical security camp promotes the openness of security politics to the public contest and scrutiny. Recognizing (in)security problems that individuals encounter and their right to emancipation is important to create a world of majority with alternative voices instead of enhancing the elite minority who has the monopoly over speaking and enacting security. Therefore, the politics of emancipation can be seen as one of the strongest ways to challenge the realist legacy in security studies which promotes exclusionary and undemocratic securitization attempts of states (Aradau 2004; Booth 1991, 321). In the telling, it is easy to define both political and ethical principles of CSS, but explanation of what makes people unable to speak for security or what makes easy for states to securitize an issue in its political agenda deserves further special attention.

3.4. Relationship between Sanctification and Politics of Security

As it is stated in the preceding parts of the chapter, understanding securitization as a discursive praxis allows us to see the securitized issue as a constructed phenomenon rather than as a natural fact. Since the main theme of the thesis is to shed light on security-religion nexus in Turkey and particularly in the Afrin military operation, it requires an analysis of the role of sacralization in security practices which has relatively remained as

an under-researched area. In such an analysis, it is important to comprehend the role of religion with its multiple functions in both politics and politics of security.

From the perspectives of both Laustsen and Wæver (2000, 717), it is possible to understand religion with its sociological dimensions since in their analysis, religion(s) is (are) described as big memory containers consisting of myths, rituals, doctrines and emotions. All these functional dimensions of religion as a guiding principle for people play a pivotal role in creating self-narratives and founding stories constituting a fundamental bridge between the past and present (Laustsen and Wæver 2000, 717-718; Smith 1999). As Gentile and Mallett (2000, 38) argued, the diffusion of the images of sacralized politics among people have been valid for a long time with the help of “the symbolism of resurrection, paradise, the mystic qualities of blood and sacrifice, and the cult of heroes and martyrs”. Therefore, instead of assuming an autonomy of religion from the politics and the security in the era of “secularization of the world politics” (Berger 1967), this approach allows us to re-think about how religion and religious cultural motifs are instrumentalized to limit security politics besides the state and its militarized institutions. Similarly, as a response to the conventional idea of the secularization of the international security politics, many have argued that the revitalization of religion as a conflict driven factor in the politics of security after the end of Cold War needs an in-depth analysis (Laustsen and Wæver 2000, 706; Gentile and Mallett 2000; Bilgin 2018). Given this lacuna in the literature, it can be stated that scholars are trying to find an answer to the question of how, why and for what purposes securitization of religiously infused referent objects come to fore. To show how politics and many concepts of *International Relations* are influenced by religious semantics, most of the scholars call for attention to the notions of “sovereignty, state and nation” which have religious, sacred and nationalist roots (Laustsen and Wæver 2000, 726; Smith 1999). In the similar vein, Gentile and Mallett (2000, 18-19) explain how ascribing sacred status to the aforementioned “earthly entities” by politicians creates a principle of “collective existence and mass behavior” at the societal level, making people to be dedicated and ready to self-sacrifice. Since the sacralization of politics takes place when politics is bound up with ‘rituals, myths, memories and symbols’ which are embedded in a society’s collective consciousness, its main purpose is to create a dedicated and staunch community having a ‘warlike spirit’ in order to secure the nation and to accomplish its national missions (Gentile and Mallett 2000, 21-22; Smith 1999, 332-333). In sum, the use of cultural sacred figures is the best way to create an enthusiastic community defying individual’s autonomy to make people

take an action to secure their homeland even if they are compelled to sacrifice their own selves. The main goal of instrumentalizing religious rhetoric and sacred cultural narratives is expressed in the following way by Gentile and Mallett (2000, 27):

“Religions and political parties equally make profitable use of vain people by creating rank, offices and distinctions for them, and also by exploiting the simple minded, the naive and those eager to sacrifice themselves or become notorious so as to create martyrs, and once they have created martyrs, they keep the cult alive, which in turn serves to reinforce faith”.

On a more general level, it can be claimed from the above quotation that creation of a collectivized identity in any kind of state-run institution such as the army through indoctrinating people with the use of religious narratives ultimately aims to legitimize political power to ensure its sustainability. As part of this big picture, the main purpose is to create citizen-warriors and the sense of militarized citizenship who have a vital role in practicing and reproducing states’ ideological and material apparatus. On the other hand, it is obvious that people are given a life story in the military with the help of sanctified ranks, norms and symbols which concomitantly prevent people for searching new beliefs or attributes to give another meaning to their lives. As a corollary to that, this indoctrination process gives impetus to the spread of political militancy in the minds and deeds of the citizens. Gentile and Mallett (2000, 38) have shown in their analysis that almost each war propaganda of the elites has contributed to the politicization and securitization of traditional religions to create a sanctified nation which deserves protection of the soldiers fighting in the name of victory and humanity.

In this regard, it is needed to reconsider the post 9/11 developments in the US security politics which amalgamates religion with the national security discourse. As many scholars have argued, it is possible to see myriad of references to religion and sacred cultural norms in the speeches of the president Bush and in the US national security agenda following the 9/11 attacks (Bosco 2014, 29-30; Agathangelou and Ling 2004; Bilgin 2018, 101). According to Agathangelou and Ling (2004, 523-524), the most obvious manifestation of it is the statements of Bush who was calling Americans to pray for “their country, the military and the victims” and accusing terrorists as they “blaspheme in the name of religion and Allah”. As it can be clearly seen, the clear line had been drawn between the self (sacred entity deserving patriotism, devotion and protection) and the other (demonic murderers deserving defeat) to make the discourse of war as an

everyday practice of citizens. Similarly, this kind of a religious security discourse -in the jihadist form- was used by bin Laden, who was calling Islamic communities to fight against America who is infidel and morally deprived. After all, it is noteworthy to ask who benefits from this discourse of grave threat; who pays the price for the sacrifice of many people; and most importantly why such a religiously instilled security discourse was required? In answering the question of what religion has to do with securitization, it is obvious that any kind of state policy requiring an urgent action for the well-being of a state is easily legitimized by the use of religious discourse given its transcendent power. In sum, such a conscious discursive praxis always aims to defy any critics of a state-led militarized mission especially in the secularized contexts. In addition, Gentile and Mallett (2000, 38) argues that any kind of critics directed against the sacralized security politics is not only capable to create external and grave threats for the states but also able to create the images of ‘internal’ enemies in the following way:

“Wartime propaganda [...] also created the image of the internal enemy who had taken root within the nation, was, indeed, a part of the nation, but did not belong to it because this enemy failed to accept its sacredness and did not venerate it with absolute and loyal dedication.”

That said, overlaying a religious rhetoric with securitization attempts favors security moves decided by state authorities as the only ones through delimiting and even marginalizing alternative voices, who are questioning the necessity of taken actions or policies. In sum, this side of the literature illuminates the way the religious discourses and signifiers are abused by political ideologies who speak in the name of religion and faith to legitimize its political desires and gains. In contrary to this, CSS state that states or any politically favored entity should let religions and sacred traditional norms to remain as they are by eschewing politicization and securitization of them as a general ethical principle.

3.5. An Overview of Politics of Security in Turkey from the Lens of CSS

As I stated before, the agenda of this theoretical framework was two-fold. First, I discussed the principles of the two streams of security studies by focusing on the need of

re-thinking security given the problem of elite privilege in determining the way the security discourse and referent objects are formulized. Second, my aim is here to prepare a groundwork analysis for Turkey, which will be integral to operationalize the principles of CSS in the next two following chapters. Before focusing on the securityness of the sacred cultural norms and symbols during the course of the Afrin military operation, my purpose here is to understand what ‘security’ is doing politically in the historical context of Turkey and which issues are needed to securitize on the basis of national interest. In response to the realist framework of national interest as part of the ‘hard’ security agenda, this interrogation is important to comprehend why Turkey has a difficulty of positioning itself in a new spectrum of ‘soft’ security agenda consisting of individual, societal and economic challenges.

To begin, it is worth asking how we define the problem of survival (*beka sorunu* in Turkish) in Turkey through referring to the notion of security. As Wæver (1989, 4) puts it, security is closely tied up with the matter of national survival in the following negative way:

“Security problems are developments which in a particularly rapid or dramatic way threaten the sovereignty or independence of a state, not just something harming it, but something threatening to deprive the unit of its capacity to manage by itself; thereby changing the foundation for everything else [...]”

As an implication of the above quote to the case of Turkey, the entrenched ‘national security paradigm’ is naturally seen neither as a problem nor a syndrome Turkey needs to eschew it since it is a protectionary and survival mechanism especially given Turkey’s strategic position and the malign intentions of its neighbors. As a corollary to the aforementioned threats directed towards the national security of Turkey, the military in Turkey is licensed to play a vital role in both foreign and domestic security politics without necessarily opening them to the public and political debate. In her theory-informed geopolitical analysis of Turkey, Bilgin (2007, 1,2) states that the need for “strong unitary nation-state” with a standing and strong army is a response to geopolitical security threats which are fraught with the realist predicates and zero-sum thinking in seeking security. As it is anticipated, framing the security discourse with geopolitical threats results in geopolitical determinism in security policies and strategies which are left to the mastery of the military.

Given the high tapping on Turkey's geopolitical location and national security culture over the years, Özcan (2010, 307-308) explains how the concepts of geopolitics and national interest as part of security language are made sacrosanct and untouchable in the state rhetoric. To understand how this sanctified national security paradigm is developed over time, as many have argued, it is important to look at the way the national education system is designed. Bilgin (2007, 7) has shown that the education system highly uses the geopolitical truths of Turkey by explicitly referring to the insidious intentions of the aggressive external powers which necessitate the Turkish youth to be prepared and to act in case of any urgent security or defensive moves. As a result of it, forming a close linkage between 'threats' and historically constructed realities is one of the most important conditions to securitize an issue at hand while rendering other alternatives silenced and even marginalized.

Concerning the case of Turkey, another factor that contributed to the internalization of the discourse of threat and enemy is based on the ideas which has long been taught both at state and societal level as part of the Turkish nationalist culture. As the study of Balta (2010, 411) sheds light on, these ideas mainly revolve around the following themes; "Turkey surrounded by the enemies on four sides, the Turk has no friend but the Turk, and heavy suspicion against the intention of the West". While these self-explanatory ideas are much acclaimed notions in our cultural context, they constitute a cornerstone for both ideological and cultural forms of militarization in Turkey. In other words, it is possible to mention that there is a centrality of the enemy and threat perception in the explanation of war mechanisms and the reasons why citizens are required to become part of this war practice (Balta 2010, 408). As a consequence of such security perspective, which is filled with the images of threats and enemies, militarism has emerged as a proclivity use force and warlike practices to resolve conflicts.

As foremost part of the analysis, it is important to understand how national security paradigm is coupled with the problem of terror in Turkey from the state's perspective. Given the Turkish state's perception on the intractable terror problem continuing for almost three decades, the arguments based on the need for proactive actions of states against terrorism and 'living in a risk society' are still valid. Although the rationality of this security practice is to take precautionary actions to block situations becoming disastrous at some point in future, it may make the extensive and emergent security moves as everyday routine of the country at the expense of human rights and democratization. Therefore, there is a fine line between taking precautionary actions to

prevent any further harmful terrorist attack and acting to serve for the exacerbation of the extant problem. Put differently, Aksu (2010, 475) argues that although the use of coercive methods in dealing with crises moments is not always a rational and desirable management strategy given the stringent nature of the international law and environment, the use of force is used by the state elites in Turkey in the name of national security and integrity. As expected, overlaying the image of threat with the discourse of national security is a business as usual practice especially during the time of crises in order to shift an ‘issue’ in the political agenda into the domain of the military (Aksu 2010, 487-488).

By the same token, there is no space left to the civilian sphere to question the issue which is intentionally framed as ‘above-politics’. The political rhetoric and securitization framework that the elites use during the course of military crises have an utmost importance as they serve to legitimize the militarist course of action in both national and international level (Aksu 2010; Bilgin 2018). In what follows, it is needed to ask in line with the principles of CSS; what sets up the conditions of being secured for the state against any external or internal threat and what price the state needs to pay to sustain human right-based and democratic security agenda. Even though the above line of inquiry can be multiplied by many other questions, these are necessary to shed light on the way seeking security not in lieu of the (in)security of the state’s inhabitants.

Last but not least, the way the sacralization process manifests itself as a security practice in the Turkish context is recently held by Bilgin. According to her insightful analysis, central political authorities securitize ‘issues’ in their agenda without recourse the right to “security-speak” to either civil society actors or opposition figures in the parliament given their potential defiance in security understanding. In this regard, what makes difficult to generate controversy against prevailing security discourse? As Bilgin (2018, 95) stated, when sacredness of cultural codes in framing any potential danger is invoked by the state authorities, it corollary restricts alternative or dissident politics around security¹⁵. As it was discussed in the preceding parts of the chapter, the explicit references of the elites to the religious motifs in forming securitization framework of an issue (such as the way the 9/11 terror attack was framed in the US politics) in fully secularized contexts have received serious attention. However, considering the case of Turkey or another Middle Eastern country, the use of religious discourse in security

¹⁵ In her analysis, she has illustrated that how certain sacred norms such as “ablution, watchful eye of God and martyrdom” are used by the political elites in the face of danger, that is, during the Kilis incident in 2016, in order to help limiting the dissident politics around the security (2018, 107-108).

politics is generally accepted as a traditional way of framing security discourse. To spell out the obvious, the current governing elites in Turkey, namely, the AKP politicians are considered to be conservative and pious Muslims, hereby, the instrumentalization of religious rhetoric within the security framework seems as a customary praxis for them. The state elites' references to the religious motifs and symbols are also seen quite natural for another reason. This is because both the Turkish military and educational system have traditionally indoctrinated both conscripts and civilians to practice these norms as part of their everyday lives. Additionally, since the military is accepted as a sacred institution to fulfill the security missions of the country, this utilization process helps to keep any critics of military and compulsory military service away from the heart of Turkish politics. At this point, Bilgin has accentuated the risk for citizens when the elites render an issue that is politics and security related by itself as sacred. The risk is closely related with the following question; "what if citizens get labelled as being sacrilegious" in case of not accepting this religiously instilled security rhetoric? (Bilgin 2018, 109-110). Following the previously posed question, my aim is to remedy this gap in the literature through making visible the voices of ordinary citizens, who also define themselves as pious Muslims, but get labelled as the 'other', vis-à-vis the religiously instilled institutional rhetoric on the securitization of the Afrin military operation.

As it is known, the demands of the state in Euphrates Shield cross-border military operation¹⁶ in 2016 was particularly met, and then a new one arose, namely, the Afrin operation. Taking the TAF's Afrin military operation in northern Syria¹⁷ into account, it is possible to argue that the state is in a stage of emergency in terms of resorting security and defense measures in the form of a military attack due to the perceived existential 'terror' threat. In the context of Turkey and particularly in the Afrin military operation, it is important to comprehend why political elites have a tendency to securitize issues by using religiously instilled rhetoric and what they accomplish by reactivating religious

¹⁶ As Jeff Jager (2016) argues, the Operation Euphrates Shield, which was carried out by the Turkish army in 2016, aimed at controlling the territories across the Turkey-Syria borders from the threat of the Islamic state and Kurdish rebel groups. In this regard, there is a continuity in Turkey's security mentality given that multiple offensive military operations have been carried out along Turkey's borders.

¹⁷ Given the significant amount of Kurdish population living in Turkey's southeast neighborhood, namely, in Syria, the Turkish state has treated the PKK and terror problem not only as a matter of domestic but also a matter of cross-border issue. In this regard, the Turkish state assumes that Syria has supported the mobilization of Kurds along Turkey's borders as a threatening issue, which puts the territorial integrity of Turkey at risk. Subsequently, this paves the way for the understanding that the roots of the terror are in the outside and if this was prevented, the sources of the terror also would be uprooted in inside (Balta 2010, 422-423). Since the late 1990s, how the threatening image of Syria on the issue of terror is reinforced in the Turkish politics is well brought out by Aksu (Aksu 2010, 494) by referring to both Syria's material and legal support to the PKK and the Turkish state's warning to use its self-defense right against terrorism.

myths, rituals and symbols in the political realm, particularly in the course of military action. In this regard, it can be argued that security and religion are on par to create 'above politics' issues which are assigned with emergency and necessity roles at both state/military and societal level. When religion as a first and foremost part of faith put in political agenda to deal with existential threats, state or any institutional entity endowed with tantamount power is more likely to succeed in making security moves around its statist and militarist objectives. Since religion also establishes an overarching loyalty over people independently from their personal identities and self-interested calculations, it could be easier for the audience to give an utmost significance to religiously framed securitized issues. In other words, as Bilgin (2018, 99) clearly stated, rendering 'things' as sacrosanct is intentionally utilized by the political actors as a source of legitimacy to safeguard these securitized 'things' against any possible challengers.

By way of a conclusion, my purpose is to draw some general points on how sacralization of the security discourse finds its reflection in the state and elite rhetoric, and also how Muslim COs and anti-war activists perceive this prevailing political rhetoric in the following analyses. In line with the principles of CSS, the Afrin military operation engenders questions about what should and should not be on the security agenda of Turkey. For example: Is the Afrin military operation a security problem for Turkey? Is this a religious and nationalist war? Does it require a call for pious and patriotic defense of citizens? If it is and it requires, what about religiously oriented COs and anti-war activists refusing to participate in an armed conflict? By having approached to the concept of 'security' from a critical perspective and with a specific focus on human-rights based discourse, all the issues listed above, pertaining to the soldiering duty and militarist practices, may constitute insecurities not necessarily on behalf of the state but also for people. The reason is that both politicization and glorification of the use of Islamic and nationalist rhetoric in the official security discourse leave little room for citizens to interrogate 'what national and religious security mean' given their Muslim identity.

To recapitulate, scrutinizing more closely at the relationship between security and religion in the context of the current phenomenon of the Afrin military operation provides a well-suited case analysis. Firstly, such analysis paves way for understanding the way the official discourse of national security is sanctified with the reintroduction of sacred cultural norms, symbols and texts into to domain of security. As anticipated, in return for the perception of the national security and sustainment of its interests as a sacrosanct core

value by citizens, their selves are expected to be subordinated in serving the nation. One final note before moving to the following chapters, as Bilgin (2011, 402) has shown in her survey analysis of “security and securitization articles published in Turkey”, most of the studies dealing with security issue revolve around the mainstream ‘policy analyses’ rather than searching for critical ‘theory-informed studies on security’. In this regard, it is important for us to understand security going beyond the state and its empowered institutions to create a possible crack within the pervasive realist security tradition imprinting the minds and practices of the today’s Turkish state.

4. THE DISCURSIVE PORTRAYAL OF THE OPERATION OLIVE BRANCH (AFRIN)

This chapter aims to illuminate what securitization looks like in the empirical case of the Afrin military operation. By doing this, the analysis part gives us a reasonable understanding about the purpose and the way the securitizing attempts of the operation with certain frames and themes constructed. As we all know political and governing elites including leaders, government officials and the members of parliament play a central role in structuring securitization frames of a conflict in a given society. Therefore, analyzing the publicized political frames of the elites is important to understand what decision or action is justified in the way states do. The supreme power of the elites in both politics and politics of security lies in their ability to identify, frame and reproduce issues in the way they want and in turn how citizens on a more general level base their preferences and interests on the issues which are framed and represented by the elites. The political elites are visible set of actors in various spheres of public life including the political, cultural, and economic, and they have the ability to change the scope and salience of political issues, thereby dramatically altering the nature of political conflict. As a result, framing mechanism does not always include a rational and even-handed explanation of the matter in the political agenda due to the possible distortions or exaggerations resting upon the elites' discursive strategy. Additionally, it is important to understand how verbal rhetoric of the elites interacts with the media representation in which the news and images are released to the sense of people. Vultee (2011, 70-80) treats securitization also as a media frame representing some parts of the reality while silencing remainders which tell audiences what matters to think about. Hence, the media representation as a complementary apparatus in constructing securityness of an issue is significant to illustrate whether ideological and political reproduction of the elites' discourse take place.

In light of the stated arguments above, my main purpose here is to analyze the political and official statements that governing/political elites use in describing the Afrin

military operation. This study contributes to the growing literature on securitization and militarization by providing empirical examples from the Operation Olive Branch as a heated and burgeoning debate in the Turkish politics. Most of the extant studies delving into the details of the Afrin operation have remained in the status of official reports assessing the political, military, diplomatic and strategic operational aspects of the Operation Olive Branch in Syria.¹⁸ The reports mainly centered on the following foreign and defense security policy objectives; increase in terrorist attacks on Turkey's borders; Turkey's taut foreign affairs with US given its supports to separatist terrorism in Syria; and Turkey's legitimate military response to protect its national security as part of its self-defense right against terrorism. However, my specific focus is studying the politics of security, that is, how the discourses, understandings and practices of security are formed and represented in the case of the Afrin military operation as a way of outlining the domestic implications of Turkey's military campaign in Syria. Lastly, the collected materials were examined within the framework of the CSS.

The research contains set of information which was collected through thematic discourse analysis. Using such a logic of inquiry enabled me to study what kind of religious and nationalist signifiers are in practice in constructing the securitization framework of the Afrin operation and the compulsory military service. In short, it was a prolific way to prepare an analytical template identifying the securitizing actors, audiences, and securitized themes and concepts which are adorned with both Islamic values and nationalist sentiments. Taking dichotomies between secular/religious nationalism and sacred/civic virtue of military service in Turkish politics into account, the discursive method of inquiry constitutes a significant part of the research to examine how the securitization of the Afrin issue relates to the particular narrative. The methodological significance of the discourse analysis derives from its role in studying power of semantics within a specific context in which the certain frames are formalized and used. As Hajer explains (2006, 67), discourse analysis opens up methodologically sound ways to amalgamate the discursive production of meaning with the real socio-political practices. Similarly, Hopf (2004, 32) states that conducting discourse analysis is more than analyzing texts, words or sayings since it represents politics of power in which certain language is formulated to favor a group of people. As a corollary to that, it is also a significant instrument to grasp whose discourse is silenced or voiced in a given society.

¹⁸ See the reports on this body of work: Omair Anas (2018), Can Kasapoğlu and Sinan Ülgen (2018) and Mustafa Kibaroglu (2018)

The crux of the research is to show how the Operation Olive Branch appeared in both the elites' institutional discourse and media representation. As Hansen (2006, 65) argued, if there is a heated debate on a securitized event, it is especially commonsensical to include media representation not only for expanding the scope of the analysis but also to understand competing or overlapping discourses between "the self and multiple selves". The focal point of the research is not to reflect how the international and domestic media have approached the Operation Olive Branch, but the report released in SETA Perspective shows the high visibility of the operation in terms of the number of new entries and readers in both Turkish and Western press.¹⁹ Given the high attention to the Operation of Olive Branch in the international media coverage, some of the news display the operation as "Turkey's 'holy war' in Syria putting more religious nationalism on display".²⁰

Firstly, I look at the official speeches, statements and notes of the security meetings of mostly the president and the presidential spokesperson, which are publicized in the website of the *Presidency in the Republic of Turkey*. Then, to gain more profound understanding about the media coverage of the speeches of the elites on Afrin, I analyzed how the conflating themes of religion, nationalism, military and military service are represented within the security framework of the operation in different newspapers. The investigation was based on the thematic discourse analysis of 7 newspapers (*Cumhuriyet, Hürriyet, YeniÇağ, Evrensel, YeniŞafak, Habertürk and, Sabah*)²¹ which were rigorously chosen in accordance with the differences in their ideological stances and editorial choices to portray an even-handed political trajectory. The collected materials in the sampling included the internet pages of the newspapers and the important columns, which were written by either journalists or security analysts. Due to the intense news flow, the official speeches and news were reviewed between January 20, 2018 and March 31, 2018 and the selected time span refers to the period of the beginning and the escalation points

¹⁹ The opinion report prepared by Metin Erol illustrates that in comparison to the Euphrates Shield, the Operation Olive Branch has more media coverage in both international and national press. By searching the Operation Olive Branch in the "SETA Western Media Database", the analyst concluded that there are 30.495 news released in the Western media between January 20, 2018 and February 13, 2018. During the same time span, there are 376.933 news released in the Turkish media, which were read more than a billion times by the readers. For the further details of the report, see <https://www.setav.org/perspektif-bati-basininda-zeytin-dali-harekati/> [Accessed on April 10, 2019]

²⁰ See the related news: 'Turkey's 'holy war' in Syria puts a more religious nationalism on display' by Scott Peterson <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2018/0323/Turkey-s-holy-war-in-Syria-puts-a-more-religious-nationalism-on-display>

'Turkey displays a new level of religious nationalism in Syria campaign' by Scott Peterson <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/news/turkey-displays-new-level-religious-nationalism-syria-campaign> [Accessed on April 10, 2019]

²¹ The list of the newspapers exported from <http://www.bik.gov.tr/gazeteler/>

of the armed conflict.²² In total, 23 items were analyzed. 5 of them have been included in the review to show institutional discourse of the governing officials in framing the Afrin operation. These related speeches and statements were directly cited from the website of the *Presidency in the Republic of Turkey*. Besides, from the aforementioned newspapers, I analyzed 18 news in total through focusing on the following features; the news entries, image of the contexts of the news and the framing and shaping mechanisms in the contents.²³ The analysis has not only addressed the context of headlines and news entries, but also the related parts of the news transcribed and translated to carry out the discourse analysis through the texts.

4.1. Sanctifying the National Security Discourse in the Operation Olive Branch

To start from the beginning, it is essential to understand how the Operation Olive Branch has first appeared in the official discourse²⁴ and which themes were displayed surrounding the TAF's military operation in Syria. In one of the provisional congresses, the President declared in his below speech that the Afrin operation has begun with the following purposes and strategic aspects:²⁵

“The Afrin Operation has actively begun in the field. Manbij is next. We will gradually destroy the terror corridor. Since none of the promises made to us concerning Manbij has been kept, nobody can say anything when we do what is necessary [...] The Turkish nation never hesitates to sacrifice its lives for the sake of its homeland, state, Azan and flag as integral part of our faith. Today, if there are those who think they can persuade us to accept our destiny and to give up on the fight for our independence and future through the threats of more martyrs, it is our duty to prove them wrong.”

²² In the aftermath of the April 2018, the identified items show that the conflict arrived at its de-escalation stage with no discernible rhetorical changes in framing the Operation Olive Branch either in the speeches of the elites or in related newspapers.

²³ To scrutinize the ongoing security trajectory and rhetoric in the case of Afrin military campaign in Syria, the thematic discourse comparison used as a method of inquiry by targeting the following objectives: how the military operation is framed in Afrin, how the TAF and its role are shaped in Syria and what kind of rhetoric is used to shape or reproduce the notion of citizen-soldiers as both Turkish historical and cultural relic.

²⁴ All the speeches and statements of the governing officials were made in the first two months of the operation, and see the following dates respectively: 20.01.2018, 23.01.2018, 24.01.2018, 28.01.2018 and 13.02.2018.

²⁵ See the full speech of the president: 'Afrin Operasyonu Sahada Fiilen Başlamıştır' <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/89139/afrin-operasyonu-sahada-fiilen-baslamistir> [Accessed on April 11, 2019]

The words such as ‘terror corridor’, ‘fight’, ‘our independence and future’ have received serious attention since they have close connotations with the rigid security conception in general. The operation aims to eliminate the terror corridor encircling our country with a grave threat targeting not only our short-term security but also our independence and future. With a specific reference to Manbij as a next operational target of the Afrin, it is declared that decision on what means are necessary for our security is not up to the ‘others’ but only to the Turkish state. In addition, the securitization framework of the operation is closely associated with Turkey’s concerns about its survival, future, security and independence. All these aforementioned components of the state security are coupled with a series of sanctified utterances, symbols and norms such as ‘faith’, ‘flag’ and ‘Azan’ (call to prayer), which are deemed as immanent historical, cultural and religious ingredients of the Turkish nation. Emphasis on the sacredness of ‘martyrs’ and their volunteer ‘self-sacrifice’ to make ‘the homeland’ secure illustrates that how fulfilling the military duty of protecting the nation without ‘hesitating’ is accepted as sacrosanct in our culture. In a nutshell, militarist tradition is not questioned not only as an inseparable element of national security, but also as an ‘innate feature’ of Turkish religious nationalism, and hence, the old saying goes, ‘what makes an ordinary land into the homeland is its martyrs and their bloods’.

The further clarification of the Presidential Spokesman on the progress of the Afrin operation also calls for attention in terms of the high usage of religiously instilled political rhetoric. In one of the security meetings which was held in the early days of January 2018, İbrahim Kalın has noted the success and strength of the operation by using the following themes:²⁶

“Turkey has never brought oppression, blood, tears and harm to anywhere. On the contrary, people maintain their lives in peace and prosperity everywhere our country has set its foot on and the Operation Euphrates Shield is the best example of this [...] The superiority of morale of our soldiers, who go to the front lines saying ‘I will be martyr if I die or a veteran if I come back’, is our greatest strength.”

As seen, Kalın as one of the prominent state officials created an organic linkage between

²⁶See the full text of the security meeting and speech of Spokesperson of the Presidency: ‘Güvenlik Toplantısına ilişkin Basın Açıklaması’ <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/cumhurbaskanligi-sozculugunden/1695/89188/guvenlik-toplantisina-iliskin-basin-aciklamasi> [Accessed on April 11, 2019]

the Euphrates Shield and the Afrin in terms of success of these operations. As argued by him, the main purpose of these operations is to foster ‘peace’ and ‘prosperity’ with the benign intention of the Turkish state and the army. Yet, it is not obvious in the preceding quote, there is a comparison among all prior cross-border military operations which had been carried out by Turkey. It seems that all of them share a common goal, that is, to end ‘oppression and tears’. By referring to the previous accomplishments of the operation Euphrates Shield as the best example of it, it seems that also the success and legitimacy of the Operation Olive Branch is closed to any alternative security discourse culminating in an outcry, given its ultimate goal. In sum, it has shown that the purpose of the military operation is just and sacrosanct in terms of salvaging both people, who are living under oppression, and Turkey whose security and survival is under a threat. Most importantly, the direct causality was established by the governmental officials between the strength of Turkey/operation and morale of the soldiers stemming from their religious nationalist commitment to the martial valor. As it is obviously seen, there is an inculcation of religious public sensibilities and patriotic virtues such as ‘martyrdom’ and ‘veterans’ into the discourse of the Operation of Olive Branch. Since these aforementioned notions are self-defined sacred examples of public virtue and devotion to the nation, their utilization in a security discourse is a way to exalt the military duty in the eyes of whole population to render them embraced the vision of ‘nation-in-arms’.

In the similar vein, the President Erdogan clearly stated in his speech that the aim is to first uproot terror at its source and then to make Afrin a livable place to ensure our neighbors’ peace in Syria. In his speech, the President has expressed his gratitude to all of the citizens who support the Afrin as Turkey’s ‘national policy’. Here is the remainder statement of the president:²⁷

“Thank God, our soldier, our police, our village guards and our brothers from the Free Syrian Army walk to death just because they see the martyrdom as the greatest honor. Our God gives us the news of the life of our martyrs who sacrificed their mundane lives for the life of the hereafter [...] They say that we are going to Afrin for the wedding. Alhamdulillah, it is not the ordinary thing that everyone believes it, but it is the way how our little Mohammed (Mehmetçik) was raised.”

²⁷ See the full speech of the President: ‘Afrin’de Önce Teröristlerin Kökünü Kurutacağız, Sonra Orayı Yaşanabilir Hale Getireceğiz’ <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/89205/afrinde-once-teroristlerin-kokunu-kurutacagiz-sonra-orayi-yasanabilir-hale-getirecegiz> [Accessed on April 14, 2019]

Firstly, the Operation Olive Branch was portrayed as a ‘national’ security trajectory of Turkey which is above the AKP or any other party policy aiming to transform Afrin into a peaceful region for both the well-being of Turkey and Syrians. Since it is a ‘national’ (*Milli*) policy, it is not something opening to the discretionary preferences of people which in turn expects all the citizens living in Turkey to support the cause of the operation serving to the good of the nation. Hence, using such a security discourse constitutes an authoritative official statement on the issue of the Operation Olive Branch. As it is reflected in the previously stated quote, there are lots of words that are incorporated into the political and security discourse of the operation, which have strong religious connotations such as ‘martyrdom’, ‘hereafter’, ‘Alhamdulillah’, and ‘little Muhammed’. The usage of such components of Islamic faith within the context of traditional and nationalist martial duties such as securing the homeland illustrates that the military duty is not only seen by the people as a nationalist but also as a religious duty. In addition, the use of religiously infiltrated discourse shows that especially the Turkish army is the place where security and sacralization gain their meanings together at both concrete and emotional states. The best illustration of it is the usage of very affectionate name for the soldiers (*Mehmetçik*), that is ‘little Mohammed’ and ‘martyrs’ who willingly sacrifice their earthly lives and who are awarded with the greatest honor and even paradise in the afterlife. It is a way to show that there is nothing to be afraid of being a fallen in the army since the life of the fallen will continue in the eternity as a God’s gift. The use of the word ‘wedding’ by the conscripts for their mission in the Afrin shows how this military duty is more than welcomed by the soldiers as part of their faith. Therefore, the military service as a patriotic duty is galvanized in the elites’ religious and nationalist discourse to display that the individual life can be forfeited to fulfill this sacred duty, that is to protect the nation. As a consequence of it, it is quite natural to see that both the security and well-being of the nation precede citizens’ own as an integral part of the sanctified security paradigm. In addition, as it is stated by the President, the fulfillment of the sacred military duty without hesitation is not something that everyone believes in it, but as a Muslim populated country, citizen-soldiers are continuously raised in accordance with religious and nationalist sentiments. Therefore, it is quite easy to convince and mobilize these pious and nationalist people by instrumentalizing religious nationalist discourse to take arms against any threat. Moreover, stressing the ‘the way the ‘soldiers’’ are raised is a self-explanatory example of how militarist thought, and practices are not confined to the

barracks but instead it is also omnipresent in the civilian sphere.

It is significant to understand how fueling of religious nationalist undertones operates as a mechanism to securitize the compulsory military duty in the face of a security crisis triggered by the existential terror problem. The President Erdogan gave a speech, and he has made a strong tap on the Operation Olive Branch by stressing the below themes in his speech: ²⁸

“Our heroic soldiers made history in the area of Operation Euphrates Shield. They are now making history in Afrin. And they will definitely make history wherever there are terrorists threatening our survival along our borders [...] We have heroic martyrs in our history such as our Nene Hatun and Şerife Bacı who were standing in the fronts and fighting against cruelty. Today, how wonderful our women gendarmes raised her arms to protect our country and they performed well to accomplish their assigned tasks. [...] We have no purpose on anyone's land, property, honor and dignity. However, in case of our faith, our Azan, our flag, our borders and the lives of our people are threatened, sorry but our eyes do not see anyone [...] Therefore, we totally say no to those who say yes to the cruelty by declaring their anti-war stances.”

The previous quote is an exemplar of how religious nationalist fervor is in practice in the security discourse of the Afrin operation by giving explicit references to Islamic and historical valorization of the military service in our culture. The first three sentences admittedly illustrate the way the militarist image of the Turkish nation and its historical legacy have been evolved over time thanks to the endeavor of ‘heroic’ and ‘benevolent’ soldiers in the history. Although the explicit references to the martyrs and soldiers’ heroism have been present in all previous official statements, the quote above referred to the heroic women having a symbolic importance in our culture as they had fought against invaders for the well-being of the nation. Similarly, what women gendarmes were doing in Afrin brings these culturally and historically important memories back to call all people for collective and total defense of the nation. Normally, women are expected to act in a patriotic way through other means than conscription, but such a recall of the historical memories over women heroes and cults also shows how much the operation is securitized at the national level. In the remainder of the quote, it is possible to see that discourse of the governing elites puts Operation Olive Branch at the center as a national policy by

²⁸ See the full statement of the President in the Amasya Provisional Congress: ‘Kahraman Askerlerimiz Afrin’de Destan Yazıyor’ <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/89239/kahraman-askerlerimiz-afrinde-destan-yaziyor> [Accessed on April 14, 2019]

emphasizing encroachments on our sacred cultural values, symbols and the lives of our people, thereby challenging the possible alternative discourse questioning the necessity of the operation. In addition, the elites expressed their gratitude to the citizens supporting the Afrin operation so far. However, in this quote, we can see that the target is those who were saying no to the war ongoing in Syria. As it can be seen, the institutional voice in security discourse imposes restrictions on the emergence of any possible counter security rhetoric on the subject of the Operation Olive Branch. Additionally, people declaring their anti-war stances were deemed by the state officials as ‘others’ because their opposition to the operation was conceived as to favor the cruelty.

When we look into how the official discourse on the securityness of the Afrin operation has evolved over time, it is possible to assert that it becomes more rigid through time by not only targeting the ‘outside’ enemies but also ‘insider’ ones. The exclusionary security rhetoric comprises of a series of sanctified utterances to make the clear line between who is from ‘us’ and who is from ‘them’. Speaking at one of the *AKP*’s group meetings in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, the President has stressed the sacredness of the Olive Branch Operation in the following way:²⁹

“We are maintaining the largest and most important independence, dignity and honor war in Afrin after the War of Independence. Dying for the flag that we were born under its shadow is the greatest and exalted honor for us. As a whole nation, we know that the struggle is about faithfulness and religion rather than being committed to money and weapons. With the help of God’s permission and our faith, we will give the struggle to clear our borders completely from the evil of terror. Do you know what really makes us sad? It is the betrayers within us...”

The President’s reference to the War of Independence and its confluence with the Afrin operation on the grounds of divine goals such as ‘dignity’ and ‘independence’ are self-evident in and on itself in terms of bearing nationalist spirit. The linkage he established between the two wars also illustrates how sacred mission was carrying out the legitimacy of the previous by relying upon the continuity in the militarist features of the Turkish nation. The comparison between the two additionally constitutes the securityness of the Afrin operation in the elites’ security rhetoric despite the notable differences in the

²⁹ See the remainder speech of the President: ‘Gölgesinde Doğduğumuz Bayrağın Altında Ölmek, Bizim için Şereflerin En Büyüğüdür’ <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/90400/golgesinde-dogdugumuz-bayragin-altinda-olmek-bizim-icin-sereflerin-en-buyugudur> [Accessed on April 14, 2019]

nature of ‘threats’ and historical contexts that gave birth to them. As it is well-known, the Turkish national ‘flag’ consisting of crescent and star along with its red color is associated with various myths related to both Turkish nationalism and Islamic faith. Therefore, ‘dying’ for the sake of the flag as an eternal symbol of the Turkish nation is the most exalted thing in the life of a Muslim Turk. As it is also reflected in the above statement, the Turkish nation as a whole is well aware of its ‘faith’ as a supreme morale which enables people to fight staunchly. Following the same sentence, it is stated that nothing is more effective than a person’s belief, even the material privileges such that ‘money’ does not matter for soldiers. In sum, it seems that the goodness of the conscripts is nourished by religious nationalist interpretation of militarism as a perfect fit to the Turkish national character, which, in turn, makes them unwearied and pious patriots who are committed to fight against the ‘evil’ of terror. Last but not least, the concluding sentence of the quote is where the elites’ security discourse on the subject of the Afrin operation becomes more severe when the ‘others’ are labelled as ‘betrayers’ in return for their ‘desecration’ of the sacred objectives of the operation. It is quite anticipated to see the use of such an exclusionary political rhetoric by the elites since by invoking sacred norms and values as a securitizing attempt, the elites aim at creating a unified mobilization and support at the national level towards the statist and militarist objectives of the operation.

4.2. The Overall Analysis of the News Portraying the Afrin Operation

This part will look at how the Afrin operation was represented in the media. In the extracted data from the different media outlets, there are two important themes emphasized as thematic units of the analysis: (1) Construction of the security of the military service and the Afrin operation; and (2) Nationalism and religion at play in the Operation Olive Branch.

4.2.1. Construction of the Security of the Afrin Operation

The news which were listed below and chosen on same date illustrate how the Afrin operation is perceived by different newspapers and what their distinctive positions in shaping the role of military campaign are. Although each of them, except for the news in *Evrensel* and *Cumhuriyet*, focuses on different facets of the operation, common theme is based on the securitization of the Afrin issue in Turkish political agenda. The securitization narrative of the operation is closely associated with the usage of phrases such as ‘terrorists’, ‘terrorist organizations’ and ‘territorial and national integrity of Turkey’. References to these rigid ingredients of the national security discourse make the struggle of the Operation Olive Branch against ‘terrorism’ as simple as that since the resolution of the conflict is only possible in the case of eradicating the threat and evil of terror with the triumph of Turkey. Additionally, all the attention-grabbing headlines of the newspapers illustrate that Afrin case establishes an emergency in Turkish politics, which exemplify the arguments of CSS in terms of Turkey’s inertia in de-securitizing and broadening its national-policy agenda beyond the militarist objectives. It can be understood from all the news that emphasizing the notion of terrorism and making visible the names of terrorist organizations clearly define the conflictual and contrasting relationship between the ‘us’ and ‘them’. The framing of ‘others’ as terrorists or ‘enemies’ make them illegitimate threats against the state security, which ultimately requires suppressing their presence by using the authority and mastery of the Turkish military.

Jetlerimiz Afrin'i vurdu...Türkiye Tek Yürek (Hürriyet, 21.01.2018)³⁰

Turkish jets hit Afrin...Turkey acts as one hearth

Afrin bölgesinde, PKK/KCK/PYD-YPG ve DEAŞ'a mensup teröristleri etkisiz hale getirmek, dost ve kardeş bölge halkını bunların baskı ve zulmünden kurtarmak üzere 'Zeytin Dalı' harekâtı başlatılmıştır. Harekât, Meşru Müdafaa Hakkı çerçevesinde, Suriye'nin toprak bütünlüğüne saygılı olarak icra edilmektedir.	Olive Branch Operation begins in Afrin region to neutralize terrorists who are members of the PKK/KCU/PYD-YPG and ISIS, and to salvage the friendly and brotherly people of the region from the pressure and right of oppression of those terrorist organizations. The operation is being carried out within the self-defense and is in full respect of Syria's territorial integrity.
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The news in *Hürriyet* displays on what grounds the Afrin operation became visible as a security matter. As shown, there are some emphasized words such as 'salvation', 'self-defense' and 'friendly and brotherly people of the region' which constitute positive meanings for the 'self' and what belongs to 'us'. Put differently, the military undertakes a holy and just duty to salvage friendly people from the oppression of 'them' which is attributed to the role of perpetrator who is in complicity for the insecurities of the 'Afrin's people'. Since the Afrin's innocent people are portrayed as defenseless living under the threat of terrorism, this military operation is perceived as a just and legitimate war. By referring to Turkey's 'right to self-defense' and the protection of Syria's 'territorial integrity', the operation itself was positioned in the safe-zone which keeps any critics away either which are directed either towards the legitimacy or the necessity of the operation.

Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: Afrin hallolacaktır, geri adım atmak yok (Habertürk, 21.01.2018)³¹

President Erdoğan: Afrin will be handled, no way to return back

ABD'nin Afrin hareketına ilişkin açıklamalarına yanıt veren Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan, "Afrin operasyonu, Fırat Kalkanı gibi hedeflerine ulaştığında sona erecektir. Amerika diyor, süre belli olmalı, fazla uzun olmamalı. Afganistan'da sizin süreniz belli oldu mu? Irak'ta bitti mi bu süre?" diye konuştu. Bugün kahraman güvenlik güçlerimiz sınırlarımızın içinde ve dışında, yakın tarihimizin en büyük mücadelelerinden birini yürütüyor. Sınırlarımız boyunca oluşturulmak istenen toprak	President Erdoğan answering to the statements of the USA regarding the Afrin operation, "Afrin operation will end when it accomplishes its goal like Euphrates Shield operation. The US says that, the duration of the operation must be certain and limited. The president says that: Was your duration of the military operation in Afghanistan certain? Did this duration end in Iraq?". Today, our heroic security forces have been fighting within and across our borders, which is one of the biggest struggles of our recent history. We drove the first dagger into the terror corridor which obviously
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³⁰ 'Jetlerimiz Afrin'i vurdu... Türkiye tek yürek'

<http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/jetlerimiz-afrini-vurdu-turkiye-tek-yurek-40716845> [Accessed on April 14, 2019]

³¹ 'Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: Afrin hallolacaktır, geri adım atmak yok'

<http://www.haberturk.com/son-dakika-cumhurbaskani-erdogan-dan-ankara-sanayi-odasi-odul-toreni-nde-aciklamalar-1806753> [Accessed on April 14, 2019]

bütünlüğümüzü alenen tehdit eden terör koridoruna ilk hançeri Fırat Kalkanı ile vurmuştuk. Bazı yazar çizerler, Kürtlere karşı operasyonlar olarak ilan edip hedeften saptırma gayreti içerisine giriyorlar. Bizim Kürt vatandaşlarımızla bir sorunumuz yok. Olay, Kürt koridoru meselesi de değildir. Olay, terör koridorunu bizim yok etme meselemizdir.	threatens our territorial integrity in the Operation Euphrates Shield. Some intellectuals aim to manipulate our purposes in this operation by saying that it is launched against Kurds. We have no problem with our Kurdish citizens. The issue is not about Kurdish corridor, either. The issue is our effort to destroy the terror corridor.
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The news in *Habertürk* can be seen as a reflection of ‘assertive nationalism’ in Turkey given the use of phrases such as ‘putting dagger into the hearth of terror corridor’, ‘the threat targeting the territorial integrity of Turkey’ and ‘no way to return’. All the phrases were used to show how Turkey is right and just to conduct this military operation. It can be inferred that the usage of the ‘dagger’ in this text reflects how the military power and operation are legitimized against the threatening ‘other’. Also, the statement ‘Afrin operation will continue until it accomplishes its goals’ illustrates that the governing elite and the military in Turkey have monopoly over the security issues without leaving any room to question this entrenched security mentality. Therefore, the official stance clearly declares that there is no middle ground in this war, but only the total triumph of Turkey over terrorism. Similarly, the explicit conveyance to the US and its former military campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan implies that the official security discourse imposes serious restrictions on any external party, who has no right to intervene in the domestic politics of Turkey. To prevent possible ‘manipulations’ on the objectives of the Operation Olive Branch, as it is reflected above, the stark line has been drawn between the Kurdish population and terrorists in order to specify who the principal target and enemy of Turkey are. Lastly, the discursive power of the elites manifests itself also in constructing the security of the army as a ‘heroic security force’, which is perceived as a timeless guard of Turkish nation.

ABD'nin sınırda yarattığı gerlim, Türkiye'yi Suriye'de yine savaşın içine çekti! TSK Afrin'i Vurdu
(Cumhuriyet, 21.01.2018)³²

The US tension on the border draws Turkey into a war again in Syria: TAF hits Afrin

'Harekatın gerekçesi Türkiye'nin güvenliği' 'Zeytin Dalı' harekâtında ikinci günde kara birlikleri Afrin'e doğru ilerlerken jetler hedefleri vurmaya devam etti. Komando, özel kuvvet ve ÖSO unsurlarına tanklar eşlik ediyor. Öte yandan Erdoğan, "Harekâta karşı sokağa çıkan bedel öder" dedi. Sosyal medyada harekât karşıtı açıklamalara soruşturma açılıyor.

'The operation is carried out for the security of Turkey' On the second day of Olive Branch Operation, while ground troops move towards Afrin, jets continue to hit targets. Commandos, special forces and FSA are accompanied by tanks. On the other hand, Erdogan said "Those who will take the streets to protest the operation pay the price". The statements on the social media that speak against the operation face prosecution.

In *Cumhuriyet*, 'the security of Turkey' is emphasized in a different way since the US is framed as an 'external power' which drifts Turkey into a war. Therefore, it is possible to interpret this statement as a challenging security discourse comparing to previously stated two schemas since pre-constructed securityness of the Operation Olive Branch stemming from the Turkey's own security concerns has not given too much credit by this news. Additionally, the remainder of the news calls for special attention to the phrases such as 'paying the price', 'prosecution' and 'speak against' displaying the reality that any opposition movement or rhetoric is forbidden by the governing elites in Turkey. This is an evident explanation of how the elites' discursive privilege in forming securitization framework of an issue favors only a group of people while it marginalizes others. As it can be understood from the above text, 'others' are the ones who are challenging the securityness of the Afrin operation either by producing alternative discourse or acting in the way the elites do not want. As a corollary to that, semantics of the previously stated frames are important to grasp whose discourse is silenced or voiced on the interpretation of the military campaign going on in Syria. Most importantly, the governing officials do not allow even a modicum of either public debate or political contest on the securityness of the operation.

³² ' ABD'nin sınırda yarattığı gerlim, Türkiye'yi Suriye'de yine savaşın içine çekti! TSK Afrin'i Vurdu' <http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/arama/afrin%20operasyonu?page=20> [Accessed on April 14, 2019]

Afrin campaign is not a gain but a loss!

Günlerdir Cumhurbaşkanı Tayyip Erdoğan, hükümet sözcüleri ve bütün bir sermaye basını Afrin'e askeri bir hareket yapılması için yoğun bir ajitasyon-propaganda yapıyor. Ülkenin neredeyse tek gündemi haline getirilen operasyona ilişkin en küçük itirazın bile "vatan hainliği" ile eş anlama geldiği fikri, bu şer cephesi tarafından halkın beynine ve yüreğine sürekli işlenmeye çalışılıyor. Erdoğan ve hükümetinin bugün öne çıkardıkları söylemlerden, Afrin'e yönelik askeri hareketin amaçlarını genelden özele doğru şöyle özetleyebiliriz. "Türkiye ulusal güvenliğini sınır ötesinden başlayarak garanti altına alıyor. Terörle mücadelenin başarısı için bu şart. Bu hareketle PYD tehdidi ortadan kaldırılmış olacak." Ancak hareketin öne sürülen amaçları gerçek dışı.

Nowadays, the President Erdogan along with his exponents and big media started agitation-laden propaganda to launch a military operation in Afrin. The operation almost constitutes one and only political agenda of the country and the idea representing any opposition against the campaign is seen as equal to be a treason. This idea is tried to be inoculated to the mindset and heart of the people without any questioning. The purposes of the military operation in Afrin can be epitomized through looking at the discourse highlighted by Erdogan and the government in the following way: "Turkey guarantees its national security by starting from cross-border safety. It is essential to struggle with terrorism. With this operation, the threat of PYD will have destroyed". However, proffered aims of the operation are not realistic.

It can be argued that the news in *Evrensel* manifests distinctive approach in terms of assessing the Afrin operation in comparison to first two news stated above. In this article, all the security needs of Turkey against the threat of terrorism are portrayed as 'unreal'. On the other hand, by indicating the President, his exponents and the mainstream media, the preceding text renders the Operation Olive Branch as *AKP*'s political project rather than being of a national security policy. Additionally, the view represented in the preceding context explains the ways the operation is presented as 'one and only political agenda' of the country, meaning that the issue at hand is lifted above the normal politics with urgent security moves. Besides putting the Operation Olive Branch at the center of the Turkish politics, it is accentuated that people, their minds and hearts are inoculated by the elites' use of 'agitation-laden propaganda'. In that sense, it is important to comprehend what 'agitation-laden propaganda' means and what its *sine quo non* are. Given the framework of the analysis, the elites' propaganda refers to the use of phrases which are based on the utilization of the fomenting religious nationalist sentiments in an intense way to maintain public support for the objectives of the military operation. Similar to the news presented in *Cumhuriyet*, *Evrensel* draws attention to the 'otherizing' process of the state elites during the Afrin operation. As seen, any little objection the operation was perceived as disloyalty and betrayal to the nation. This, in turn, divides people in the

³³ 'Afrin seferi kazanım değil kayıp'

<https://www.evrensel.net/haber/343786/afrin-seferi-kazanim-degil-kayip> [Accessed on April 14, 2019]

line of ‘supporters’ vs. ‘opponents’. This can also be interpreted in a way that those people who are not proponents of the military operation are marginalized through ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ bifurcation. Hence, the strict boundaries are drawn by the officials when the national security is threatened to identify who can speak and what needs to be done.

4.2.2. Nationalism and Religion at Play in the Operation Olive Branch

The second pivot of the analysis aims to illuminate the way the central security rhetoric of the Operation Olive Branch is conjoined with religious nationalism. The foregoing analysis has shown that the language of national security is ubiquitous in the official speeches and statements of the elites since the outset of the conflict. However, it is notable to ask for what purposes the national political elites shape the debate over national security by incorporating core national values of the society into their rhetoric. As we all know, the rhetoric of security crisis consequently turns into the utilization of public sensibilities in a given political discourse in order to reproduce national self-conceptions and identifications. Within the framework of securitization, we can observe that religion as an alternative to nationalism plays a decisive role to legitimate political goals and national values which are worth to defend. This, in turn, makes it hard to generate any alternative discourse on the operation regarding its state-led defined images in the public.

İslâm âlemi duada. Şimdi Zafer Zamanı (YeniŞafak, 21.01.2018)³⁴

World of Islam prays: It is time for victory

Türkiye terörle kuşatılma planına karşı dün Başkomutan’ın emri ile harekete geçti. Afrin’in teröristlerden temizlenmesi amacıyla başlatılan “Zeytin Dalı Harekatı”nın zaferle sonuçlanması için ümmet duaya durdu. Diyanet’in çağrısıyla Türkiye genelindeki 90 bin camide sabah namazında Fetih Suresi okundu, ardından zafer duası edildi.	Turkey took action yesterday as the commander-in-chief ordered Turkey’s plan to battle against terrorist basement. The ummah prays for the victorious end of Olive Branch Operation which started to clear Afrin from terrorists. With the call of the Directorate of Religious Affairs, people prayed by reading Sūrat al-Fath̄ (<i>victory</i>) for a successful operation during the dawn prayer in almost 90.000 mosques.
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In the first sentence, the President is depicted as a ‘commander-in-chief’ whose

³⁴ ‘İslâm âlemi duada. Şimdi Zafer Zamanı ‘

<https://www.yenisafak.com/gundem/islam-lemi-duada-3025882> [Accessed on April 14, 2019]

‘order’ started the Operation Olive Branch in the field with a wide-range national support. By stressing the epithet of ‘supreme commander’, it is evidently implied that the President himself is the chief of the dominant security discourse and the military action. The news which was released in *YeniŞafak* also illustrates well the rhetorical use of Islamic values, motifs and symbols in securitizing the Afrin operation by highlighting the notions of ‘ummah’, ‘praying’, ‘mosques’ and ‘Sūrat al-Fath’. Besides using everyday connotations of Islam, for the first time, we see that there is a manifest reference to one of the verses of Quran (*Al-Fath*), that is calling for victory. All the aforementioned words are well respected religious terms which mostly constitute cornerstone in the lives of Muslim population. In that sense it can be argued that the power of Islamic discourse is used as a strategic tactic to revitalize both the sentiments of the citizens and the security aims of Turkey in general. From this news, it is also possible to assert that the operation itself along with its objectives is highly respected and enshrined in the eyes of Muslim population given the support of high number of ‘mosques’ and the Directorate of Religious Affairs.

Jandarma o şiiri paylaştı (YeniÇağ, 21.01.2018)³⁵

The Gendarmerie shared that poem

Jandarma Genel Komutanlığı, resmi Twitter sayfasından, Afrin operasyonu için, "Zeytin Dalı Harekatı'nda kahraman askerlerimize muvaffakiyetler diliyoruz" derken, Yahya Kemal Beyatlı'dan da bir şiir paylaştı. Beyatlı'nın Büyük Taaruz'dan önce Türk askerine moral olması için yazdığı şiirden alıntı yapıldı.

"Şu kopan fırtına Türk ordusudur Yâ Rabbi
 Senin uğruna ölen ordu, budur yâ Rabbi
 Tâ ki yükselsin ezanlarla müeyyed nâmın
 Galib et; çünkü bu son ordusudur İslâm'ın"

While the Gendarmerie General Command says via its official twitter account “We wish our heroic soldiers success in the Operation Olive Branch”, it also shared a poem by Yahya Kemal Beyatlı. They quoted from the poem which was written to lift the morale of Turkish soldiers before the Great Offensive.

This breaking storm is the Turkish army Yâ Rabbi!
 The army dying for you is this army Yâ Rabbi!
 Shall your name praise with Azan,
 Triumphed over them as this is the last army of
 Islam!

It is important to remark that the Gendarmerie in Turkey is one of the complementary parts of the Turkish security forces which mostly performs in the rural areas for the maintenance of security and public order. The preceding text succinctly displays the symbiotic relationship between the military and religion by exemplifying the

³⁵ ‘Jandarma o şiiri paylaştı’

<https://www.yenicaggazetesi.com.tr/jandarma-o-siiri-paylasti-182315h.htm> [Accessed on April 14, 2019]

shared poem carrying out the imprints of Islamic valuation of the military. As explicitly shown, the poem was written to lift the morale of the soldiers before the war, namely, the Great Offensive, which successfully brought to an end the *National Independence War*. Coupling the military with honorific religious attributes such as ‘dying for God’, ‘praising the name of God with Azan’ and ‘the last army of Islam’ illustrates how the ‘martial valor’ and ‘warlike spirits of the soldiers’ find its roots and sources in religion. The religious motives come to fore as a significant driving force to revitalize soldiers, which further brings success in carrying the whole nation to a war. Therefore, instrumentalization of religious discourse in the military not only provides the religious legitimacy for the military service but also contributes to the reproduction of pious compatriots throughout generations. The best example of it is the endeavor presented above by bridging the past (the Great Offensive) and the present (the Afrin operation) under the umbrella of ‘heroic’ and ‘holy’ wars. In sum, religious valorization of the military in the rhetoric of crisis as aims to sustain the symbiosis between the military and religion for both spiritual and strategic reasons. Lastly, from the foregoing news, it is plausible to interpret that using religiously adorned security rhetoric represents itself as a unified and wide-ranging narrative given the engagement of both governing and military elites into it.

Afrin ve ‘İslam’ın Son Ordusu’ (Habertürk, 22.01.2018)³⁶

“Afrin and the Last Army of Islam”

MEHMETÇİK üç gündür Afrin’de memleketi belâdan kurtarmak için canıyla ve kanıyla mücadele ederken internette bir “**İslam Ordusu**” tartışması başladı... Vay efendim o ordu “**İslâm**” değil “**Türk**” ordusu imiş, bunun kullanılması lâik cumhuriyetin sona erdiğini gösteriyormuş, “**Türk ordusu**”nda olsa haydi neyse ama “İslam Ordusu”nda askerlik yapmazlarmış. Biz, Anadolu’daki bin küsur senelik mevcudiyetimiz boyunca iki kimlik benimsedik: “**Türk**” ve “**Müslüman**” kimliklerini... Vârolma mücadelemiz, gün geldiğinde uğradığımız yokolma tehlikeleri, savaşlarımız, zaferlerimiz, yenilgilerimiz, refahımız ve felâketlerimiz hep bu iki kimlik çerçevesinde şekil buldu...

While “little Mohammed” struggles in Afrin for three days to salvage our country from the trouble with his blood and life, the discussion on ‘Islamic Army’ has started on the internet... Some say that this army is not Islamic but the Turkish army, the usage of Islamic word is the signal for the end of the secular republic, they can perform in the Turkish army but not in Islamic army. We had two identities which are Turkish and Muslim throughout our approximately one-thousand-year existence in the Anatolia. Our struggle for existence, the threats which we were exposed to annihilation, our wars, triumphs, defeats, and welfare have been shaped around these two identities.

³⁶ ‘Murat Bardakçı: Afrin ve ‘İslam’ın Son Ordusu’

<http://www.haberturk.com/yazarlar/murat-bardakci/1805898-afrin-ve-islamin-son-ordusu> [Accessed on April 14, 2019]

The presented news above in *Habertürk* is a self-explanatory exemplar of how both religion and nationalism concomitantly are in play in the Operation Olive Branch. Framing the army as either ‘Islamic’ or ‘Turkish’ was denied and ironic language was used against the ‘ones’ seeing any distinction between the ‘Muslim’ and ‘Turkish’ identity which are interwoven in the history. To recapitulate a point made earlier, the news also displays again that both the nationalist military ethos and Islam have become timeless attributes of the Turkish nation. Therefore, as it is clearly declared, there is no reason for people to have an anxiety or fear which stems from the risk of losing ‘secular’ Republican army to an Islamist one. This is because the militarist tenets of the nation seem to coalesce around one overarching idea, that is Turkish Islamism. In addition to that, the phrases such as ‘our existence, wars and defeats’ can be seen as an exemplar of nationalist revitalizations which are used to reaffirm the national ideals of Turkey in the current context of the war. Also, ‘the people’ who reject to perform in the ‘Islamic’ army were criticized, and this corollary shows that performing in the military is the duty of defending both Turkish and Muslim identities. Contrary to the people who see the use of the word ‘Islamic’ as a threat to the ‘secular Republic’, the news illustrates that these notions are not in conflict at all. Consequently, ‘Islam’ is portrayed as a least related issue for a person’s objection to perform in the military. Additionally, it can be argued that the role of the soldiers in the Operation Olive Branch is securitized and venerated by using sanctified language to address the sensibilities of both Muslim and Turkish community.

‘Muhammed’in ordusu geri döndü’ (YeniŞafak, 18.03.2018)³⁷

“Mohammad’s Army is Back”

ASSAM Güvenlik Uzmanı Ersan Ergür, "Bu ordu, Mescid-i Aksa'da, Mekke'de, Medine'de peygamberlik sancaktarlığını yaptı. Mehmetçik bu bölgelerden çekildikten sonra, Müslümanların kanadı kırılmış ve Kudüs'e ve Mescid-i Aksa'ya namahrem eli değişmiştir. İşte bugün 18 Mart'ta Afrin'in alınmasıyla, şu sloganı rahatlıkla söyleyebilirim ki, 'Gidin emperyalistlere söyleyin ki, Muhammed'in ordusu geri döndü..' ifadelerini kullandı.

The security expert, Ersan Ergur, working at ASSAM, “This army did protect sanjak of the Prophet in Al-Aqsa Mosque, Mecca and Medina. After the withdrawal of ‘little Mohammed’ from these regions, Muslims felt broken and these were touched by heathens’ hands. Today, after Afrin was seized, I can easily say this slogan: “Go and tell the imperialists that the army of Muhammed is back”.

³⁷ ‘Muhammed’in ordusu geri döndü’

<https://www.yenisafak.com/dunya/muhammedin-ordusu-geri-dondu-3178927> [Accessed on April 14, 2019]

In comparison to the previously analyzed news, the preceding quote has strong focus on the religious aspects of the military instead of merely tapping on its nationalist connotations. It is the news where the religious security narrative became that much dominant. The Turkish army was defined as the ‘army of Mohammed’ and ‘Mecca and Medina’ -having significance for the Muslim world- are portrayed as the places in which the army has pursued the mission of the ‘Prophet’. Additionally, the specific reference to the date of ‘18 March’ when the Afrin was seized by the army reminds ‘18 March Canakkale Victory and Martyr’s Day’. Explicit reference to the above-mentioned date reminisces us to the one of the prominent victories of the Turkish nation that was won against the ‘invaders’ by a defensive war. Additionally, attribution of symbolically important date to the characteristic and objectives of the Afrin operation shows that the military operation is an example of heroism that is deeply interlinked with the sacred duty of soldiering. In general, by invoking such religious themes in the media, the audiences are not enabled to perceive the security problem from a different perspective, but only as an evil ‘thing’ threatening their faith.

İsmail Kahraman ‘Zeytin Dalı’ Harekatı için ‘cihat’ dedi (Cumhuriyet, 26.01.2018)³⁸

İsmail Kahraman used the term ‘jihad’ for the Operation ‘Olive Branch’

Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi (TBMM) Başkanı İsmail Kahraman, Zeytin Dalı Harekatı'nı değerlendirerek, "Bakın şimdi Afrin'deyiz, dün Fırat Kalkanı'ndaydık. Büyük devletiz. Cihat olmadıkça ilerleme olmaz, dik duramazsınız."	By assessing the operation Olive Branch, the president of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey said, "Look we are now in Afrin and we were in Euphrates Shield yesterday. We are the great state. As long as there is no jihad, there is no progress and you cannot stand upright."
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The news entry of the *Cumhuriyet* is very striking with regards to confluence of ‘Jihad’ and the ‘Operation Olive Branch’ in the same sentence. The Speaker of the Grand National Assembly calls the Afrin operation as jihad, which generally signifies the ‘holy war’ and ‘the struggle to defend Islam’. Although the real semantics, namely, what jihad means open to discussion, it has certainly myriad of Islamic connotations in the Muslim world. Furthermore, in this article, the Islamic concept of ‘jihad’ was used in a very nationalist context. Apparently, *Cumhuriyet* critically takes place the preceding quote of the Speaker in order to open it to the public or political contestation given the term jihad’s

³⁸ İsmail Kahraman ‘Zeytin Dalı’ Harekatı için ‘cihat’ dedi

<http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/siyaset/913807/ismail-kahraman-zeytin-dali-harekati-icin-cihat-dedi.html> [Accessed on April 14, 2019]

contestable place in the secular Republic. Although the true motive of the Speaker is not obvious, it is important to understand what audiences may understand from this speech in the context of the Afrin operation given the Speaker's significant role in the politics as a state elite. Since the religion of people is integrated into the both state and security discourse, people undoubtedly are expected to act to protect their faith against any threat. As it is plainly seen, the 'progress' and 'jihad' are seen as on par by referring to the both the operations of Euphrates Shield and Olive Branch. The continuity in 'the struggle' is also seen as a requisite of being a 'great state'. As a consequence of it, the foregoing speech may pave the way for the possibility of launching further military campaigns to accomplish the purviews of the 'progress', in other words, jihad as a nationalist concept of struggle.

Bahçeli: Gerekirse ben de Bozkurt gibi Afrin'e giderim (Habertürk, 06.02.2018)³⁹

If necessary, I will go to Afrin like Bozkurt

Bahçeli, Afrin Harekatı'nda askerlerin yaptıkları bozkurt işaretine ilişkin eleştirilere sert yanıt vererek "Bu topraklara rastgele 'vatan' denmemiştir. Eğer yeri gelirse ben de bir bozkurt gibi Afrin'e gider bu vatana bu millete taşıdığım canı seve seve veririm. Bu da bu millete Devlet sözüdür" dedi. Milli varlığımıza kin ve nefret besleyenler hiçbir zaman amaçlarına ulaşamamışlardır. Türk milletinin bekası siyaset üstü bir konudur. Bekamızın mahvı çöküş ve yok oluş demektir. Milli beka müdafaa edilmezse, tarihi haklarımız korunmazsa akıbeti ihanet lobisi tayin edecektir. Tehlike bu kadar yakın ve yakıcıdır. Artık terörizmle her seviyede hesaplaşma zamanı gelmiştir. Zeytin Dalı Harekatı milli güvenliğimizi temin için planlanmıştır. Türkiye'nin meşru müdafaa hakkının gereğidir. Harama karşı helalin duruşudur. Zeytin Dalı Harekatı caniler ve cehalete karşı cesaretin duruşudur.

Bahçeli responds harshly to those who are criticizing the soldiers making the sign of Bozkurt (Gray Wolf) in the Operation Olive Branch by indicating that this land is not randomly called as the homeland. Bahçeli said "If needed, I will go to Afrin and willingly sacrifice my life that I carry for the nation like a Bozkurt." This is the promise of the State (referring to his first name, that is Devlet) to the Turkish nation. Those who have grudge and hate to our national existence have never achieved their goals. The survival of the Turkish nation (*beka sorunu*) is an above-politics issue. The failure of our survival means the collapse and extinction. If the survival of our nation is not defended and our historical rights are not protected, our future will be determined by the betrayers. The danger is so imminent and bitter. It is now time to stave off terrorism at all levels. The Operation Olive Branch is planned to ensure our national security. It is the necessity of Turkey's right to self-defense. It is the stance of halal against the haraam (forbidden). The Operation Olive Branch is the stance of courage against the thugs and ignorance.

The presented article above in *Habertürk* is the clearest one in terms of identifying

³⁹ 'Bahçeli: Gerekirse ben de Bozkurt gibi Afrin'e giderim' <https://www.haberturk.com/son-dakika-devlet-bahceli-den-mhp-grup-toplantisi-nda-aciklamalar-1826079> [Accessed on April 14, 2019]

what the motive of the news is, who says what in the context of the Operation Olive Branch and by targeting what audiences. The reason why Bahçeli, as the party leader of *Nationalist Movement Party*, supports the soldiers making the sign of *Bozkurt* relies on its nationalist promotions in our culture. Therefore, it is expressed that there is no use to criticize the soldiers on the basis of their presented action since they enthusiastically perform their military duty as the way each ‘Turkish nationalist’ does. In his remainder speech, it was overtly declared by Bahçeli that as a necessity of being a Turkish nationalist, he may also willingly sacrifice his life for the well-being of the nation and the state. When the party leader made such a manifestation by referring to the Turkish nationalism as a core principle of the Turkish history, it is quite expected to see the espousal of this rhetoric by the large amount of Turkish population. In this regard, it is important to note that Bahçeli’s speech is reinforcing the arguments made by the governing elites on the subject of both the Operation Olive Branch and the soldiers’ pivotal role in protecting the security of our country. As part of the dominant national security paradigm, ‘the language of threat and danger’ is also highly emphasized to show how divisive and destructive nature of terror lands on the doorsteps of Turkey, thereby, if not prevented, it will culminate a catastrophe on behalf of the whole nation. As a result of it, the ‘struggle’ in Afrin itself is framed as something that is even more fundamental and sacred than the lives of people. The main reason legitimating and securitizing this stance is the ‘survival of the nation’ which is positioned ‘above politics’ as a vital security concern for Turkey. To assure the ‘national invulnerability’ in the face of an existential terror threat, all ‘citizen-warriors’ are expected to act courageously to protect their nation and historical heritage as a stance of ‘halal’ against ‘haram’, that is what betrayers and ‘ignorant’ are doing. Given the rigid securitization of the Operation Olive Branch and the duty of military service, it seems that it is not allowed to constitute an alternative security rhetoric around the aforementioned hot topics. Therefore, either the public or the political opposition has plenty of reasons to withhold their potential dissidence against the ongoing security discourse in order not to be labelled as being ‘external’ or ‘internal’ ‘other’. Since the perpetuation of the militarized understanding of Islam and nationalism is the crux of the current national security paradigm, any counter argument constitutes another dangerous factor targeting the core national values.

22nd day in the Afrin Operation: 11 soldiers lost their lives

<p>Diyaret İşleri Başkanı, Afrin operasyonuna ilişkin dikkat çekici açıklamalarda bulundu: 'Zeytin Dalı' hareketindeki askerlerin İslami ahlaka göre savaştığını söyledi. Başkan, "Bizim askerimiz Afrin'de niye bu kadar yavaş ilerliyor? Biliyorsunuz Irak'ı bombalayanlar çoluk çocuk, masum insanlar demeden 1 milyon insanı katlettiler. Kimdi bunlar? Kim oldukları belli, Müslüman olmayan Amerikan askerleri. 1 milyon insanı öldürdüler. Bizim Müslüman askerimiz yaptığı savaşı İslam ahlakına göre yapıyor. Onun için yavaş ilerliyor Afrin'de" dedi.</p>	<p>President of the Religious Affairs made remarkable explanations regarding the Afrin Operation. The president said that our soldiers in Afrin are fighting in accordance with the Islamic ethics. "Why are our soldiers are progressing slowly in Afrin? You know that those who shelled Iraq killed one million people without considering children and innocent ones. Who were they? Who they were is obvious, they were non-Muslim American soldiers. Our Muslim soldiers are waging the war in light of the Islamic ethics, hereby, their progress is slow in Afrin.</p>
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In light of the news in *Evrensel*, it is possible to say that the newspaper implicitly takes a critical position towards the Religious Affairs' involvement in the issue of Afrin Operation which is normally outside of its institutional agenda given the political and security-laden nature of the operation. Moreover, emphasis on 'Islamic ethics' in the statement of the President of Religious Affairs could be seen as an indicator of a strong connotation between Islam and military in the context of the Afrin Operation. Concurrently, it can be claimed that reference to 'Islamic ethics' turned into a point that differentiates the mentality of the Afrin operation from other cross-border military campaigns such as the 'invasion' of Iraq by 'non-Muslim' American soldiers. While what Americans did in Iraq did not prioritize the sacrosanct value of the lives of 'innocents', what TAF is doing is completely different in terms of glorifying people's lives as a command of Islam. Thereby, it seems that there is an accentuation on the 'securityness' and 'sacredness' of the military operation by establishing a close linkage between Islam and the Afrin operation in the rhetoric of the Religious Affairs. Consequently, using religiously instilled discourse to valorize both the operation itself and soldiering duty is a way to withdraw any critics from the public sphere given the veneration of the life of human being even in the warfare as part of Islamic ethics.

⁴⁰ 'Afrin operasyonunda 22. gün: 11 asker hayatını kaybetti'
<https://www.evrensel.net/haber/345221/afrin-operasyonunda-22-gun-11-asker-hayatini-kaybetti> [Accessed on April 14, 2019]

Afrin'de son dakika! Raco - Bülbul hattı birleşti, 'hilal' oluştu! (Sabah, 26.02.2018) ⁴¹

Breaking news on Afrin! The line between Rajo and Bulbul was merged, the 'crescent' emerged

Son dakika haberi... Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri tarafından başlatılan ve ÖSO birliklerinin de yer aldığı Zeytin Dalı Hareketi kapsamında düzenlenen operasyonlarda Afrin'deki Bülbul ve Raco bölgesinin birleşmesinin ardından Türkiye'nin Afrin sınırlarında 'Hilal' oluştu. ... TÜRK ASKERLERİNE SEVGİ GÖSTERİSİ. Suriye'nin Azez bölgesi ve ona yakın olan bölgelerde de sık sık Türkiye'nin Zeytin Dalı Harekatı'na destek gösterileri düzenleniyor. Bölgeye intikal eden Türk askerlerine sevgi gösterilerinde bulunuluyor.

Breaking news... After the merge of Rajo and Bulbul line during the Operation Olive Branch which was launched by TAF and also supported by the troops of FSA, the crescent has emerged along the borders of Turkey... EXPRESSION OF LOVE TO THE TURKISH SOLDIERS. The support demonstrations were frequently organized towards the Operation Olive Branch in both Azaz region of Syria and in its closer surroundings. The Turkish soldiers who arrived in the region are welcomed with demonstrations of love.

As the headline of the news speaks for itself, it is possible to grasp even from the beginning how nationalism is highly incorporated into the picture of the Afrin operation. In that sense, the 'crescent' is one of the most important symbols in Turkish history given its long-standing religious and nationalist connotations. Firstly, the significance of the 'crescent' stems from its usage in the military as a deep-rooted offensive war tactic, which also symbolizes the continuity in the practice of military strategies inherited from the Ottoman period. In addition, the 'crescent' itself is accepted as a sacred national symbol given its place on the Turkish national flag. Thereby, re-establishing the borders of Turkey in the shape of crescent could be read as a sign of success of both Turkish religious nationalism and the Turkish army in the Afrin operation. Furthermore, it can be asserted that demonstrations of 'love' and 'support' coming from the people of Syria towards the Turkish army not illustrate the sacredness of Turkey's mission *per se*, but also explains how much the operation is needed and how legitimate it is.

⁴¹ Afrin'de son dakika! Raco - Bülbul hattı birleşti, 'hilal' oluştu!
<https://www.sabah.com.tr/haberleri/afrin> [Accessed on April 14, 2019]

Bu akşama kadar 3000'i aşar (Sabah, 07.03.2018)⁴²

Until tonight it will exceed 3000

Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan açıklamada bulundu. Biz merhamet dinini mensuplarıyız. Bizde azap yok, bizde zulüm yok. Bizim ecdadımız da öyleydi. Hint Yarımadası'na ecdadımız kadirgalar gönderdi, bir kişinin kurtuluşu için. Böyle bir ecdadın torunlarından zulüm beklenir mi? Esed'in olduğu bir yere bizler o mazlumları kurtarmak için gidiyoruz. Şunu bilin biz seferle emrolunduk. Zafer Allah'a aittir. Şehitlerimiz boşuna şehit olmadı. Peygamberlere en yakın makam şehitlik makamıdır. Şehitler tepesi boş kalmayacak. Beraber o tepeye yürüdük, yürüyeceğiz. Afrin'e beraber yürüyeceğiz. Millet hazır. Hiç endişeniz olmasın.

The President Erdogan made the following explanation. We are the members of the religion of mercy. We have no torment and we have no oppression. Our ancestors were, too. Our ancestors have sent the galleys to the Indian subcontinent for the salvation of a person. Is it possible to expect cruelty from the grandchildren of such ancestors? We are going to a place where Assad is to save those who are oppressed. You should know that we are commanded with the military expedition. Victory belongs to Allah. Our martyrs were not martyred for nothing. The status of the martyrs is the closest one to the Prophets. The Martyrs' Hill will not be empty. Together we walked to the Hill and we will walk. We'll walk to Afrin together. Our nation is ready. No worries.

The presented account in *Sabah* is the best example of the epideictic style of framing the security discourse of the Operation Olive Branch given the explicit references to the Islamic values and doctrines. In short, it is a securitizing move towards not only the operation itself but also the role of the soldiers by making use of religious notions. Similar to the other analyzed news, this one also illustrates how successful legitimation of the war in Syria was made possible and unquestionable by the elites' utilization of Islamic principles. The use of specific words such as 'religion of mercy', 'salvation', 'martyrdom' and the 'Prophet' paint a picture of the Operation Olive Branch as a 'holy war' which was launched against the oppression of the Assad regime. By doing so, Turkey is implicitly portrayed as the 'heroic savior' who is like a father protecting the oppressed inhabitants of another nation. As it was made clear in the preceding speech of the President, this paternalistic view of the Turkish state takes its roots from the historical past and its ancestors. Hence, it was highly accentuated both the religious and atavistic characteristic of Turkish nation which protects the honor of its 'national family', that is the Muslim populated countries. Therefore, it was stated that "we are commanded with the military expedition" as a culturally embedded tradition. When we move to examine the word 'nation', in other words *millet*, it has specific religious connotations in the political rhetoric of the *AKP* given its explicit reference to the nation of Islam or Muslim

⁴²Bu akşama kadar 3000'i aşar

<https://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2018/03/07/cumhurbaskani-erdogandan-onemli-aciklamalar> [Accessed on April 14, 2019]

nation. Thereby, by saying ‘the nation is ready’, it is implied that the Muslim nation is immanent to sacrifice itself to fulfil the sacred duty of soldiering. This is because, ‘martyrdom’ is accepted as the most sacred and greatest honor in the life of a Muslim as a long-standing tradition. As it was implied, the life of martyr is not given in vain, but it is sacrificed to secure the sacred nation. Given the fulfillment of this sacred duty, meaning that the life is given in the way of God, the martyrs’ status will raise to the highest status of the Prophets as a God’s gift. When the President includes himself into such a religious picture as a most influential elite figure in the country, it is quite anticipated that the rest of the society as a whole accepts the security of this duty as preeminent with no opposition.

‘Kılıçdaroğlu: Afrin’e gideceğiz diyenler kendi çocuklarını askere göndermez’ (YeniÇağ, 09.03.2018)⁴³

“Kılıçdaroğlu: Those saying that they will go to Afrin do not send their children to the military”

Kılıçdaroğlu'nun ifadeleri şöyle: Askerlik hem vatan görevi hem de gençler açısından bir olgunlaşma sürecidir. Sonuçta bu buraya ‘Peygamber ocağı’ diyoruz. Peygamber ocağında nasıl bir eğitim veriliyor görüp yaşaması lazım. Günümüzde parası olan askere gitmiyor, parasını ödüyor. Bir siyasetçinin askerden, askerlikten, şehitlerden söz ederken kendi çocuğunu askere göndermemesi samimi olmadığını gösterir. Bir de askerliğin şovunu yapanlar var. Kefen giyip gezenler, ‘Bizi Afrin’e götürün’ diyen şovmenler, onlara ‘Gideceğiz, hep beraber gideceğiz’ diyenler kendi çocuklarını askere göndermezler. Fakir-fukaranın çocukları üzerinden siyaset yaparlar.

Kılıçdaroğlu’s statements are like these: Performing in the military is both a national duty and a process of maturation for our youth. We call the military as a ‘Prophet’s heart’. The youth should experience the military training. Today, people having money do not perform in the military, instead they pay for it. When a politician both talks about the soldier, military and martyrs and does not send his son to the military, it indicates that the person is not sincere. And there are also some people making a show off over the military duty. The people who wear shroud, who say ‘Let’s send us to Afrin, and there are also others saying ‘We will go there together’ but they do not send their sons to the military. They do politics over the children of poor people.

As Kılıçdaroğlu who is the leader of the main opposition party, CHP (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, *People’s Republican Party*) pointed out clear in his foregoing speech, he has several repercussions against both the way the military service is thought in Turkey and the security politics of the AKP’s officials in the context of the Operation Olive Branch. However, the security and sacredness of the compulsory military service in Turkey are reinforced by him through providing different religious nationalist legitimacy for it. In his speech, role of the military and military performance was exalted in the lives of

⁴³ ‘Kılıçdaroğlu: Afrin’e gideceğiz diyenler kendi çocuklarını askere göndermez’
<http://www.yenicaggazetesi.com.tr/kilicdaroglu-afrine-gidecegiz-diyenler-kendi-cocuklarini-askere-gondermez-186231h.htm> [Accessed on April 14, 2019]

men through calling the military as both ‘Prophet’s hearth’ and ‘national duty’. The representation of the army as the home of the Prophet is one of the popular religious convictions at the societal level. Hence, such a speech directly consolidates the Islamic interpretation of militarism among the pious population. In what follows, the military service is framed as the most sacred citizenship practice in one’s life. In sum, the compulsory military service and the experiences of soldiering are sanctified in the lives of man as a milestone and rite of transition to manhood. To exemplify it in a clearer way, in our culture, men are expected to perform in the military before they marry and find a job since the army is thought to be an eminent place where men really become men through learning how to protect the nation breeding him, and his family members. The use of words such as ‘should’ and ‘must’ further emphasize the security of the mandatory military service as an integral part of ‘citizens-soldier ideal’, thereby criticizing the paid military service for not to be a good fit to the Turkish national character. The statement of Kılıçdaroglu additionally displays how the military performance and its societal valuation are abused by the people (implicit reference to the officials of the AKP), who ‘do politics’ over both religious and nationalist sentiments that people have. However, it seems that both the governing elites and the opposition party are unified in their sacralized interpretation of the Operation Olive Branch and the pivotal role of the military. In addition, the latter one also uses polarized and religiously instilled political rhetoric to ‘otherize’ people who are wearing shroud (*kefen*) and saying that ‘let us to go to Afrin’ as a way of showing their faith and commitment to the ongoing military operation. Therefore, it shows that although the religion is accepted as a unifying force for people, the use of this rhetoric in the domain of security causes deep societal divisions.

'Afrin'e girdik giriyoruz... Fetih yakın' (Hürriyet, 18.03.2018)⁴⁴

We are about to enter Afrin... The conquest is close

[...] Erdoğan, Bugün Afrin'e Münbiç'e ve bölücü örgütün işgali altındaki diğer bölgelere baktığımızda Kobani olaylarıyla, çukur eylemleriyle ne yapılmak istendiğinin çok daha iyi farkına varıyoruz. Meselenin siyasetle, demokrasiyle, hak ve özgürlük talepleriyle hiçbir alakasının olmadığı, tek hedefin vatanımızı parçalamak olduğu şimdi daha iyi anlaşılıyor. Bu örgüt camileri kurşunlayacak kadar İslam düşmanı bir örgüttür.

Erdoğan, today, when we look at Afrin, Manbij and other regions under the occupation of the separatist organization, we realize much more about what happened with the Kobani and trench incidents. It is now better understood that the issue has nothing to do with politics, democracy, and demands for rights and freedom, but the only purpose is to divide our country. This organization is an anti-Islamist organization which shoots even the mosques.

As I have stated before in the preceding analyses, the total victory of Turkey over terrorism constitutes the first and foremost goal of the Operation Olive Branch in order to secure the future and survival of the nation. In this new, how close Turkey is to victory and to 'conquest' the places which were controlled by the separatist terror organizations before were stated. It is the first time the word 'conquest' is used to describe the objectives of the operation instead of 'salvation' or 'rescue'. The reason contributing to this strict security move and rhetoric can be seen as the 'illegitimacy' and 'evil' of terror, which is 'anti-Islamic' by its nature, targeting not the unity and integrity of Turkey *per se*, but also sacred values and places. By stating that 'this terrorist organization even shoots the mosques' as part of sacralized security discourse, it directly creates a far-reaching influence on people who perceive the threat not only as a matter of security but also their faith. In this respect, it is plausible to assert that the righteousness and legitimacy of the Operation Olive Branch derives from the use of sanctified security discourse at the state level. Given the inimical threat of terrorism *vis-à-vis* the both the security and values of the nation, the dangerous 'other', namely, the terrorist organization cannot be seen as a legitimate and negotiable partner on any issue. Having digested the lessons learned from the 'terror incidents' in Turkey, the news in *Hürriyet* clearly states there is no reason and use to tolerate the presence of terror but only to 'triumph' over them.

⁴⁴ 'Afrin'e girdik giriyoruz... Fetih yakın'

<http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/afrine-girdik-giriyoruz-fetih-yakin-40775966> [Accessed on April 14, 2019]

The Victory Speech

<p>Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan, Çanakkale Zaferi'nin 103. yıldönümü törenindeki konuşmasına Afrin şehir merkezinin tamamen alındığını müjdeleyerek başladı. Erdoğan zafer konuşmasında tarihi mesajlar verdi: Afrin'de artık terör örgütünün paçavraları değil, huzurun ve güvenin sembolleri dalgalanıyor. Türk bayrağı dalgalanıyor. Allah şanlı ordumuza, kahraman Mehmetçiklerimize güç, kuvvet versin. Bu mücadelede en büyük ilham kaynağımız hiç şüphesiz Çanakkale Zaferi'dir". Birkaç gündür şunu söylüyordum. 'Artık Afrin için zafer yakın diyordum.' Allah ayetinde öyle buyuruyor. 'Allah'ın yardımı ve fetih yakındır, müjdele' diyordu. Biz o müjdeye inandık ve fethin yakın olduğunu gördük.</p>	<p>President Erdoğan began his speech at the 103th anniversary of the Çanakkale Victory by announcing that the city center of Afrin was completely taken over. Erdoğan gave historical messages in his victory speech: In Afrin, there are no longer the rags of the terrorist organizations waved, but the symbols of peace and trust. The Turkish flag is waving. May God give power and strength to our glorious army and heroic soldiers. Our greatest inspiration in this struggle is undoubtedly the Çanakkale Victory. I've been saying this for a few days. I was saying that victory is close to Afrin. Allah says so in this verse. "God's help and the conquest are close, and tell the good news," he said. We believed in that verse and saw that the conquest was close.</p>
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Like the previous news, how governing elites reached their goals in the Operation Olive Branch constituted the referent object of this news as well. As the President remarks, the operation ended with 'victory' and the role of the Turkish military who acted in accordance with Islamic values and principles is emphasized as the main source of the success. We have already observed the established linkage between the Canakkale Victory and the Afrin operation in the previous analyses. Thereby, the relation among the two important and sacred wars is important with regards to keep the connection between Turkey's historical past and its future alive. Making a comparison between the two is a way to revitalize both the spirit and faith of the soldiers in Afrin. In addition, referring to the verses of Quran while evaluating the Afrin operation indicates how effective religion is in securitizing of the operation. On the other hand, it can be said that the usage of Islamic rhetoric in a society where majority of population are Muslims aims at bringing people together and mobilizing them on the basis of a common goal. In sum, this could be read as a call for unity of Turkish Muslim nation in the face of an any existential and grave threat. In this respect, in a Muslim society, incorporation of God's sayings to the political-security concerns of Turkey effectively leaves little room for any alternative security discourse given the sacredness of the religious rhetoric. Moreover, it is remarkable to see the role of the President as an addresser in delivering the verses of

⁴⁵ 'Zafer Konuşması'

<https://www.yenisafak.com/gundem/zafer-konusmasi-3178962> [Accessed on April 14, 2019]

Quran to the people. Finally, the use of the term ‘conquest’ twice also may contradict with the idea that the operation emerged out as an outcome of the security need of Turkey.

‘Kendi elimizle Afganistan Kuruyoruz’ (Cumhuriyet 25.03.2018)⁴⁶

“We are creating another Afghanistan by our hands”

“*Afrin’i terörden temizledik*” deyip El-Bab’daki gibi okullar açınca, biz daha mı güvende olacağız? Sınırlarımızı güvene alacağız diye yola çıkıp Türkiye’nin imkânlarıyla bir Afganistan yaratmak, Idlib ve Doğu Guta’dan gelen bütün aşırı İslamcı unsurları sınır boylarımıza yerleştirmek, nasıl bir zihni-sinir stratejinin ürünü? Fırat Kalkanı kuşağındaki radikal İslamcı yapı bütün güney sınırımıza yayılsa Türkiye güvende mi olacak? Size şöyle sorayım: Siz kendi mahallenizde seküler Kürtler ve “Cihangir’deki marjinalerle” mi komşu olmak isterdiniz, yoksa otobüs otobüs Doğu Guta’dan getirdiğiniz radikal İslamcılarla mı?

By saying that “We saved the Afrin from terrorism” and opening radical Islamist schools as in Al-Bab, are we going to be more secure? For the sake of our border security, what type of reasoning does the state have by creating another Afghanistan through resettlement of the radical Islamic groups coming from Idlib and East Ghouta? If the radical Islamists did spread over our south border, would Turkey feel more secure? Let me ask you like in this way: Would you prefer to be a neighbor with secular Kurds and “marginals living in Cihangir” or with radical Islamists brought from the East Ghouta?

From the preceding quote, it is possible to assert that the serious critique is directed against the security policies of the governing elite in Turkey and the defiance in the way the operation is thought and represented is emphasized through asking various rhetorical questions about the ‘border security of Turkey’. In comparison to the other analyzed news, this one has more focus on the consequences of the Operation Olive Branch in Turkish politics instead of its pre-stated objectives and success. The critique of the text mainly centered on the issue of ‘secularism’ which is thought to be in danger as a consequence of the operation. The ‘Islamic groups’ coming from ‘Al-Bab’, ‘Idlib’ and ‘East Ghouta’ to Turkey are defined as ‘fundamentalists’ which threaten the secular characteristic of Turkey. They are thought as perilous *vis-à-vis* both the national and border security of Turkey than the ‘secular’ Kurds and ‘marginals’ living in the different regions of Turkey. In that sense, it can be interpreted that Kurds and other groups are thought as part of ‘us’ as being Turkey’s citizens while the others are designated as threatening and dangerous ‘them’. Therefore, quite separate from the previous analyses, the presented news aims to re-define who the real threat for the security of Turkey is. The overall purpose of the news released in *Cumhuriyet* is to argue that security rhetoric of Turkey which is fraught with religiously infused nationalist narrative puts the

⁴⁶Aslı Aydıntaşbaş: Kendi elimizle Afganistan Kuruyoruz’

http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/koseyazisi/948171/Kendi_elimizle_Afganistan_kuruyoruz.html [Accessed on April 14, 2019]

‘secularism’ in a slippery ground, thereby producing the ‘real’ danger for the secular Republic. To show how the threat to secularism is more dangerous than terror itself, Afghanistan is given as a non-preferable example that Turkey would be in the future.

By way of a conclusion, I draw out some general remarks to illustrate what the discursive analysis of both the elites’ statements and the media representation have shown to us. Each discursive narrative is always subject to criticisms and at least some political or public contradictions. However, there are times when the elites strengthen their rhetorical power by borrowing from the sacred and traditional values of the society into their political agenda. In this respect, the ways the Operation Olive Branch and the military service are portrayed in both the institutional and media discourse is the perfect fit for the preceding argument. As a consequence of my thorough reading of all the news, I observed that elites’ speeches on the operation was mostly cited in describing the operation. In that sense, the elites’ parlance on the securitization framework of the operation is common even in the media representation of Afrin. Hence, the analysis firstly shows the elites’ capacity to speak with an unquestioned authority with regards to any issue related to the politics of security. As it was seen, most of the news were revolving around the speeches and statements of the President. This is the direct explanation of how the state officials have launched an extensive rhetorical campaign on the issue of Operation Olive Branch and how they represent their own preferred security discourse as preeminent. By doing this, we saw that the governing elites additionally use religious and nationalist motives as a driving force for the both success of the operation and mobilization of the people around this security objective. The analysis shows that the securityness of the operation and role of the soldiers are positioned in a security narrative blending both religious and nationalist valuation of militarism. Almost all of the news, except some of them in *Cumhuriyet* and *Evrensel*, which are released in ideologically different media outlets made this narrative dominant in the first three months of the operation. Consequently, as it was interpreted from the speeches of the elite figures, espousal of a security rhetoric carrying the imprints of both religion and nationalism imposes constraints on people to dissent or at least forming any counter discourse towards either the Operation Olive Branch or the compulsory military service. As it was clearly declared by the governing elites any opposition argument made against the Operation Olive Branch will be muted.

As we all know, Turkish nationalism has always been the dominant ideology in

the military barracks, but the analysis illuminates how the religious component of it became more obvious during the course of the operation. Given the framework of the analysis enunciating the strong references to religious and nationalist glorification of the military service in the Operation Olive Branch, it is understood that any opposition idea facilitating antimilitarist and antiwar thought can be easily challenged and even marginalized. As the analysis displays the way the nationalism and religion work together in complicated ways to reproduce the understanding of pious and patriotic citizenship in the face of a danger, Islam comes to fore as the last thing that can be associated with antimilitarism or antiwar activism. In addition, as it was stated in the previous chapter, such a stance culminates in being labelled as sacrilegious and unpatriotic. Therefore, having completed the portrayal of the Operation Olive Branch from an institutional discursive perspective, it is also worth to analyze the reverse side of the story, that is the stances and experiences of religious COs and anti-war activists. Such an analysis is needed to give a more complete picture of the military operation and the military service from the lenses of counter-agents in terms of challenging the silence of critiques on securitization.

5. FOCUS-GROUP METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

So far, I have analyzed the discourses adopted by the governing elite on the Operation Olive Branch. Since the second fold of the research question targets Muslim COs and Muslim anti-war activists and the way these agents perceive religious discourses accompanied by national sentiments, I will first evaluate the methodological advantages and limitations of using focus-group research design. To add an agent-based value ensuring a holistic elaboration of the investigated phenomenon, this methodological instrument will be initially overhauled to explain why choice of focus-group methodology has been made as a best way to conduct an action research with Muslim COs and anti-war activists as a unit of analysis. In what follows, the process such as general procedures in selecting participants, preparing the questionnaire list, and other practical details of the research design will be explained along with some limitations associated with the scope of this research.

In many cases, semi-structured interviews are used as a substitute for focus-group interviewing. The main distinction between the two methods is based on a researcher's interest in either gathering individual level or group and interaction level data. As it was mentioned in the earlier chapter of the thesis, CO is a multilayered issue and there is an identity, goal and motivation-based distinctiveness both across and within the COs. Given these differences in the COs' identities and political or moral stances, my primary interest is to explore whether Muslim COs and Muslim anti-war activists challenge the religiously infused nationalist rhetoric the elites use either resort to similar or different discourses. In doing so, focus-group data analysis consequently paves way to comprehend whether the act of military objection and anti-war activism of Muslims purely depend on their individual calculus or not. In addition to that, the most recent and extant studies approach empirical cases of COs including a few Muslim COs by conducting in-depth interviews to understand their individual position in different contexts (Erol 2013; Durgun 2017; Kemerli 2015; Kemerli 2018). For that reason, exploring the extent and the

nature of interaction between the Muslim COs and Muslim anti-war activists including agreements, disagreements, and making comparisons amidst their opinions in the group setting are needed. Taking into consideration the under-researched nature of this subject in the group context, conducting such fieldwork contributes to understand whether there is a consensus among Muslims, or whether they have disparate agendas as to how the militarized tenets of religious nationalism are perceived. Most importantly, focus group methodology is invaluable to illustrate whether perceptions of the Muslim COs and Muslim anti-war activists on the military Operation Olive Branch military, the elite's security discourse, and their imaginings on security/peace are coherent or not.

To achieve the previously stated goals, my source of data seems to be more in line with the interactions and discussions between participants, which can be captured neither by individual interviews nor my intersubjective interpretation of participants' worldviews.

As Mosley (2013, 6) argues, interviews as a way of making sense of the data are useful to ask wide-range and detailed questions including follow-ups and probing questions to participants in comparison to focus groups, which consequently results in getting deeper set of responses. By referring to this facet of interviews, Mosley also pays attention to the potential drawbacks of conducting focus-group analysis based on its logistical and methodological problems (2013, 7). Since focus-group methodology is relying on discussions between the larger set of individuals, it is possible to encounter with the problem of not asking all relevant questions to participants in the questionnaire and possible domination of "one strongly opinionated individual" over other respondents (2013, 7). Additionally, it looks more easier to create an interview environment in comparison to focus-group since the former one allows researcher to utilize other materials such as phone and video chats rather than constructing only face-to-face in group setting. Furthermore, it would be easier to conduct data analysis of interviews by solely reviewing in-person interviews. Contrary to interviews, since focus-group environment enables participants to discuss the same topic simultaneously, it may be difficult to actively listen informants for a researcher to be sure who says what and in response to whom. However, the problem of asking all relevant questions and control over the discussion environment are not unique to focus group interviewing because most qualitative interview methods may suffer from the same limitations to different degrees. If the group discussion goes to irrelevant areas, it is the researcher's responsibility to control possible interruptions to avoid distractions from the topic.

As one of the key strengths of focus group methodology, the researcher may play an active role in both generating and managing discussions as a moderator of the group. Another problem with focus group is ‘social desirability bias’ in terms of talking in front of others in a group setting especially if the research is contentious and highly politicized. However, it is my contention that since focus groups involve interactive setting and participation of more than one individual in contrast to interviews, participants may feel more relaxed in sharing their opinions when they see others are willingly to respond to the posed questions. This may eliminate the problem of creating rapport and trust with participants since the presence of other participants in the research environment may make less important the researcher’s identity and role, which can be deemed as an ‘outsider’ for the population that he/she is studying on. According to Morgan and Krueger (1993, 16-19), focus groups are more useful than interviews for researching politically contentious and emotionally sensitive topics since they provide a “humane environment” for discussions through the involvement of other participants.

As both Cyr (2016) and Knodel (1994) argue, focus-group analysis is the best way to maximize both the quality and comparability of data since this method enables a researcher to have an individual, group and interaction-level data concomitantly. Given the comparative advantage of focus group analysis in generating “data at the three units of analysis, focus-group environment easily serves as a kind of “public forum” (Cyr 2016, 231, 242) in which distinct or similar individual opinions are voiced. Rather than measuring static individual opinions by using face-to-face interviews and then comparing their answers with other participants, conducting focus groups is more fruitful tool to display naturally occurring ‘variance’ and ‘consensus’ in both within and across interlocuters.

Besides focus groups’ contribution to the understanding of what kind of a group dynamic and interaction are at play amongst participants, it is also a well-fitted logic of inquiry in line with the theoretical assumptions of CSS. By approaching to the cases of Muslim COs and anti-war activists in light of the premises of CSS, focus group is important tool to empower these ‘non-state actors’ by giving them a voice to challenge the silence of critics on the securitization framework infiltrated by religious nationalist political rhetoric. This is not only significant to give a more complete picture of the phenomenon under investigation, but also it is needed to comprehend what it means to be ‘silenced ‘and ‘marginalized’ on behalf of Muslim COs and Muslim anti-war activists. Since the religious identities of these non-state agents are perceived as a threat and risk

to the ‘national security paradigm’ which is fraught with sacred norms and references, it is crucial to accept focus groups’ potential in reflecting the issues which are of utmost importance to the lives of COs and anti-war activists from their own lenses. To explain why focus group is a much acclaimed methodology in the social sciences, many scholars stress the fact that the method provides a voice to whoever has been previously marginalized and silenced to facilitate their articulation on the basis of both individual and “group resistance narratives” (Chase 2000, 645; Madriz 2000; Rodriguez, et al. 2011, 402). In fact, focus groups may be thought as a safe place in which people are encouraged to discuss and share what they think and experience on the issues that are primarily relevant to their struggles without hesitation of being otherized. This consequently brings about both individual and collective empowerment of participants in group settings vis à-vis the real political context in which their identities and perceptions are alienated from the normative and powerful narrative. Put differently, as Madriz (2000), Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2000, 893-894) argued, focus groups put participants in a nurturing context to render them as the experts of their own social contexts and experiences to produce not solely the “politics of knowledge” from their angles but also an “emancipatory action”. This is especially substantial in the cases of Muslim COs and anti-war activists given the fact that let alone being organized around the CO movement, they are not even allowed to speak about either CO or anti-war activism publicly even though they are the most affected ones by the securitization, militarization and prevalence of religious nationalist political rhetoric. By referring to all above mentioned tenets of focus group methodology, this research admittedly benefits from using it for several reasons, especially for its good fit with the nature of the research subjects and theoretically-oriented arguments of the thesis.

5.1. Designing and Conducting Focus Groups

Having elaborated on what grounds the choice of focus group methodology has been made, in this part, I will explain the way I conducted my focus group research design by frequently referring to the table below:

Table 1: Data on the profiles of participants

Participants' profile attended focus groups along with their religion, ethnicity and age identifications ⁴⁷	Date of the focus group conducted	Number of participants		
		Male	Female	Total
Focus group 1: Hasan (<i>Islam, a Turkish male, Muslim anti-war activist, 26-35</i>) Rukiye (<i>Islam, a Kurdish female, Muslim anti-war activist, 26-35</i>) Özgür (<i>Islam, n/a, male, a Muslim anti-war activist, 18-25</i>) Doğuş (<i>Islam, n/a, male, a Muslim COr, 36-45</i>) Ersin (<i>Islam, a Kurdish male, Muslim COr, 18-25</i>) Halim (<i>Islam, a Kurdish male, Muslim COr 26-35</i>)	02.23.2019	5	1	6
Focus Group 2: Ali (<i>Islam, n/a, male, a Muslim COr, 26-35</i>) Alper (<i>Islam, a Kurdish male, Muslim COr, 36-45</i>) Cihan (<i>Islam, n/a, male, Muslim COr, 26-35</i>) Kılıç (<i>Islam, a Kurdish male, Muslim COr, 26-35</i>) Lütfiye (<i>Islam, n/a, female, Muslim COr 26-35</i>) Senem (<i>Islam, n/a, female, Muslim COr, 26-35</i>)	02.24.2019	4	2	6
Focus Group 3: Serkan (<i>Islam, n/a, male, Muslim anti-war activist, 46-60</i>) Nurten (<i>Islam, a Turkish female, Muslim anti-war activist, 46-60</i>) Emrah (<i>Islam, a Kurdish male, Muslim anti-war activist, 46-60</i>) Hayriye (<i>Islam, n/a, female, Muslim anti-war activist, 46-60</i>) Duygu (<i>Islam, a Kurdish-Turkish female, Muslim COr, 26-35</i>) Emre (<i>Islam, a Kurdish male, Muslim COr, 18-25</i>) Adnan (<i>Islam, a Kurdish male, Muslim anti-war activist, 26-35</i>)	03.02.2019	4	3	7
Focus Group 4: Ünsal (<i>Islam, a Kurdish male, Muslim COr, 36-45</i>) Ahmet (<i>Islam, n/a, male, Muslim COr, 26-35</i>) Bircan (<i>Islam, a Turkish female, Muslim COr, 26-35</i>) Bektaş (<i>Islam, n/a, female, Muslim COr, 26-35</i>) Erman (<i>Islam, a Kurdish male, Muslim COr, 26-35</i>) İbrahim (<i>Islam, n/a, male, Muslim COr, 36-45</i>)	03.03.2019	5	1	6
Total:		18	7	25

⁴⁷ The data come from a brief written survey questionnaire including some demographic questions such as age group, gender, ethnicity and religion identifications that the participants filled after the focus group. It was designed to obtain general information about respondents. As it was shown in the table, some group members did not want to respond the question related to ethnic origin either by identifying themselves more as 'a global citizen' or simply checking the "none" answer in the survey.

In total, 25 people, who were Muslim COs and Muslim anti-war activists, came together in the different focus-group settings (1, 2, 3 and 4) in the above-mentioned dates. Each group consisted of 6 participants, except for the third one in which 7 individuals were convened. The focus groups 2 and 4 were homogeneous, meaning that the groups contained only Muslim COs. Although the groups 1 and 3 also included Muslim COs, as it was indicated in the above table, these groups were designed as the mixed ones, namely, coalescence of Muslim COs and Muslim anti-war activists around the same table to allow within comparisons between the two groups of people. The reason behind the formation of mixed groups was to elicit additional insights from the interactions among respondents given their different self-declared group identifications. However, it is also significant to note that Muslim anti-war activists used the ‘anti-war activism’ as a self-identification for themselves which diverges them from Muslim COs solely on the basis of their non-declared CO. They were as a group of people declared their support to Muslim COs’ resistance by challenging both religious and nationalist valorization of the military duty.

The participants were determined on the ground of their ideological and identity-based belongingness to Islamism to understand how they perceive and react to the instrumentalization of religious nationalist discourse, especially in light of the Operation Olive Branch. Focus-group setting formed for this research was essential to comprehend how participants, given their shared Muslim identity, challenge the religiously infused security framework either by resorting to similar or different discourses. Therefore, the goal of this field is not to portray a representative miniature of all COs’ and anti-war activists’ views and perceptions, but rather to project diversity and overlap of opinions amongst the Islamist COs and anti-war activists with regard to the topic of discussion.

On the request of most informants attended the group meetings, the exact sites where the focus groups were conducted remain confidential. However, the focus group meetings were held in Balat and Bakırköy districts of Istanbul upon the request of participants. This was the first time for me to build trust and rapport with participants given our mutual agreement on meeting in safe, quiet and less distractive place for the comfort of all of us. As another way of building reciprocal trust and comfort between participants and myself, first I used my personal networks, stemming from my previous research in the field, in some NGOs and human rights organizations located both in Ankara and Istanbul to contact ‘gatekeepers’, who have known and worked with Muslim COs and anti-war activists in different platforms. Since research participants, especially

Muslim COs are not visible actors and are hard to find given their past and present encounters with punitive mechanisms such as fine and imprisonment, the role of ‘gatekeepers’ was crucial to reach out to them. Briefly, I used purposive sampling through benefiting from the snowball technique, in other words, utilizing the network of a group of people who are in contact with research participants.

Before entering to the site, I conducted a pilot test in Istanbul with a group of five people to control the quality and clarity of questions, which are planned to be asked to the real informants in the field. Additionally, this was also a test for me as the moderator and facilitator of group discussion to see whether I am capable of keeping people focused on the discussed subjects and generating productive group discussions by making the opinions of all heard. In return for the feedback⁴⁸ of the participants right after the pilot focus group were completed, the questionnaire⁴⁹ were revised. As part of the general procedure before starting to collect data, I included the ethical procedures approved by the SU’s Ethics Board. I submitted the ethics form to eliminate any risks or discomforts which can be associated to the participants, me as the researcher and also the research itself. Similarly, I also prepared the Consent Form to inform the participants about the purpose of the study and type of questions that they will be asked, as provided in the Appendix II.⁵⁰ The most important part of the consent form was to clearly declare how the anonymity and confidentiality based on personal identification of participants are to be ensured in the context of given study. Additionally, participants were asked to put their signatures along with their initials to the form to illustrate their participation is voluntary.

Having completed the legal procedure to conduct this research, the steps and processes about to inform participants proceeded as follows. Firstly, participants were informed at the beginning of each focus-group meeting that their identities will remain anonymous. Therefore, the aliases were used rather than their real names in the statements quoted in the analysis part of the study. After participants were informed that their presence is not obligatory, the ‘exit’ opportunity was provided to all participants either at the beginning of the research or throughout the group interviews. As it was highlighted before, focus-group setting provides a relatively flexible and interactive environment to

⁴⁸ The feedback mechanism was nurturing for me given its contribution to my learning process in developing skills to ask right, unbiased, non-leading and not double-barreled questions. As an exemplification of it; a few participants of the pilot study found some of the vocabularies such as ‘governing elites’ (*yönetici elitler*) unclear and academic by asking “who they are”. In lieu of this word, I added the term ‘politicians’ (*siyasetçiler, siyasiler*) to make the question clearer and understandable. This practice was invaluable for me to learn the way to elicit the right and detailed information from respondents.

⁴⁹ For the list of questions in Turkish, please see Appendix I: Focus Group Questionnaire

⁵⁰ For the Consent Form in Turkish, please see Appendix II: Consent Form

participants both in answering the questions and responding to other participants. Due to the time limitation, participants were asked to use time-span from three to three and a half hour efficiently for the group discussion. Based on participants' permission, all group discussions were audio-typed and then transcribed verbatim as word documents. As the group-based research setting was enabling participants to discuss the same topic simultaneously, the informants were actively listened to be sure what they tell and in response to whom, by also taking notes on all non-verbal reactions. As part and parcel of the fieldwork, it was significant to give a complete picture depicting the way how participants communicated each other.

The questions that were asked to participants were indeed based on the following themes: (1) what they think about the compulsory military service, (2) on what grounds they define themselves as Muslim COs and Muslim anti-war activists, (3) how they interpret culturally diffused norms such as 'nation-in-arms' (*asker millet*), 'army as the hearth of prophet' (*askerlik peygamber ocağıdır*), and so forth, (4) how they as Muslims, interpret the political elite's religiously infused security discourse and (5) whether they see any relation between this rhetoric and the Operation Olive Branch. The same questions were used in each focus-group meeting not to distort the comparability of data at hand across focus groups. In case of ambiguity in what was meant by participants, the context-specific probe questions were asked for clarification. The questionnaire was prepared in accordance with the standards of semi-structured interviews⁵¹ which enabled me to ask open-ended questions to participants to get detailed and context-rich answers. Even though the questions were prepared beforehand, the flexible structure of semi-structured interview allowed me to pose new and insightful questions to participants when they highlighted other significant points which are not listed in my questionnaire. This in turn helped me a lot to generate more comprehensive field study given participants' mastery in the context of their own experiences and perceptions. Moreover, recognizing participants' own agency in building more specific arguments on the top of my questions enabled me not only to understand problems in-depth but also to generate new ideas and themes which may need further academic investigation. In shorth, in all group meetings, I just took over the role of debate moderator with the least interference.

⁵¹ The formulation of semi-structured interview questions is discussed by Leech et. al (2013) in the following way: starting with general questions (demographic and identification questions); formulating questions from general/simple to specific/complex ones; and asking least sensitive questions to the more sensitive ones to keep questions in order.

5.2. Limitations

I initially planned to reach out to more Muslim COs and anti-war activists with a total of more than 30 individuals to conduct five focus-groups. One of the women with whom I was in contact via a friend of mine refused to get together for this study by saying that “I am fed up with these ‘thesis things’, I am not interested in being part of these things anymore.” Additionally, my thesis subject was perceived as an area in which people feel insecure to talk about. Therefore, one of the major limitations for this research was based on my inability to reach more participants, which in turn affected my observation on potential variations and similarities across focus-groups. Besides people’s initial negative reactions to the research, similar problems also had occurred when I was organizing focus-groups. One of the primary reasons for such inconvenience is that after we came to consensus on the time, date and place in which the group will convene, two of the respondents, who are friends of theirs, declared that “they are not indeed suitable candidates” for my research. In what follows, they stated that “we are not identifying ourselves as Muslim COs anymore” so that “there is no use for you even if we physically attend the meeting”. It showed me that friendship relationship among people, especially between the two, sometimes played a negative role for this study by discouraging or at least reducing incentive of a person in case his/her friend does not want to be part of it. Other discouraging obstacle for me was not to be capable of achieving gender balance given the fewer number of women participants in focus-groups. I was not able to find enough women to speak with since most of them with whom I talked a couple of times were unwilling to be part of the study given the changes on their perspective of Islam and being a pious Muslim woman. Besides the above-mentioned reactions that I got from people, lastly, a few Muslim COs did kindly refuse my invitation just because they did not want to reminisce their past distressing experiences and they wanted serenity in their private. Concisely, it was hard to both find and bring people together for this research.

There were also some other limitations which were rooted in the nature of focus groups where multiple actors and identities were present concomitantly. There was no discernible discomfort and tension observed in the groups in general. However, only the focus group 1 had relatively experienced an interpersonal tension in the form of verbal disagreement between the two participants (between the participant aged from 18 to 25 and other aged from 36 to 45), which was majorly because of the age difference. The

reason behind the interpersonal difficulty between the two mainly stemmed from the fact that as the group discussions became heated, the elder one expected from the younger to speak mannerly and not to cut the elder's sayings while he was talking. Based on the stated inconvenience above, the group interviewing was not completed on time, but instead, it almost took four and a half hours. This made also transcription process more difficult and exhaustive for me due to the overlapping talks between the participants. As part of the similar problem, it was sometimes hard to transcribe the conversations amongst participants when they used Islamic terms in Arabic, or when they referred to the specific Islamic concepts that I did not have linguistic and conceptual familiarity with. As a consequence, transcribing voice memos became more time consuming given my considerable attention to find the real meanings of the words or phrases used by participant either by searching or asking them. In general, the data analysis part of the research was demanding. Since focus-group environment provided me with inclusive and rich qualitative data, analysis part required a tedious work in terms of transcribing, coding and interpreting data. Given the difficulty of extracting overlapping and divergent themes both within and across group discussions, it was difficult to disentangle what the data is revealing.

6. DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter has two primary objectives. First, my purpose here is to provide both summary and analyses of the focus group discussions to reflect overlapping and divergent perceptions of the Muslim COs and anti-war activists on the following issues; (1) CO and anti-war activism as a religious praxis; (2) Defying exploitative use of religious & nationalist political discourse; (3) Critical reevaluation of the Afrin Military operation from the security perspective; and (4) Cases of ambiguity: religious CO an individualist or a collective movement?. These themes were inductively extracted from the data encompassing collection of concepts, values and metaphors which were commonly used by the participants during the group meetings. The cases, where there were slight disagreements or the use of argumentative language to challenge another participant's claim either within or across group discussions, were identified under the aforementioned themes. However, secondly, cases of ambiguity will be provided in order to portray the overall comparative analysis of the group discussions. This part is essential to grasp what kind of themes and arguments raised by participants made complicated to reach an agreement on the single axis.

Before turning into the closer examination of how the religious resistance either in the form of CO or anti-war activism relates to the previously mentioned themes, it is necessary to make a brief explanation to clarify the overall objective of the data analysis. As it was shown previously, the current government has long been valorized the use of both Islamic and nationalist discourse in the military by rendering the military service as a genuine indicator of pious and patriotic citizenship duty. Hence, it is quite anticipated to see COs who are opposing the compulsory military service on the secularist grounds given the intertwined relationship between the militarism and religion. Quite separated from secular COs, the cases of Muslim COs and anti-war activists are puzzling due to their religiously oriented refusal of the military service. Therefore, it is significant to understand the rationale behind the Islamist CO and anti-war activism as a contested

sphere in the current political system in which Islamic political and military-laden rhetoric has gained prevalence. It is my argument that relatively new scholarship on the Islamic grounds of CO and anti-war movements lacks in eliciting intellectual, philosophical, humanitarian and political positions of these devout counter non-state actors. Given this paucity in the literature, this chapter not only aims to give voice them to talk about the problems related to their lives, but also to understand how they use religiously oriented discourses to (re)evaluate the role of religious nationalism on the issues related to the military and security policies of the state.

6.1. CO and Anti-war Activism as a Religious Praxis

6.1.1. Focus Group 1: A group of Muslim COs and Anti-war Activists

The discussion topic on Muslim CO and anti-war activism provided participants with a venue in which they clarified their identities and the reasons for why they are against the compulsory military service and wars in general. Despite participants' different personal identifications, the diversity in the group was appreciated by all participants with a great excitement and curiosity. In fact, all the group members declared that they saw each other as part of the same resistance movement. This was the first instance where I saw the strong emphasis on solidarity and group-based support between the participants on the basis of their shared Islamic identity. Although the group was designed as a mixed one, meaning that three participants were Muslim COs (Doğuş, Ersin and Halim) while the other half consisted of Muslim anti-war activists (Hasan, Rukiye, Özgür), they had no difficulty in reaching on the single axis, that is the refusal of soldiering duty and bearing arms are the sacred things to do in the life of a Muslim.

When participants were asked to define themselves along with their both moral and political grounds shaping their objections to the military service and war, Doğuş, a Muslim CO, started talking first by describing the reasons behind his religiously oriented CO. Doğuş made the explanation below not solely to explain himself but also to make clear the idea that all Muslims should act only in accordance with the dictates of their conscience and faith rather than of the commands of the military or the state:

“CO is to live in peace by ending human resource of wars. I am a faithful individual and I believe that the military service is a terrible thing to do for a Muslim. It has no place in our religion. In Islam, we do not recognize any authority or power but that of God. We believe that the sovereignty and property only belong to God (*mülk Allah'ındır*).” (*Doğuş, a male Muslim CO*)

From his view, it is understood that his Islamic undertones make the military and the state ‘illegitimate’ authorities given the supremacy of God. Doğuş’s anti-statist perception was also overt in his preceding expression regarding his attribution of sovereignty, property and power only to God. This stance explains well why he rejects the ‘compulsory’ nature of the military service since the soldiering duty is imposed by an ‘unrecognized’ authority on people as a citizenship requirement.

In the parallel way, Özgür, *a self-declared Islamist anti-war activist*, explained that struggling for right to CO should be an almost religious duty for Muslims by explicitly referring to the ‘sacredness’ of ‘freedom’ and ‘voluntariness’ in Islam. As Özgür stated, “there is no compulsion in the religion of Islam” (*dinde zorlama yoktur*), which in turn puts the principle of ‘volunteerism’ above everything including the concerns over ‘territory’, ‘land’, ‘property’ and ‘security’. As he claimed, the mandatory characteristic of the military service sharply contradicts with their faith given the Islamic valuation of volunteerism. In addition, even though the aforementioned terms such as territory and security are considered to be of utmost significance for both the Turkish military and the state, it is obvious that these are not concerns of Muslims unless there is no volunteerism in defense of those. Similarly, Rukiye (*a Kurdish woman and Islamist anti-war activist*) supported Özgür’s arguments by claiming that “a person is absolutely free to define his/her sacred in Islam as a God’s gift”. In light of her statement, it can be argued that the use of the right to reject compulsory military service is somehow a way of exercising a person’s freedom, which is, in fact, recognized in Islam. Given the strong emphasis by the participants on the forceful character of the army and soldiering duty for citizenry, Ersin described how the imagery of the military and soldiering has been shaped in his mind throughout his life:

“For me, conscription is a tyranny of the state which disregards my freedom, civil life and humanitarian nature of my existence. It reminds me the disciplinary despotism which tramples on my personality and fragility of my life with its combat boots. If someone is forcing you to participate in military

or to do something, how is it different from being enslaved?” (*Ersin, a Kurdish male, Muslim COr*)

For him, compulsory military service is something treating people as ‘slaves’ because of its limits on people’s freedom, liberties and other individual preferences. In that sense, by opposing to conscription, Muslim COs seem to demand liberty in terms of both expressing themselves and pursuing a personal lifestyle for their self-empowerment. In what follows, the notion of the “military discipline” was heatedly discussed by all participants through stressing its “illegitimate” and “unjust” character in relation to Islamist premise, that is, the rivalry of the military discipline to God’s ultimate authority. As it was argued by participants, all preferred to disobey the rules of the military and the state as a way of sacred practice rather than of submitting their will to the artificial and sacrilegious authorities. The overall reason why Muslim COs and anti-war activists do not want to be bound to any authority was explained by Hasan as follows:

“The army is like a big prison where soldiers are constantly surveilled by their commanders. Who are they? If we support the compulsory military service, we first challenge ourselves and then our faith and our philosophy of life, which prioritize free human thinking and act.” (*Hasan, a Turkish male, Muslim anti-war activist*)

That said, Muslim COs and anti-war activists take the preservation of their moral, religious and individual integrity and identity as one of the primary causes, which in fact constitute their resistance against the army and soldiering duty. In short, the military and its disciplinary practices on people are conceived by Muslims as ‘transgressive acts’ on their free human will, that is a sanctified and valuable thing in Islam.

After participants repeatedly linked Islam to the notions of free human reasoning and human will as the unifying theme of the discussion, they all argued that Muslim CO and anti-war activism are not only carried out against the compulsory military duty, but also they have broader objectives. Halim explained this very well in his below statement:

“CO means to be an anti-war activism for me. Wars are dirty; they make us violent; they militarize us; and most importantly they force us to commit what is forbidden (*haram*) in Islam. My friends, remember killing a person equals to killing the whole humanity in our religion. Therefore, CO as very sacred thing to be bound with, it refers to peace and peaceful coexistence. My Kurdish brothers are Muslims and I am, too. How can I dare to shoot at my Muslim brother in the battleground?” (*Halim, a Kurdish male and Muslim COr*)

From Halim's point of view, his CO and anti-war activism cannot be thought of as separate concepts from the long-standing Kurdish conflict in Turkey. As he clearly stated, being part of it, namely, 'the dirty and illegitimate war' is prohibited according to the Islamic values. In fact, the previous speech of Halim was appreciated by all participants with a great warmth as he tapped on a very significant issue for all, that is "Islam prohibits all Muslims from killing another Muslim". All participants agreed on the idea that instead of being a perpetrator of such sacrilegious act, they became anti-war activists and COs despite all the humiliating epithets such as "coward and traitor" directed towards them. As a further elaboration on the same issue, Rukiye declared that her anti-war activist stance and her refusal of the military duty stem from the fact that Halim exactly put forwarded. Additionally, she added that "my desire is to stop the reproduction of this culture of violence and blood, and to warn people that these wars are just products of the dirty political games". By stressing the importance of human-centered perspective in both Muslims' daily lives and in politics, Rukiye explained in her below speech that why people need a 'humanitarian' civil disobedience rather than sticking to any partisan ideology in Turkey's current "chaotic war environment":

"If the state wants human deaths, there are deaths. If it has a desire for peace, there is peace. We are people and we are more powerful than the state. There has been conflict and polarization in Turkey for years. However, the lands that the both sides are defending are bombed, people are mutually suffering and losing their beloved ones. What have we gained from this war environment? Think about the damage that has been done to the habitat, nature and the lives of human beings. Peace has no cost for us, and it enables us to live in prosperity. War has both physical and economic expenses and it endangers our future. In short, whose security, borders and territories are protected and from whom are they secured? We need to be aware that our lovely desire of peace is risked at the expense of wars and militarization."
(Rukiye, a Kurdish female and Muslim anti-war activist)

Since the participants raised the issue of 'war' particularity in the context of the Kurdish Question multiple times, it is clear that their oppositional views on that issue has an important role in shaping both their religious CO and anti-war activism positions. Also, their imagination on peace and security is closely related to the resolution of the Kurdish Question in Turkey to achieve both peaceful coexistence between "the two brotherly Muslim nations" and prosperity in general. Last but not least, participants also highlighted

the significance of the principle of “humanitarianism” in Islam, which in fact evaluates wars, peace and all other military (armed) campaigns from just a human-centered perspective. Despite the “false consciousness on Islamic tradition in which the military and war are assumed to be perpetuated and valorized” (*Ersin and Doğuş*), these religiously inspired agents defined themselves as “envoys” whose attempts to make “peaceful resistance and struggle” intelligible to the people within the Islamic community. An interesting discussion topic in this regard was the debate between participants on what war really means and why many Muslims living in Turkey lack in capacity to interpret their religious doctrines with a “benign intention”. Doğuş exemplified this by making the following explanation:

“There is no war in Quran but self-defense, and nobody is allowed to harm anyone beyond protecting his/her own self. Even in the case of self-defense, if the person attacks us with his/her hands, we as Muslims are obliged to respond in the same way instead of using weapon. There is a beautiful and just proportion in our religion. As I said before, there is no war in the Quran, but some insist that it has to be. Some say that ‘there must be a war in Quran since my sheikh (*şeyh*) told me that there are’...” (*Doğuş, a male Muslim CO*)

By confirming the statements of Doğuş on “the distorted and speculated interpretation of Islam by so-called religious authorities”, Ersin continued on the same subject by arguing that “Yes, there is no war, but a fair ‘struggle’ against the unjust and aggressive one”. Participants in general preferred to use the word ‘struggling’ instead of using the term ‘war’ to be sure that ‘the proportion’, in other words, a fair way to respond to an attack or attacker, is protected and respected in any environment where Muslims may need either to protect themselves or to take life of another.

In overall, the dialogue and discussion between the participants revealed the following conclusions. First, compulsory military service throws Muslims into the dilemma between their own faith, and statist and militarist practices given their self-declared identification as being only the obedient servants of God. The military and its authority are perceived as incompatible with Muslims’ way of living since the military’s disciplinary practices on conscious human beings contradicts with God’s ultimate authority and sovereignty over them. Therefore, one of the strong unifying themes among all participants is their collective and strong adherence to the following Islamic notion, that is the valorization and sacredness of the lives of individuals and their liberties. Furthermore, the ‘Kurdish Question’ emerged out as a naturally occurring discussion

phenomenon from the interactions amongst participants. This further shows how difficult it is to detach Muslims' perception on the Kurdish Question from their both anti-war activists and COs positions. Therefore, it makes also clearer that participants' descriptions and definitions on peace are very much condoned with the peaceful resolution and end of the violent conflict between the Turkish state and the PKK (*Partiya Karkeyrên Kurdistan; Kurdistan Workers' Party*). Without doubt, the army and soldiering duty are perceived by participants as one of the core reasons contributing to the continuity of the conflict between the "brotherly peoples". Hence, they define their refusal of fulfilling the military duty as much more sacred than being the "pious heroes" of this "dirty war".

Regarding how the group conversation proceeded in general, the only problem I encountered was the interpersonal discussion between Doğuş and Ersin, which was in fact dealt in the limitation section of the research. However, the problem was solved after a small break so that the momentum of the group discussion was not disrupted again.

6.1.2. Focus group 2: A group of Muslim COs

The group meeting started with a very welcoming conversation between the participants, who know each other for a long time as close 'friends and companions'. All of them showed a great interest in discussing things with their friends given that they have not long been convened in such environment. In comparison to the focus group 1, group 2 included merely Muslims COs with four men and two women. To give a general idea about the tone of the conversations during the meeting, I can say that there was no antagonistic and confrontational style of speech observed between the participants. In the case of potential disagreements, participants asked to each other some 'rhetorical questions' or questions leading others to think deeply. Participants expressed their own opinions in a direct and kind way when they were replying back to each other. As I have stated before, participants generally chose not to use informal but friendly way to address each other in their speeches such as calling a person whom they are talking as "brother, sister or dear friend". It is my argument that this naming mechanism amongst participants helped them a lot in easing any potential tension when the topics discussed became heated. Another reason encouraging a prolific group discussion may be because of the following fact mentioned by Ali; "I am glad to be here with you all, we all have been

inspired by each other while struggling, especially I have learned a lot from my brother Alper (a *Kurdish Muslim COr*)”. It shows that participants show respect to the presence and ideas of each other given their shared past experiences.

Similar to the focus group 1, this group was also asked to define their identities along with their political and moral reasons, which in turn make them to declare their religiously oriented objections. In answering to the question, participants mostly referred to compulsory military service, the nature of the Turkish state and army. Kılıç started conversation by expressing his thoughts on the compulsory military services as follows:

“Everyone here thinks that compulsory military service should be removed. Compulsory military service is a form of slavery and it is a forced labor. It is imposed on people without taking their will into consideration. We are vaccinated during our childhood for our own health, or we start to go to school at a very young age. But these are done to protect us, this is understandable. However, compulsory military service is imposed on adult people who are at their 20s or 30s, and it disrespects people’s wills and freedoms.” (*Kılıç, a Kurdish male, Muslim COr*)

The emphasis on ‘individual freedom’ and ‘compulsory military service as a slavery’ was also repeated by Kılıç as it was in the focus group 1. This can be interpreted in a way that Muslim COrs highly prioritize their individual subjectivities, beliefs and practices in contrast to the military regulating and disrespecting individual agencies. What is more, another interesting point raised by Cihan, a *self-declared Muslim COr*, who asked his friends to think about the following reality; “the state obliges men to do military service under the guise of voluntarism”. The argument raised by Cihan was significant to comprehend what Muslim COrs essentially object to. As participants discussed in the focus group 1, the recognition of the supremacy of volunteerism in Islam puts compulsory military service in a position where individuals’ wills and choices are just disavowed. By following the same line of argument, Alper described the military service “as a tool of pressure” making people follow only the state’s lead. In his further elaboration, he declared the reason why the military and soldiering duty are not of interest to them as Muslim COrs:

“The military as a concept may mean much for many people who do not have

a problem of attachment and belonging to either the state or the army. But for people like us, people who feel disassociated and disenchanting, these concepts, left being sacred, have no meaning at all.” (*Alper, a Kurdish male, Muslim CO*)

From Alper’s statement, it is seen that Muslim COs position themselves in a distinctive way even in today’s political conjuncture in which religious and sacred value of the military service has been strongly emphasized. Although he disaffiliates his Muslim identity either from the extant political system or from the society in general, its relation to the compulsory military service was vague. When asked, he made the following clarification to detail what he thinks about the military and compulsory services (*zorunlu hizmet*) in general:

“In my opinion, in social organizations such as states or nations, compulsory social services become inevitable processes. I think a compulsory service should exist where social belongings exist. The problem for me is, however, limiting these compulsory services to military service, and leaving no room for alternatives.” (*Alper, a Kurdish male, Muslim CO*)

The rest of the group disagreed with the argument raised by Alper and they kindly wanted him to pay attention to the following facts:

“We do not believe that a compulsory service can be imposed on people just because they are living in a community with other fellow habitants. To put it simply, we are paying tax to the state every day. So, if there is an obligation or a necessity, we are fulfilling it every day in a material manner to the greatest extent possible. In addition to that, we are also fulfilling our responsibilities against other people during the normal course of life, and we should. People who are conscious and feel responsible towards the world they are living in are fulfilling their responsibilities.” (*Kılıç, a Kurdish male, Muslim CO*)

On Muslim COs’ refusal of the draft in a more detailed way, Kılıç made the following explanation, especially making references to Alper’s comments. “Since we never defined ourselves as being soldiers by birth, a Turk, male or a Sunni Muslim, but only Islamists, we do not feel any devotion to the military duty”. In this sense, the military service is neither complementary nor a requisite for them given the discrepancy between their faith and the compulsory nature of the military. From their views, it can also be

interpreted that Muslim COs approach negatively to the aforementioned attributes such as ‘soldiers by birth’, ‘Sunni Islamism’ and ‘Turk’ as these are the “privileging” constructs of the state to make Muslims obedient citizen-soldiers. When asked, on what grounds their Muslim identity and politically inspired CO are related to each other, first Kılıç and then Cihan replied me back accordingly by stressing the secular structure of the state and military:

“We follow a belief where there is no room for any other mundane authorities. Therefore, military as an institution, which is packed with secular values and assumptions, could not be related to either our religious beliefs or our physical and biological existence.” (*Kılıç, a Kurdish male, Muslim CO*)

“Muslims take an uncompromising stance against the state’s secular, nationalist practices and its favoritism of particular groups. Muslims have objected to these for a very long time. So, we need to think about the stance of Muslims on compulsory military service in relation to their discontent with other issues in Turkey. For example, radical Muslims have already had problems with the republic and its constitutive principles. Military service enters into the picture as an obligation that is forced upon all of us. We are rendered obliged to fight for a state in which we do not believe, promote its values which we do not follow. We, as Muslims, assume that fighting for something in which we have no faith does not suit to our beliefs.” (*Cihan, a male Muslim CO*)

Following their preceding speeches, all group members were nodding to endorse their sayings. As one of the commonalities, Muslim COs expressed how becoming a soldier in the army of such a state, whose laws and values are not accepted by Muslims, is improper and impossible for them. Since “the army of the Republic” still claims to have a secular identity, all participants criticized the use of their sacred religion for the militarist and nationalist ends of the state. The previous dialogue between the participants was additionally important to indicate that the Islamist people in Turkey, including more radical ones, have been in a disagreement with the state for a very long time due to its usage of religion in pursuing its objectives. In fact, all participants commonly problematized the way the ‘sacredness’ of the military duty is constructed and used in defense for the secular constructions.

By defining themselves as pious Muslim women, Senem and Lütfiye also joined the causes of their “Muslim brothers” by declaring that the compulsory military duty in Turkey, whose constituting principle is *laicism*, is something that Muslims never

recognize with respect to their volunteer and total submission to God. This suggests that religious objection to the secular state and the military is not merely a concern for men identifying themselves as Muslims, but also for women who embrace Islamic worldview as a cornerstone of their religious resistance. This also presents the reality that religious form of CO came to the fore not only as being male-dominated area of discussion, but also as a public debate in which Muslim women's voice can be heard. All in all, the state and the army were portrayed as an impediment for pious Muslims in terms of fulfilling their fundamental religious duty, namely, voluntary and total submission to God, considering "the military's chain of command and non-Islamic structure of the state" (*Senem and Lütfiye*). By making overt references to the "morally degenerate character of both the state and army", Ali further explained why he took Islam and his Muslim identity as a constitutive part of his CO declaration in the following way:

"To kill, to die, these things matter to us. We are ordered not to kill. It is one of the Ten Commandments (*on emir*). It is extremely important for us. It is said that taking one's life unjustly equals to killing the humankind. For this reason, war waging should be based on just grounds. The state commands to die for it, to kill the enemy. It only looks out for its short-termed national interests. This is the point where my perspective diverges from that of the state. I look at the world from a completely different perspective. I relate to the nature, universe, to God in a different way. And the ones who force me to die and kill do not have these concerns. Thus, dying and killing in a war waged by an institution in which I have no faith in is completely fictitious. I am obliged to be just by virtue of my beliefs. I do not recognize any institution who prevent me from being just in line with my religious convictions." (*Ali, a male Muslim CO*)

His statement implies that religious CO is not about the refusal of the compulsory military service *per se*, but it is also about being a 'just' person by resisting and struggling against unjust wars. Ali's explanation further evidences that his interpretation of Islam starkly diverges from the prevalent Islamic understanding in which Muslim identity is connected to serve for the defense of nation as a necessity of both being pious and patriotic compatriots of the state. Additionally, all Muslim COs in the group agreed with Ali's inclusive explanation putting Islam and the principle of justice at the center of the lives of all Muslims.

The emphasis on justice seems also closely to be related to 'the glorification of human life' as Islam forbids Muslims to kill a person unless there is a just war. The opinions of the focus group 2 on the glorification of human life seems one of the common

themes with the group 1, but with a slight difference in light of the ambiguity on what just war is. Since it is one of the core themes to understand how Muslims COs' perceive Islamist anti-war activism, I asked them to elaborate the term 'just war' for further clarification. As a response to my question, Ali made the following explanation:

“The just war is the war, which is subjugated to the will and commands of God, rather than of dirty politics like what the Turkish state and army do. There may be just wars which require you to fight to protect your dignity, women, children and all the others who are victimized and exposed to injustice (*zulüm*). On the other hand, unjust war is something making you hypocrite (*münafık, iki yüzlü*) when you are forced to do something you do not believe.” (*Ali, a male Muslim CO*)

In Ali's view, the war practices of the Turkish state and the army are portrayed as unjust in respect to its relation to the politics, which in turns made him dissident against both the military service and the military as an institution. Although he did not totally refuse to participate in any war, he further elaborated his previous comment by adding that “it is my wishful thinking that wars should not occur since victimized become more victimized in today's each and every war.” Given the prevalence of injustice(s) all around the world, all participants made a call for not only Muslims, but also for the whole humanity to ‘have good conscience’ to question for whom and for what purposes they are fighting. In general, participants discussed the issue of just war in the context of “fighting against injustice” and “self-defense” by markedly stating that their perceptions and visions on the just war are sharply different from the Turkish state's and army's militarists fights for power and nationalism. To exemplify what unjust war is in a more concrete way, Kılıç gave the below example:

“When we are performing our ‘iftar’ (*breaking the fast after the sunset*) with the news such as “he is a soldier now”, “he was martyred” and “a so and so number of terrorists were killed”, how can we expect from that war to be just when our brothers are dying? When do we give up to race and to celebrate deaths? When do we abandon conservativeness, militarism and statist arguments? This rhetoric, language and cruel clichés that are used in the news are nothing but the exaltation of nationalism (*kavmiyetçilik*) that was trampled by the Prophet.” (*Kılıç, a Kurdish male, Muslim CO*) (*italics added*)

In this regard, the unjust war was depicted by Kılıç over the Kurdish Question in

Turkey as it was discussed before in the focus group 1. Similar to the arguments raised by the participants of the group 1, Kurdish and Turkish people were also portrayed here as Muslim brothers whose desire is to live in peace. Besides depicting the “war” itself as unjust, also the use of nationalism and militarism were represented as ‘unjust’ instruments bolstering “the conflict” and “victimhood” rather than of uniting people on the just grounds. By affirming the speech of Kılıç, Senem, a pious woman COr, lastly explained why they as Muslim COs “refuse to embrace statist, militarist and nationalist interpretation of Islam” by referring to the “painful consequences of the war waging against the Kurdish population” in case when the “state endorses nationalism as a dominant ideology”. Following her concluding remark on nationalism, all participants showed a gratitude towards Senem in regard to her considerable attention to the fact that “nationalism is forbidden in Islam.”

Overall, the tone of the conversation amongst the participants was almost stable during the meeting even though participants sometimes used an argumentative language to challenge another’s claims. Indeed, as a response to Alper’s distinctive position and perception on the ‘compulsory services’ as an unavoidable way of serving the nation, the rest of the group seemed to form an intra-group alliance at least at the level of oral argumentation. Put differently, except Alper, other members of the group were unwilling to serve in any ‘compulsory service’ which has either connection to the military or not. This further illustrated how the notion of volunteerism is acclaimed by participants as it is one of the crucial Islamic norms. Last but not least, ‘fighting in the secular state context as pious soldiers of the army’ was one of the things that Muslim COs objected. This theme also constituted an important referent object of the following discussions which will be scrutinized in detail in the next session.

6.1.3. Focus Group 3: A group of Muslim COs and Anti-war Activists

Similar to the focus group 1, the group 3 was also formed as the mixed one including both Muslim COs and anti-war activists with a total of seven participants; three women and four men. Compared to other focus-groups, the group 3 relatively had more women participants. Additionally, it was a bit difficult to start the discussion since participants looked like more enthusiastic in talking to their ‘friends’ rather than of

answering my questions at the beginning. After a while the discussion gathered momentum because the questions asked to the group were related to their personal identifications on the grounds of Muslim CO and anti-war activism together with their own perceptions on the military service and conscription. Since the group setting was comprised of participants' own friends, they seemed comfortable in representing their own agency while sharing their knowledge and experiences on proposed questions.

Quite similar to the first two focus groups, the group 3 made a substantial emphasis on the “glorification of human life” and “humanity” in reference to their shared Islamist identity. Therefore, they generally conceptualized the compulsory military service and its implications on people from a humanitarian lenses by stressing the need for “a society which values and prioritizes life of humankind over dying and killing”. In this regard, all participants agreed upon the idea that their refusal of performing in the military and of killing a person firstly stemmed from their respect to a person's right to live without being subjugated by anybody. As they all commented, trampling on a person's right (*kul hakkı, rightful due*) is the most serious of all sins in Islam and it is punished with God's wrath. As a corollary to that, they depicted the army and the state as “rivals to God” given their “commands”, “authority” and “right to say over the matters of life and death”. Therefore, as the group discussed, nobody in this group could effort to commit such a “sin”. In short, the first three groups were unified on the ground that an individual life is sacred, thereby it cannot be sacrificed either for the defense of the state or for any militarist ideal.

To show why the idea of a being pious soldier in the army, which in fact forcefully recruits people, is far away from him, Emre made the following explanation:

“[...] In our past to present history, there is one strong tradition indicating that the state acts like a god (transcendental state, *tanrı devlet*), meaning that state-authorized actions were seen as God's commands to which all people must obey. As a result, going against the state is seen like opposing to God, which indeed is the biggest sin in Islam. In short, this entrenched mentality causes a subliminal message to appear in the minds of people whenever military service and CO are discussed.” (*Emre, a Kurdish male, Muslim CO*)

Based on his statement, Emre is completely against the tradition using religious imaginaries to render the modern Turkish nation-state as sacrosanct, which made the state as something religiously venerated rather than of religion itself. It is his implicit argument that being opposed to the state is wrongly formulized as a formidable sin; hence, most of

the people including Muslims stay in silence and perform their military duty as they are afraid of committing what is forbidden. In short, Emre's above excerpt explains why the act of objection to the compulsory military service is out of question for many people believing the duty is obliged by the state, whose presence and orders are accepted as sacred. By following Emre's ideas, all group members agreed upon the idea that participation in military life in 'a state-favored way' is neither "just" nor "sacred" for them. They also declared that "attributing religious, divine and authority-laden characteristics to the state and army besides God himself" is overt manifestation of *shirk* (*şirk*). Duygu (*a Turkish-Kurdish, Muslim CO*) further described the act of "Islamist CO as a revolutionary and sacred struggle" given its emphasis on "disobedience to the aforementioned spurious authorities".

After Duygu started particularly talking about CO, the group discussion kept its focus on the positions of Muslim COs for a while. To my surprise, she explained the reasons why Muslim COs and anti-war activists pose more serious threat than other COs to the current political system in which Muslim identity of people and Islamism have gained more visibility, especially during the era of the *AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, Justice and Development Party)*.

"Muslim COs are generally perceived as 'apostates' (mürted), meaning that we are seen as betrayers in their Islamic community given our starkly different interpretation of religion. We are conceived as dangerous even more than anarchists, atheists and other objectors defining themselves on different grounds. We are blamed to be reformists and religiously tolerant and even for producing a new religion. We are violently rejected by the current political system as we are perceived as a grave threat. I am answering why it is the case; we are challenging their fake religious arguments which are constantly nurturing their monopoly over sovereignty, power, authority and capitals." (*Duygu, a Turkish-Kurdish female, Muslim CO*)

"I cannot hold a gun and I have to be against wars and all these militarist things with my presence and soul. I have to resist to it as a Muslim woman and a human. If I do not resist, who will? Death of a human being is an unbearable burden for me if I cannot prevent it. I know that some of my friends have problems with the secular army. Then we should ask those people whether they would go to war and bear a gun if there was an Islamic state and army... They might be COs but only in a secular state. As a woman who witnessed the war [*refers to the war between the state and the Kurdish guerilla*] in this country, I believe that anti-militarism is a very valuable thing

that we all should hold onto.”⁵² (*Duygu, a Turkish-Kurdish female, Muslim COr*)

In her speech, Muslim CO was in general defined as a much more contested sphere within the CO movement along with their more ‘otherized’ positions. They are not considered to be genuinely Islamic by the current government since they challenge prevalent and normative understanding of religiosity either refusing to participate in any state-led martial valor or rejecting to be pious and patriotic citizens of the state. In short, Muslim COs, as religiously inspired non-state actors, are in conflict with the government, whose Islamic foundation is found neither legitimate nor credible by themselves. In her rendering, far from being compatible with Islam, the current political conjuncture was characterized to be solely concerned over its material needs such as power and capital. Secondly, Duygu intermingled her Muslim COr identity with antimilitarist and anti-war activist principles, which are so sacred to be forfeited in defending the nation or the state regardless of its secular or Islamic feature. Duygu also seems to look at some Muslim COs suspiciously if they have no concern to fight in the Islamic state but the secular one. If this is the case then Muslim COs put themselves in a contradictory position with respect to ‘antimilitarism’, which is regarded as the foremost motto of CO in her opinion. As seen, Duygu presented a different approach pertaining the anti-militarism as a core of the CO movement. While listening to the explanation of Duygu on antimilitarism, it was interesting to observe that other women in the group showed a great enthusiasm towards the discussion on antimilitarism from a gendered perspective. Some of the cases discussed on this topic are provided as follows:

“Since children and women get harmed, I am opposing against even the ‘w’ in the word ‘war’. From the point of a woman and a mother, I am against all sorts of violence even from the tiniest to the largest amount. Violence and militarism are not keys to solve the problems we have. I wholeheartedly believe that militarism should be replaced with a humanitarian and civilian lifestyle as it is supported in Islam. We should interpret Quran in a way that we can create our own utopia where people live in peace and love.” (*Nurten, a Turkish female, Muslim anti-war activist*)

“As an activist, I defend being an anti-militarist person till the end. I wish for this as a woman because women are the ones who become the victims of all

⁵² In her further explanation, Duygu stated that “the war waged against the Kurdish guerillas by the Turkish state” is one of the primary reasons rendering her antimilitarist and anti-war activist. Similar to the other groups focusing on the Kurdish issue, Duygu also objects to the application of the “state’s war practices” to Muslim Kurds, which indeed violates Islamic norms and values.

wars. People come back home with so many psychological problems after the wars and the mothers, sisters and wives are suffering from the results of these mental breakdowns. The heroic stories of men are always told after the wars but the stories of women and the misery and poverty that they go through are never told. Look at the histories of all nations, you cannot find any source that underlines morality of all those ‘almighty’ nations gained their current powers by shedding blood. That is why a religious person has to be anti-militarist.” (*Hayriye, a female Muslim anti-war activist*)

As perceived by Nurten and Hayriye, there is a close link between gender and militarism in a way that the latter one ascribes certain roles to women, such as being sacrificing ‘mothers’, ‘sisters’ and ‘spouses’, who are either suffering from their losses or disastrous consequences of wars. Their narratives clearly represented that although women and children are considered to be void subjects of militarism and wars, in fact, they are the ones who suffer the most even in the after-war period. Besides making an emphasis on ‘maternal’ and ‘emotional roles’ of women with regards to the military, there was another theme displaying the intricate relationship between gender and militarism. That was voiced by Duygu as follows:

“I am not a person who needs to be protected and not with tanks and weapons at all. I do not want to be rewarded with heaven in case my beloved ones were fallen. I do not want to raise militarist children and then say that ‘he died for the love of country’.” (*Duygu, a Turkish-Kurdish female, Muslim COr*)

Following her foregoing speech, Nurten and Hayriye joined the cause of Zeynep in the sense that “exclusionary practices of the military” perceive women as just someone to be passively guarded since they are not conscripted. Some of the women participants, namely, Hayriye and Nurten turned to men in the group and asked the following question from a more Muslim perspective: ‘we all know that Islam requires to treat women and men as equals, if we need to be protected by you guys, isn’t it unjust for us?’ (*giggling*). All men in the group actively listened to the arguments raised by women, but they remained in silence without either making counter-arguments or sharing their explicit supportive positions. However, their gestures, (*they all nodded and smiled*), were implying that they were personally on the women’s side. Thus, women’s perception on militarism was one of the heated discussion subjects in this group and it kept reoccurring whilst the meeting. In sum, women’s repeated references to militarism are efficacious to

recognize how complicated a notion the militarism is in women's lives. Since militarism is never simply perceived to be a soldier in the army, women succinctly reject divisionary discourse and practices of militarism, which expect women, as docile and patriotic mothers and spouses, to take part in either war-making or in serving the military-nation by raising next generation of soldiers. The former discussion was very significant in terms of challenging the taken-for-granted intertwinement of masculinity (manhood) and militarism by revealing the fact that militarism equally, and even more exaggeratedly, influences the lives of women. Most importantly, this was the first group discussion amongst women participants eliciting substantial intersections between militarism, women's gender and religious identities.

Then participants moved the conversation forward on the need for anti-war activism as an ethical stance through especially defying today's unjustifiable facets of 'wars' which are not consistent with their Islamic beliefs and practices. By defining war, they also acknowledged that the past wars in reference to the era of Prophet Mohammad were used to be starkly different from today's one since the latter one is only caused and determined by 'material needs'. Some of the examples on the conceptualizations of wars are as follows:

"All wars without an exception turn into a political game where selling or buying weapons has gained dominance so that fighting for a nation became ridiculous. It is now a war of private companies which use their economic powers to dominate one another and abuse the oppressed folks to gain even more power. It is the war of capitalist entrepreneurs and as a mother, I do not approve our sons going to war to fight for these companies. They are not becoming heroes; they are becoming victims of this greedy system and it is not rational or acceptable that our kids die for the interests of the wealthy." (*Nurten, a Turkish female, Muslim anti-war activist*)

"Claiming that we could raise 1 million soldiers in a year with the budget of 40 billion dollars is a fishy story. The real aim, as we all know is to raise 'slaves' that serve the intentions of the powerful." (*Serkan, a male Muslim anti-war activist*)

"Today, wars just start and end only by pushing a button. A man from anywhere in the world merely taps on a button and destroys all his enemies. The war and military technology have developed too much in the world, so that taking a gun or a sword in your hand and fighting with soldiers are no longer a necessity, even it is meaningless to do it." (*Adnan, a Kurdish male, Muslim anti-war activist*)

The remaining answers of other participants also revolved around the following war descriptions; “cruel”, “shedding bloods of innocents”, “forbidden”, “no relevance to our faith (*itikat*) “disproportionate use of means”, “political and capitalist interests”, “material benefits” and “pleasing someone’s ego”. Here, it is an astonishing fact that participants voiced anticapitalist values in their critiques of wars in tandem with their Islamic interpretation. In light of their assessments, both the modern Turkish nation-state and its army prevented to claim religious legitimacy for launching a war to achieve its ‘political goals’. What participants said also avowedly illustrates that the means used by the state and the army are neither “proportionate” nor “just” because of the deaths caused by them. Most importantly, the military practices (means) of the state were problematized by the group due to its submission to the ‘worldly’, namely political ends. The Turkish state’s and its army’s preservation of the interests of powerful and wealthy make ‘killing and dying for this system’ pointless. In sum, from the perspectives of the Islamist COs and anti-war activist neither defining the Turkish state and army as the agents of ‘sacred war’ nor attributing the military service the role of holy duty hinges upon statutory Islamic foundations. The common tendency of the group is to reject the use of the purity and strength of their faith (*iman*) in fostering militarist ideals and fights of the state.

All in all, the group was relatively more comfortable in representing their agencies in comparison to the other groups not only through their actions including their facial and bodily expressions but also through their meaning-making practices. The transitions between their arguments were more logically connected since they never lost the ‘stream of thought’ when they were building their own arguments on what others previously said or replying back to each other. Given my observation, there was no intra-group alliance formed during the group dialogue instead they were all able to engage in an integrated and meaningful conversation. Women’s participation in the former two group discussions appeared to be less visible, but since three women participants were present in the group 3, they more actively engaged in the group dialogue. This was important to grasp how Muslim women incorporate a gender perspective and voice to the women’s CO and anti-war struggle against militarism given the unfortunate fact that only few Islamist women COs exist within the broader CO movement in Turkey.

6.1.4. Focus Group 4: A group of Muslim COs

The group 4 was the last focus group that was conducted with only Muslim COs. A total of 6 participants attended the group meeting with 5 men and 1 woman. Unlike other groups which were comprised of acquainted fellow participants, most of the participants of the group 4 did know each other, at least in person. Since some of them did not know one another, they first seemed partly unsure about my intention in gathering them together due to the politicized nature of my research. However, the group 4 setting provided me with a comparative leverage to understand whether it is also possible to yield valuable and context-rich information from a group consisting of strangers along with acquaintances rather than of merely friends.

It was surprising that participants firstly stated either it is religious (*imani*) CO or not, CO is essentially a political stance which does not necessarily make people feel attached to any other ideology. By contrast, as they argued, ‘the religion itself is the only thing which shapes their whole lives and bases of their actions’. Before beginning the discussion, they wanted to make a clear and direct link between their CO positions and Islam. This makes obvious that the group rejects any other personal identification or ideology to define their act of objections. In this respect, their faith (*iman*) is influential in their distance to both the state and military. When participants were directly asked to define how they perceive the military and compulsory military service in general, they came to consensus on the idea that “the military is where injustice(s) abound with its uncountable and different forms.” Bektaş gave more concrete examples on this matter as follows:

“The military is the place where there is humiliation, curses, oppression, violation of human rights...Therefore, serving for the army which produces death and tears is to replace all the beauties in the world such as love, solidarity, conscience, and life for a while or for perpetuity. This is not only insincerity but also an atrocity for somebody and also loss of self-esteem for a person. If we are humans, we need individuality, freedom and creativity. We are not machines or puppets. I do not want to wear the military uniform, have same-type haircut and not to order and be ordered.” (*Bektaş, a male Muslim CO*)

From the response provided, witnessing such injustice(s) in the military seems to eventually cause Bektaş decide not to be part of it. In addition, given oppressive and limiting practices of the military and militarism reshaping individual identities in a certain way, similar to the other groups, Bektaş also prioritized the rights and freedoms of

individuals. Put it simply, he made a strong emphasis on the need for bringing individuals back along with their creative and innovative capacities into the picture as part of a civilian life. This could also be read as a demand for emancipation which enables a person to pursue his/her own 'self-realization'. To add an additional perspective on how the life of a person is affected by the military, Ahmet (*a Kurdish Muslim CO*) requested from others to consider that "it is hard to think the army merely as an institution providing security, it is the place where people are indoctrinated and encountered with the hardest face of the state along with its weapons, tanks and dictates." After participants discussed why they want to 'free themselves from the constraints of the militarist system infiltrating every corner of life', Bircan, a pious woman CO, turned to others and said; "I think we should look at the military service from the perspective of the state as well. Like, how does the Turkish state view the military service?". Here is the rest of her speech:

"Let me explain what compulsory military service is. It is the explicit expression of the identity of the Turkish state and society which had chosen to fight instead of furthering art and science in order to identify itself. This represents the underdeveloped character of the state and society in general. Military service is acknowledged in our society as the one and only way to serve the nation, thereby, it has been called as a national and sacred duty. However, the way we serve the nation varies such as writing a book, opening an exhibition, sweeping your own front door and so forth." (*Bircan, a Turkish female, Muslim CO*)

Her speech on 'alternative ways of serving the nation' reminds what Kılıç said in the focus group 2. As one of the common grounds of all focus-groups, the participants harshly criticized the way the military service is seen as the only way through a person can serve for the interest of his/her nation. As a consequence, they all objected the frame of the military service as a sacred duty. All in all, as they argued, the army could not simply be perceived as an institution. Rather than of providing security for the nation and people, the compulsory military service is utilized to keep nationalist, conservative and Sunni structure of the state in secure. In other words, it serves as a societal engineer.

As seen in Bircan's speech, how the military and militarism are perpetuated is also closely related to the historical character of the Turkish state. In the similar vein, other participants in the group also focused on the embedded and everlasting "warlike" mentality of the Turkish state, which has made militarism and warlike spirited people an inseparable part and parcel of the culture. When the discussion moved towards how the state defines itself by using what sorts of attributes, Ahmet made the following explanation:

“There is a war in Turkey between the state and the Kurdish people. Since I do not want to be part of either side of this conflict, I declared my CO on the basis of humanitarian reasons. Normally, we are living in a culturally very rich and multi-layered society. However, Turkey is thought to be the state of Turks and Sunni Muslims. The concept of ‘one nation (*millet*), one language and one religion’ is not for us. The state wants to keep this structure for eternity and securitizes its artificial citizenship duties including the military service by even threatening us with ‘civil death’, repetitive imprisonment and fines. Even if we accept to become a soldier, in fact, we will not protect the people of the whole nation, but only secure the state and keep its identity safe.” (*Ahmet, a male Muslim CO*)

As seen in his above excerpt, there are themes such as the ‘Kurdish Question’ and ‘institutionally privileged Sunni Islam’, which were also constantly repeated by the participants in other focus-group meetings. In this sense, Ahmet’s speech illustrates the way he disassociates and dis-identifies himself from the constructed attributes, namely, ‘singular’ identification of the state over one nation, one language and one religion as constitutive elements of the national and state identity. His above-mentioned emphasis on ‘the war between the state and the Kurdish people’ stimulated the group to discuss this in a more detailed way due to their perceptions on “the unjust war launched against Kurdish Muslims”. The Kurdish issue was one of the themes that dominated discussion throughout the group discussion. The participants defined the “the war” as an “unnamed” and “unrecognized” one by also voicing their concerns about the continuity in “structural insecurity, underdevelopment and denial of cultural, social and political rights of Kurds” in the Kurdish region. As a result, once again like what the other participants argued, the participants in the group 4 also defined the CO as follows; the best way to stop war is to reject to participate in.

To explain his personal relation to the notion of CO and even what performing in the military meant for him in more detail, İbrahim told the whole group his personal adventure, eventually resulting in his CO declaration. Yet what differentiates İbrahim’s case from the stories of the other participants is that İbrahim’s initial stance on the compulsory military service was starkly different given his nationalist and militarist roots. As he admitted, although he first enthusiastically attended the army for fulfilling his soldiering duty, what he encountered in the barracks led him to put a radical distance between himself and the militarism as an idea:

“CO is the thing that caused me to confront myself for the first time. It enabled me to discover my humanity. It means self-purification for me. I have started my life from the place where militarism and nationalism are glorified and accepted as a lifestyle. Therefore, while many people were deserting from the army, I was one of the militarist persons who run for performing in the army to kill my Kurdish brothers. Now, as a person committing only to his faith and its ethics, I can say that all the militarist ideals that we were memorized and inoculated are unrealistic and illusion. I saw it in the army.” (*İbrahim, a male Muslim COr*)

“[...] An individual living in Turkey is burdened with capitalist, militarist, ethno-nationalist and most importantly biased Islamic propaganda. When your personality is tamed with these so-called values, you have no choice left in your hand. Therefore, although the current system forces you to obey the rules, CO enables you to exist with your own rights and preferences. I called this a self-realization of a person in which all the imposed norms and identities die but you live freely.” (*İbrahim, a male Muslim COr*)

It is significant to note that İbrahim was the only one in the group 4, who declared his religiously oriented CO while performing in the military. In this regard, it seems that his personal encounters with the military service together with his Islamic background was determinant to transform him as an anti-militarist and anti-statist activist. Even though there is a divergence between İbrahim and the other participants in the group in terms of performing in the military, there was no difference observed in their speeches related to their discursive disavowal of religiously valorized militarism. Right after İbrahim told his own personal experience of how being COr is also intertwined with being an antimilitarist individual, Ünsal made the below explanation by making explicit references to the Islamic grounds of his CO declaration:

“As a religiously motivated COr, I define CO as a very sacred disobedience against the state’s legal monopoly over killing human beings. What we are targeting is not the unity and integrity of the nation, but we want to deplete the state’s monopoly over the lives of humans. We defy the concepts of making people dead and being killed since only God has this prerogative.” (*Ünsal, a Kurdish male, Muslim COr*)

Although there are some differences in the ways the two participants told their approaches on CO, it was evident by the tone and content of their speeches that both of them sharply break away from both the hegemonic conceptions of soldiering, war and Islamic interpretation of militarist tenets. The common trait in their CO declarations is not only their refusal of killing human beings but also refusal of the state’s right to have a

monopoly over it. In sum, the statements by İbrahim and Ünsal give a clear example of why Muslim COs get religiously motivated to declare their objections and resist against religious appraisal of militarism and the compulsory military service.

Some of the responses discussed so far also introduce another important issue indicating how COs and CO in general are construed by the state as something ‘targeting the unity and integrity of the nation’. As perceived by the state, COs as anti-statist and antimilitarist counter agents are considered to be an ‘existential threat’ given their defiance on the cultural and historical codification of conscription as a necessity of Islamic, nationalist and citizenship duty. This was a relatively novel theme emerged out from the discussion and interaction between the participants in focus group 4. Although how the COs get labelled by humiliating epithets such as ‘coward’ and ‘traitor’ was discussed in the focus group 1, it is a fresh discussion topic to fully relates to how this naming mechanism involves into the COs’ personal lives.

Both Ahmet and Ünsal stressed the state and societal level pressure on especially Muslim COs. As they argued, the current government is precarious despite its espousal of Islamism as a dominant state ideology at least in theory. In their views, the current state ideology “ostensibly” favors Islamism so that they still have no enough space to live freely as Islamists. As a natural result of this, their religiously oriented CO receives more attention based on their refusal of the military custody contradicting with the state’s Islamic discourse and practices. In that sense, all Muslim COs seem to want to position themselves in a radical distance from the AKP’s ruling in which Islamism is supposed to be much more solidified. The reason why Islamist COs create discomfort in general was elucidated by Ünsal as follow:

“We are living a country where Muslims constitute the majority. Therefore, if the Muslim COs and their stances are spreading like a disease, the state loses its first and foremost apparatus of sovereignty and power, that is the army and the state’s monopoly on killing.” (*Ünsal, a Kurdish male, Muslim CO*)

While all participants thought that struggle for having a right to CO must first and foremost concern of all Muslims living in this country, they draw attention to the fact that how much it would be dangerous for the state if the right to CO is accepted as a just a human and religious right. In reference to the foregoing speech of Ünsal, Erman (*Kurdish Muslim CO*) asked the following ironic question to emphasize how much the state would feel

threatened or insecure against the collective resistance of Muslim COs: “if we all as Muslims fight for right to CO as a religious obligation, then who will defend their sacred state and nation?”. In sum, struggling to have a right to CO seems as an important issue for Muslim COs to deconstruct the ethno-national, religious, and citizenship-based conceptions of the militarization, which are indeed imposed by the state as artificial ascriptions. Taking into consideration that the embeddedness of the compulsory military service as a citizenship duty is heavily indebted to people, who believe its sacredness, then defying the concept itself from a Muslim perspective challenges the state’s long-standing mentality of militarized citizenship, namely, creation of pious and patriotic citizen-warriors. On that subject, an interesting example was brought forward by Ünsal:

“As you know the famous boxer Muhammed Ali as a Muslim and an American citizen rejected to be conscripted during the Vietnam War. He paid the heavy price for his rejection. He was brave enough to say that ‘no I am not joining you’. The same attitude should be taken by Muslims in Turkey as well. If you say that this attitude is just and permissible in America but not in Turkey, then you are inconsistent.” (*Ünsal, a Kurdish male, Muslim CO*)

His above-mentioned example was appreciated by all group members in terms of illustrating how citizenship linkage between the state and an individual is not enough to compel a person to decide killing someone or participate in a war. As they all argued, for Muslims, it is more than hard to be convinced to do such a thing. As a result, responses given under the concept of Muslim CO show how ‘saying no to the state on the subjects of the military duty and wars’ is so precious in a life of a Muslim.

Indeed, similar to some of the other focus groups, participants in this group also established powerful alliance in terms of adopting similar arguments when they analyzed and debated the relationship between the compulsory military service and their Muslim CO identity. Indeed, discussion dynamics and prioritized issues did not much vary from group to group, but in the group 4, Muslim COs were relatively more touched upon the Kurdish issue during the meeting by referring its different aspects. Interestingly, the group 4 was the first group entering their own life stories (*İbrahim’s narrative on his military duty*) to the conversation. This was a bit interesting and surprising for me when we take into consideration that the group did not only include acquaintances but also ‘strangers’ as well. Although nearly half of the participants were silent as active listeners at the beginning of the discussion, İbrahim’s own story gave courage others to share their own opinions and perceptions. This shows me how the shared personal stories are part and parcel of creating

and facilitating common discourse in reacting to a certain thing.

6.2. Defying Exploitative Use of Religious & Nationalist Political Discourse

In this part, participants were asked to describe the Operation Olive Branch and the role of soldiering in the military operation from the perspective of their religiously inspired COs and anti-war activist stances. In fact, there was no swift and incremental discursive difference in the speeches and statements of participants in addressing the questions related to the operation and military service. Both within and across groups, all participants approached to the use of religious and nationalist sentiments in portraying soldiering duty and forming security discourse on the Operation Olive Branch as a misuse of religion in the politics. When they referred to this common theme, they mostly stayed focused on the religious terms such as ‘martyrdom’, ‘jihad’ and ‘just war’ by explaining their Islamic roots and providing examples from the religious documents. As one of the common themes of the group discussions, participants also overhauled the role of religious nationalist roots of the AKP play in the ongoing armed-based struggle in Syria.

The focus group 1 started group discussion by arguing that ‘politicians, namely the AKP officials used religion and its divinity in the Afrin operation for their political gains’. Ersin, *a self-declared Kurdish Muslim CO*, especially blamed the government by stating that “today’s state officials carelessly impoverish and instrumentalize religion to achieve their ambitious geographical claims in Syria similar to what their ancestors did in the past”. In his further elaboration, he also paid close attention to the “paradoxical relationship between religion and the state and army”, which, in fact, became more than evident during the Afrin operation:

“On the one hand, laicism is embraced as a principle by the guardianship of the army. On the other, the autonomy of the Religious Affairs is denied, and the state tries to keep religion under control. We see both the apostles of the secular army and the army as a hearth of the prophet... There is neither a pure secular nor a pure Islamic army in Turkey. These conceptualizations are just part of Turkey’s identity-based contradictions which have been continuing for almost one hundred years. This became even more obvious in Afrin. The Turkish military entered Afrin with the Ottoman March (*Mehter Marşı*) by arguing that the march is the sound of Turkey’s footsteps.” (*Ersin, a Kurdish*

male, Muslim COr)

The primary marker of his speech is based on the problematization of using religion in the secular context of Turkey. As seen in the statement, the hybridity of the state and army, meaning that confluence of Islamic notions and secularism, was not approved by him. One interesting point raised by him in the foregoing excerpt is to show how the state's militarist and religious rhetoric have been inspired and borrowed from the past by making explicit reference to the Ottoman March which was played as a military march in lifting courage of soldiers against the enemy. In fact, all participants differentiated themselves from the AKP's conventional wisdom on and practices of Islamist nationalism as they thought that the party was acting as the spearhead of Ottomans. All participants defined the operation deployed by Turkey as a continuity in "tradition of conquest" (*fetihçilik*). In fact, Turkey and its army were depicted as the heir of Ottomans who followed conquest-based practices. In a similar vein, Özgür, *a self-declared Muslim anti-war activist*, criticized the use of Islamic interpretation of nationalism by the AKP in the following way:

"Nationalism represents a person's belonging and devotion towards a certain group or a land. This makes people feel more powerful and power is one of the emotions that Islam pays close attention to under the content of worshipping idols. In Islam, we know these emotions as the following: *al-Lât* (ultimate authority), *al-Uzza* (power) and *Manat* (money). These are the alive idols and emotions in peoples' selves, and we, as Muslims, should keep ourselves away from these appetites. These idols are present in Afrin; the government is the authority; nationalism is the power, making people aggressive, and money is the war itself. This is not the way of living in solidarity and cohesion." (*Özgür, a male Muslim anti-war activist*)

Özgür's response delves deeper into designating the details of the Afrin operation by identifying who the ultimate authority is in launching the operation, what sorts of motivation were there and even what was at stake in the Turkish military campaign in Syria. As argued by him, the operation was deployed as a one-handed military campaign under the ideological hegemony of the AKP who uses nationalism in bolstering its own political power and material objectives. All participants put forwarded the idea that nationalism is not something complementary to religion, but in fact they compete with each other since 'nationalism (*kavmiyetçilik*) prevents Muslims to live in peace and coherence by producing subordinated and victimized 'others'. In brief terms, they

perceive nationalism as an ideology detrimental to Islamism given its competence with God's sovereignty in dividing and disintegrating people over the poles. To explain the ways the state ideology puts religion to the service of nationalism in achieving militarist ends and in producing both pious and patriotic soldiers, Ersin made the following explanation:

“Performing in the military means being a patriotic, right? This is what we have been told during the Afrin operation. Let me give you an example what we understand from patriotism by showing the poem *Amentü* (*Amentü*) written by İsmet Özel. “If so, let's my brother join our hands. Infidel Greek hanged its flag in mosques and everywhere. Let's blast bombs so bells are silenced everywhere”⁵³. This is the example of the most dangerous and influential ethno-religious militarism. Today, we are experiencing similar version of it.” (*Ersin, a Kurdish male, Muslim CO*)

It is significant to note that İsmet Özel, a prominent intellectual figure having religio-nationalist worldview, perceived Turkishness as equal to Islamism as inseparable ingredients of people's identity living in the Turkish society. In that sense, Ersin's view was significant to understand where they, as Muslim COs and anti-war activists, stand vis-à-vis the idea of 'religious nationalism', which is present in the political discourse of the governing elites during the Afrin operation. It seems that opting for such religious nationalist identity and discourse creates more than one problem on behalf of them. First, some participants defied the state-led conceptualization of 'nationalism' which attributes "Sunni-Islamism" a determining role in defining "who and what the nation is" (*Rukiye, Ersin and Özgür*). As all participants argued, when "Sunni-Muslim" notion is accepted as an overarching identity, "the Kurdish people and Alevi community" automatically turn into others who the nation needs to be protected from, as in the case of the Afrin operation. In sum, participants challenged the symbiotic relationship between Turkishness and Islam as it failed to recognize and embrace identity-based complexity and richness in both Turkey and Syria. As a result, as they argued, from an Islamic perspective it is unjustifiable and improper to be pious and patriotic soldiers on behalf of either the "state-defined" religion or state's nationalist objectives.

In addition to criticizing religious nationalist infused party policies of the AKP during the course of the Afrin operation, another most outspoken critic of all participants

⁵³ “Öyle ise gel kardeşim hep verelim el ele. Kafir Yunan bayrak asmış camilere her yere. Patlatalım bombaları çanlar sussun her yerde.”

is based on the political abuse of religious terms such as martyrdom and jihad and also the Qur'anic verses. As Doğuş as a Muslim COr argued, the term martyrdom is used by politicians to create “a culture of obedience (*biat kültürü*) and sacrifice” in order to orient more people towards the nationalist ends of the state. In the similar vein, Hasan (*a Muslim anti-war activist*) argued that martyrdom discourse is “insidiously” used by the political elites to maintain the human resource of the army and the state in the following way:

“I believe that even if we will have robot soldiers in the future, the state would still prefer to send people to the wars since it needs human deaths to secure its continuity and reproduction with the help of agitation. We have always been told that we should be glad and be proud of when our beloved ones were martyred since God’s heaven awaits us.” (*Hasan, a Turkish male, Muslim anti-war activist*)

As seen from his explanation, martyrs were depicted as soldiers who have been constantly sacrificed for fulfilling self-oriented needs and interests of the state. In that sense, the term martyrdom seems to be more associated with meeting the nationalist objectives of the state as being dutiful citizens. To show the discrepancy between the state’s use of martyrdom discourse and its “authentic” religious connotations, Doğuş further made the explanation below:

“Martyrdom actually means witnessing God’s greatness and almighty (*Allah’ın yüceliğine tanıklık etmek*) with a person’s own existence, soul and faith. It has nothing to do with the Turkish army, weapons, tanks and so forth. However, everyone becomes a martyr in our country. For instance; our revolutionary martyrs are also immortal (*gigling*). In fact, it is not something to be proud of since you will die at the end of the day. This just shows how the notion of martyrdom is exploited like any other religious terms.” (*Doğuş, a male Muslim COr*)

Thus, not only Doğuş but also other participants in the group problematized the political use of martyrdom exalting the notion of ‘sacrifice’ which was also one of the central themes in depicting sacred role of the soldiers in the Afrin operation. As other participants in the group claimed, if attributions of martyrdom aim at bearing witness of the power of the state, nation or the army but not to the God’s power, such attributions are unjustifiable and unacceptable in Islam. However, the usage of Islamic discourses of martyrdom at the institutional level was not the only thing the group problematized. Weaving together their own Islamic interpretations of “jihad” and “just war”, Islamist anti-

war activists and COs also presented a powerful criticism of the Afrin operation in which the governing elites claimed to use their right to “self-defense” in the name of jihad and religion. In this regard, Özgür made a detailed explanation to show how the notions of jihad and self-defense were instrumentalized by the state officials to foster military obligations and to revitalize religious sensibilities of people:

“The only just war is *jihad* in our religion. However, *jihad* means to struggle against injustice (*zulüm*) by using the proportional and fair means, meaning that through conquest (*fetih*) of the heart and minds of people by speaking softly. The term *jihad* should not be associated with occupation of territories or an offensive assault on the lands and rights of people. *Jihad* also can be this. If you are under attack and your people are suffering, then as Muslims we are obliged to use the right to *self-defense* to stop injustice. This right can only be used within the borders, where there is an injustice; it cannot be extended into another’s home. You cannot attack a country or a person even if you feel that other side has a threatening potential to attack you at some point. Unfortunately, politicians use these very natural religious terms to render their political messages and claims accessible to all people who are expected not to question this.” (Özgür, a male Muslim anti-war activist)

That said, Muslim COs and anti-war activists questioned whether the Afrin operation was either a jihadist war or self-defense given the fact that their Islamic conceptions and understanding of jihad and self-defense starkly diverge from the state’s use of such concepts. Based on their theological assessment, jihad and self-defense are accepted as one and only ‘just struggle’ to protect the rights of the aggrieved (*mazlum*) without interfering in another’s homeland or rights. In that sense, as they argued, Turkey’s military operation in Syria lacks in religious legitimacy and even legal causes although the state officials continually utilized the religious notions in describing the objectives of the operation. Another interesting observation was Özgür’s usage of the term ‘conquest’ as synonym of winning one’s heart with gently speaking. It is worth noting that his perception of ‘conquest’ is completely different from the portrayal of the Operation Olive Branch in which the word conquest was used as a harbinger of Turkey’s entrance to the region of Afrin, as it was stated in the president’s official speeches. All in all, all participants put forwarded the idea that use of religious terms like jihad and martyrdom by the political elites merely aims to create legitimate grounds for the Afrin operation regardless of its sacred purposes.

Criticism of the use of religious concepts such as jihad and martyrdom, legitimizing the war practices of the nation-state was also cornerstone of the resistance of

many Muslim COs in the focus-group 2. As they argued, all around the world, states have made use of religion and utilized religious values for their own policies. In light of this fact, they seemed not to be surprised with the use of religious values in the context of the Afrin operation since they saw such instrumentalization process normal and commonplace especially in the AKP's era. In sum, if there is a war and the state needs a legitimate ground, it seems that Islamic notions are evidently used as a political strategy to reinforce national obligations such as the compulsory military service. Alper, a *self-declared Kurdish Muslim CO*, explained why the Turkish military and state discourse involve such religious concepts especially in the context of armed-based conflicts as follows:

“Here is my opinion on martyrdom, veterans and jihad. All states around the world are using these concepts to legitimize their actions. You cannot tell anyone that I have sent you to war to fight for me and my own interests; you died for nothing, in vain. You have been a victim of my ideals. You cannot motivate anyone into fighting for you by saying these. There is not any other way to make people fight for you other than using these concepts such as martyrdom. Even the people who do not believe in afterlife use the word martyr because it evokes immortality. Even the leaders who have no religious beliefs use these words as well.” (Alper, a *Kurdish male, Muslim CO*)

As seen in Alper's foregoing excerpt, the notion of martyrdom is operationalized by the state elites and the military as a powerful discursive instrument which even provides people with psychological relief when the lives of people are sacrificed in performing the military duty. The need for such spiritual support and religiously infused political rhetoric has been especially manifest since the onset of the Afrin military operation, given the fact that many were fallen throughout the operation. In sum, martyrdom discourse is instrumentalized by politicians to persuade and convince people to the extent that either being a martyr, or a veteran is a justifiable reason to be part of a sacred nationalist struggle. In reference to what Alper said, Kılıç, a Kurdish male and Muslim CO, further stressed the reality that common Islamic values such as ‘martyrdom’, ‘jihad’ and ‘just war’ are misused and misunderstood since we use “the state” as “a nearly godlike entity and subject in our conversations”. Since the state-society relationship in Turkey has been formed in that way, as Kılıç said “people are terrified by the state, and they yearn to serve it as pious and patriotic soldiers”. As a corollary to it, as Kılıç claimed “the state, in turn, utilizes every material, including people's sacred and untouchable faith, it can utilize”. Since group discussion stayed heavily focused on the state and how the state uses the

religious symbols and cult of the fallen ones as a way of sanctifying its political agenda and objectives, Lütfiye as a Muslim COr further incorporated her critical stance towards the state and its militarist institutions:

“Afrin operation is just a manifestation of nationalist and militarist ideals of the Turkish state. However, Afrin is not an exception, we saw myriad of war campaigns in that country. Militarism in Turkey as an ideology benefits the most from the harmony between the official religion and the religious culture of people. Therefore, for a Muslim living in our country, the war becomes something holy. However, peace is the only holiest thing that should be embraced by everyone regardless of region, religion, and race. Why is it like that? Why do Muslims who live in those lands prefer war over peace? We do not question religion, the government, property ownership and gender roles in the environment which we were born in. We also insist on not seeing how much our faith is distorted in the name of the state, nationalism and its militarist objectives.” (*Lütfiye, a female Muslim COr*)

In Lütfiye’s view, the features of the Turkish military and the state, namely, its militarist, nationalist, patriarchal, and capitalist facets preclude them from being associated with an agent of any holy or sacred duty. Since she believes that religion is distorted and manipulated to consolidate and actualize Turkey’s ambitious militarist and nationalist claims at both ideological and action level, Muslim COrs strongly oppose the nationalist and militarist interpretations of jihad and martyrdom. Unsurprisingly, the state-favored version of Islam, in other words, official religion of the state and Islamic valorization of militarism and war-making practices are rejected by Muslim COrs. By targeting the state and the army nationalizing and militarizing religion, Lütfiye also made a strong emphasis on peace which is overlooked by Muslims, albeit “peaceful essence of Islamic faith”. To show how the state and its other institutions have been actively involved in perpetuation of a militarized understanding of Islam, Senem, an Islamist woman COr made the following explanation:

“We see that exploitation of religion is very common in our culture, look at the speeches of politicians, TV series and fatwas of the Religious Affairs. They are all using religious concepts and values as it is the case in the usage of martyrdom, veterans and shahadat in Afrin. Although we are conceived not being directly affected by the militarism as an institution, we are highly influenced as being mothers, sisters and wives. There are mothers saying that ‘if I have one more son, I will give him, too’ For that reason, both the CO and conscription should be discussed by the mothers whose sons lost their lives in vain in these military operations and they should exclaim that ‘I cannot give my son to you’”. (*Senem, a female Muslim COr*)

Her above explanation showed the fact that Muslim women COs defined themselves as the active agents of the CO movement by rejecting to sacrifice their beloved ones for the sake of the state's nationalist and militarist projects. In this regard, Muslim women COs declaring their CO seems an important source of support for men, who are enlisted and lost their lives in the state-led military operations. Referring to conventional wisdom on 'self-sacrificing mothers', who willingly send their children to the military and even hot war zones, Senem's above-mentioned point further stresses how much change in the discourse of soldier mothering is needed to stop reverence of dying and killing in defending the nation. In that sense, the crafted roles for women as being sacrificial mothers and spouses were rejected by pious women COs through demanding a substantial change in the political rhetoric of martyrdom and sacrifice, which are used by the elites as a powerful political narrative especially in the moments of crisis. By expressing his opinions on how much the martyrdom and jihad are misused in the state and military-centered discourse, Ali as a Muslim CO reinterpreted aforementioned terms as follows:

“Dying is not a *shahadat* and martyrdom. We are at the stage that the mandatory military service only serves the state's ideology and our youths are dying for nothing. When the modern Turkish nation state produces Turkish-Islamic synthesis by covering the compulsory military service with Islamic notions, soldiering is seen as jihad. When dying is seen as martyrdom, military barracks become the Prophet's heart [...]” (*Ali, a male Muslim CO*)

Having critically elaborated the cursory and rhetorical use of religious values and concepts without theological depth and righteousness, Ali continued his speech by making explicit references to the Afrin operation:

“[...] Our religion commands us not to kill, not to massacre, not to plunder. On the contrary, it commands us to live, to sustain, to keep alive, and to have faith. If I fight someone, I cannot bring him the truth, either gently or by force. The truth is bestowed upon us, and we have the duty to reveal and share it in this world. I do not believe that waging a war in this or that territory is the way to do this. Waging wars, killing, slaughtering is not good. In this sense, I feel like we have to stand against all wars. During wars, the truth is killed, innocence is lost, people get brutal. If we want to become civilized, better and honorable; we need to keep ourselves away from wars, not to get involved in that brutality. Without any exception, we have to object to all wars. Those who are waging wars are selling arms, lands, and petrol. What do we want? We want to bring people the truth, justice, compassion, and mercy. The state is now linking the downturn of economy to the war that it is waging in another country. Would not it have been better if we kept away from war in the first

place? We ask whether this is the only way. We seek a different world; we try to put forward peaceful solutions. We are naïve in this sense.” (*Ali, a male Muslim CO*)

As seen in his first excerpt, Muslim COs have been long alienated from the AKP’s religious nationalist party vision due to their perceived distance to the state’s nationalist ideals. As a matter of fact, the AKP’s political ideology has been prominently shaped by the symbiotic relationship between Islamism and its conservative interpretation of nationalism (Saraçoğlu 2011/2). Muslim COs rejected any nationalist and militarist representation of the religious values by challenging the symbiosis between Turkishness and Islam. Religious and conservative interpretation of nationalism were scotched by not only Ali, but also by other participants in the group given the fact that Islamist nationalism, which is at the very center of the state ideology, is not a valid idea to be bound for Muslims. In this regard, it is significant to note that Turkey’s involvement in Syrian conflict with the Afrin military operation has also been portrayed as something in which Turkey tested its Islamic conception of nationalism. Since Islamist nationalism as a prevailing state ideology has reached its climax under the rule of the AKP, it was quite natural for the AKP to engage in some religiously oriented discursive maneuvers and practices to permeate this ideology to the masses during the course of the military operation. In what follows, Ali’s further elaboration on the Afrin operation illustrates why religious legitimization of the military campaign in Syria is in slippery ground in the eyes of the Muslim COs given its subjugation to the ‘politics’, ‘use of force’ and other ‘material benefits’. In brief terms, Ali clearly stated that “what war-wagers are offering and what Muslims COs are desiring are insurmountably different”, given the latter one’s strong imagination on ‘peace’ rather than of using armed forces and military campaigns as a means to address conflicts. Regarding the Afrin operation, only Alper (*Kurdish Muslim CO*) argued that it is hard to make a precise comment on the operation since we are not living in that region and the news coming from Afrin are two-sided and not trustworthy. Quite separate from thoughts of other members in the group, Alper overhauled the operation as follows:

“So, what is going on in Afrin? There are two things presented to the general public by the state authorities. First, there is cruelty in Afrin, and the Turkish army will stop it. Second, the Turkish army will prevent the Kurdish threat and a possible Kurdish state in that region. This second argument relates to Turkey’s security more. The former argument is a more every day one

whereas the latter is the continuation of a long-lived state security policy. The state's use of religious arguments there is understandable. Let's say there is a terrible war going on in Afrin, or in Damascus, or in Aleppo. It is a religious obligation for Muslims to go there and stop the war and bloodshed. Muslims can become involved in this war in a reasonable conjuncture. But if there is oppression, cruelty, bloodshed; Muslims can become participants or initiators in war to stop that cruelty, ignoring their own interests and benefits." (*Alper, a Kurdish male, Muslim COr*)

Although Alper thought it does not mean much to talk about Afrin in particular as being neither the first nor the last armed-based operation launched by Turkey, other participants in the group seemed to be surprised given Alper's speech on the objectives of the Afrin operation. Up until his speech, all Islamist COs made a statement on the similar lines during the group discussion when addressing the operation and its causes. Since the foregoing speech of Alper surprised everyone in the group, as they are known to be objectors of the nationalist wars launched by the Turkish state and its army, they constantly asked Alper for his opinion and clarification on the following matters:

"I agree with Alper on the point that Muslims should fight alongside the oppressed, to end their oppression. But, while the Turkish state seemingly fights for the oppressed, it also may be conducting secret and private agreements behind closed doors. We also should consider these, in my opinion." (*Cihan, a male Muslim COr*)

"(by strongly opposing to Alper) I think, believing that Turkey has entered Afrin to stop cruelty and oppression there and to fight alongside their Muslim fellows is at best, funny. It is not even a possibility. As other states, Turkey also has imperialist, regional interests by its nature. But for us, who see themselves as conscientious objectors, who find it unjust to label people as terrorists and wage war upon them, it is beyond nonsense. We only followed the news as people in the region reported them. Following the news from the Turkish media is not possible. Of course, religious sentiments were used during the Afrin operation. It is not surprising in an environment in which the media is concentrated around one idea and ideology. Probably similar discourses were utilized in the past by different governments, too. For example, during the Kardak crisis. So, Afrin is not an exception. However, to re-state my argument, the legitimation of Afrin operation is unacceptable for us. It is nothing but an illusion." (*Kılıç, a Kurdish male, Muslim COr*) (my italics)

"(directing the question to Alper) For example, we know that in Islam, testimony of some Muslims cannot be accepted if they are known to have deceived someone before. In a similar vein, if we look at the history of the Turkish republic, what it has done in the past ensures its future actions. We

need to question the actions of TC by looking at its past. We are Muslims and of course we cannot trust the testimony of the Turkish state on the Afrin war.”
(*Ali, a male Muslim CO*) (italics added)

As can be seen by the group discussion above, a common belief among the group members, except Alper, was that Islamist COs doubted both the religious and legal status of the Afrin operation. In reference to Alper’s above-quoted statement, other participants in the group criticized the operation itself which, in fact, launched by Turkey to pursue its enlarged material interests in Syria instead of protecting people who were victimized or securing Turkey from the threat of ‘terrorism’. In brief terms, participants described the Operation Olive Branch as a foreseeable result of the AKP’s ambitious geopolitical policy, which has been heavily shaped by the conservative interpretation of Islamism in order to prepare a legitimate groundwork of the operation at the societal level.

Similar to the previously discussed two focus groups, in the group 3, all participants’ oppositional views clarify that there is a misuse of not only Islamic values, but also Islamic identity of believers to make them obey the rules of the nation-state and the army. By explicitly referring to the constant ‘exploitation of their sacred values and faith’ by politicians, their rhetoric is commonly based on the rejection of what is imposed on them either in the cause of religion or nationalism. Given the political and manipulative use of religious values, the participants mostly focused on the exploitation of the term ‘martyrdom’ for the nationalist and militarist ends of the state. Both Muslim anti-war activists and COs criticized to attribute this religious and sanctified expression of ‘martyrdom’ to the ‘soldiers who lost their lives for fulfilling the selfish interests of the state’. By opposing to the portrayal of the ‘martyrs’ either in the state’s official discourse or in the media, participants defined the fallen ones as the ‘sacrificial people of the ones who is in power and who is sovereign’. Based on participants’ previous description, the political use of martyrdom discourse is just depicted as a tool to exploit people’s senses to especially convince soldiers’ mothers and fathers to mourn in silence in case of their losses. As an example of how this political usage is realized, Serkan, *a self-identified Muslim anti-war activist*, made the following explanation:

“Most of the parents, whose sons were fallen while serving in the army and participating in the war believe that their sons were martyred in defense for their homeland. These people sincerely believe this since they have been told and indoctrinated that being a ‘martyr’ is a great and honorable thing not only for their sons, but also for themselves. However, my grief is that no young

man wants to die in his 20s. After he dies, there is no use to have a sacred title or rank. I want all politicians and commanders to stop taking advantage of people's religious sensitivities. Do not force mothers and fathers who are in pain to be proud of for their losses since the time is to cry for them given their children died for nothing." (*Serkan, a male Muslim anti-war activist*)

The honorable ascriptions to the martyrdom were rejected by all group members. In addition to that, participants found these sanctified titles and ranks illegitimate in accordance with Islam. Another reason constituting one of the bases of their rejection is to "transform people's grief and deaths into a collective, heroic and pious spectacle (*piyes*)" by "forcing people not to cry and complain" (*Nurten, a Turkish woman and Islamist anti-war activist*). Problematizing use of the term 'martyrdom' in the political discourse seems to be just one part of participants' critiques since they were totally against the instrumentalization of people's religious values and beliefs, given the omnipresent distortion and manipulation on them. As an example of this, Emre (*a Kurdish Muslim CO*) and Emrah (*a Kurdish Muslim anti-war activist*) made the below-quoted explanations respectively, which indicate how much the religious idioms such as 'martyrdom' and 'jihad' are misused in the nationalist context of the Afrin operation:

"The word Islam itself derives from the word peace. As it was definitely declared by our holy book, if there is cruelty and injustice in somewhere and if women, children and men are begging there for a savior from God to rescue them; then, we are obliged to protect them by struggling, but we are forbidden to wage a war in the lands of Muslims. If we led to shedding the blood of other Muslims, how can we call ourselves as 'saviors' or 'martyrs' by committing an unjust and forbidden act? Also, the Turkish state relies on its use of coercion and occupation not only within its boundaries but also outside of the country defined by the National Pact (*Misak-ı Milli sınırları*). That is why Turkey is still present in Iraq and Syria through those military operations." (*Emre, a Kurdish male, Muslim CO*)

"What does jihad mean? It means effort. Effort to what? It is an effort to struggle with evil (*kötülük*). As the Prophet Muhammad says, we came from minor jihad (*küçük cihad*), and we should reach the greatest jihad, that is, the greatest effort, destroying the evil. As one of the hadiths of the Prophet's says that being physically strong does not make a person powerful, but the powerful is the person who is able to control his/her anger in case of crisis. This is the war and jihad! This is the greatest effort that all Muslims should pursue. Why are you still searching for others such as Kurds and other Muslims to wage jihad against them? As Muslims, the only 'other' that we should fight against is the one's temptation and evilness such as greed, passions, political concerns..." (*Emrah, a Kurdish male, Muslim anti-war activist*)

That said, Emre and Emrah clearly stated that religious foundation of the Turkey's military operation in Syria is unjustifiable for Muslims due to Turkey's engagement in the armed conflict with another Muslim community (Kurds) in the lands of other Muslims. In their views, a person precluded to be called either a martyr or a representative of jihad since the nationalist orientations and causes of the military operation do not rest upon genuine Islamic foundations. As they believed, the Turkish military's cross-border operation in another land is far from being a religious and jihadist war, given its violation of the obligations of jihad, in other words, otherizing and victimizing Muslims. It is also important to note that their imaginings on jihad are mostly interlinked with the 'war' waging against oneself and against one's temptation and weaknesses especially in exigent circumstances rather than of using force and power on another. As a result, all participants unified in their perceptions of illegitimate and unauthenticated utilization of sacred and religious norms by the elites in the face of an adversity.

Additionally, by referring to the 'coerciveness' of the Turkish state with respect to the previously launched cross-border military operations in the Middle East region, not only Emre but also other participants in the group defied the use of religious political rhetoric of the elites in maintaining their key geographical and political interests in Syria. As Serkan (*an Islamist anti-war activist*) and Hayriye (*an Islamist woman anti-war activist*) claimed, the elites' use of religious symbols and idioms is nothing but a good and strategic way to convince people do their military duties, especially in times of crisis. Serkan further drew attention to the reasons behind the Afrin operation as follows:

“Afrin operation is a political rent-seeking operation of the AKP. It is all about the AKP's in pursuit of political gains which is promoted on the pretext of the survival of state (*devletin bekası*). It is realized through abusing peoples' religiosity to become an active actor in the region. People are consciously numbed with the belief that they are killing and being killed in the way of God. This is just a deceptive Islamic coat which is dressed to the operation by the ones who want to create wars.” (*Serkan, a male Muslim anti-war activist*)

As seen, the governing elites' publicly performed use of religious idioms and symbols is not something that haphazardly occurs, but it is a consciously used political rhetoric not to lose conservative, in other words, religious base of the society in case of a military-based crisis. As all the participants stated religiously infused political discourse as

a novel strategy, and even as much a tactic used by the AKP to consolidate and mobilize people around the AKP's Islamist nationalist party project in Syria. To show how the AKP has used the power of religion and religious sensibilities of people as a brand-new strategy in fostering its party policies and objectives, my participants referred to the July 15, 2016 coup attempt as follows:

“What happened on 15 July 2016? We began to hear both the ‘Azan’ (*Islamic call to prayer*) and ‘Selâ’ (*Islamic commemoration of the fallen ones*) from all mosques nationwide. We saw the similar thing during the Afrin Operation and the mosques were ordered to deploy the *surah al-Fath (fetih suresi)* as a call for inspiration and mobilization. Do you know what this verse of the Quran really tells us? This is the call for a peaceful ceasefire in the time of Prophet, this is not a call for a war. But our devotional (!) people were convinced to celebrate the operation and soldiers when they heard the verse. This is because we do not know our own religion and the rulers are recklessly using religion for their goals.” (*Emre, a Kurdish male, Muslim CO*) (italics added)

As shown, citing the above-mentioned verse from the Quran came across as most anticipated thing during the course of the military operation as it is a customary policy of the governing elites in face of a danger. In brief terms, religious nationalism as an effective discursive tool put in the mission when necessary to mobilize and convince large segments of the society that the Afrin operation was inevitable and necessary to secure collective, in other words, common national interest. Similarly, other participants in the group put forwarded the idea that the elites succeeded in mobilizing and stimulating people around their own goals by invoking such sacred idioms such as martyrdom, jihad, and holy war, and by citing the Qur'anic verses. This illustrates how much the political rhetoric of the elites on security matters is sanctified in a broader way. In sum, as they depicted, incorporating religious and nationalist sensibilities of people into the political discourse was vital to depict the military operation in Syria as a national problem that in turn required unconditioned and undisputed support from the public.

In a similar vein, participants of the focus group 4 criticized the political use of martyrdom and jihad discourses in a particular context of the Afrin operation as they believed such usage of religion distorts what Islam really is. As they stated, this version of political Islam under the hegemonic rule of the AKP is not the true religion that Muslims are obliged to be committed. Criticism of the political and exploitative usage of religion to legitimize the statist and militarist goals and wars of the state was at the center of the

resistance of other Muslim COs, Ahmet and Ünsal:

“A synthetic religion is produced by the state. The state has always been utilized Islam and Muslim notions to render them functional to reach its purposes and to get support of Muslims. We are fed up with this embarrassing reality, especially during the current government’s rule. Islam is not a tool that the politicians enjoy when they do politics.” (*Ahmet, a male Muslim CO*)

“The state uses Sunni-Islam for the sake of national survival of the state (*devletin bekası*). Conservatives and Islamists in Turkey have a perspective on religion which is always based on ideology of Sunni-sultanism. This ideology attributes absolutism to itself and its adherents by advocating that Sunni Islamism is the one and only faith praised by the Prophet. Afrin is just an example of it.” (*Ünsal, a Kurdish male, Muslim CO*)

As plainly seen from previous remarks of the participants, they criticized the Afrin operation, which derives its legitimacy from Sunni-Islamist ideology. As a result, all of the participants rejected the justificatory narratives of the armed-based conflict as they heavily relied on Sunni-oriented conception in defining who the nation and the enemy are. In their further elaborations, participants voiced again how much the idea of ‘one nation, one flag, and one religion’ was promoted by the state elites during the Afrin operation as one of the primary causes of their resistance. In their opinions, one nation coupled with the idea of one religion and flag was rejected due to discriminatory characteristic of this motto, especially on the Kurdish people living either in Turkey or its neighboring countries. In sum, they believed that espousal of such rhetoric is pushing their Muslim Kurdish brothers out of the scope of the nation. In general, all participants found the use of martyrdom and jihadist discourses of the elites as provocative in discussing the Afrin operation. However, they further added that such political usage is by all means reasonable on behalf of the state, at least in terms of winning the hearts of the large amount of population, whose identity has been dominantly shaped around Islamism. In fact, their meaning making on martyrdom and jihad was not different from other groups. Each participant raised exactly the same rhetorical and definitional arguments based on aforementioned religious idioms as provided by the previous groups.

However, one interesting theme of the group discussion was the ‘paid military service’ as a way of denouncing the state’s manipulative use of the terms martyrdom and jihad in describing the sacred objectives of the Afrin operation. This critique is discernible in the following remarks of the participants, who added a new perspective on understanding of the Afrin operation:

“If a person can be exempt from the military duty by paying for it even in the middle of a war, this shows how the state is hypocrite. If this is the case, I say that money is more sacred than the military duty itself. I do not know the attitudes of my friends here, but I neither give a minute nor a penny to this unjust system. The money that I can give for this militarist system also contributes to the injustice, inequality and wars.” (*İbrahim, a male Muslim COr*)

“The government passed the paid military service exemption bill more than twice. For me, it clearly states that people, who do not want to perform in the military, are kindly tolerated since they pay for it. Whenever the paid military service is put at the center of political discussions, our voices as COrs are consciously silenced in all media outlets. This is because, they are afraid of us since our questions and sayings may show insincerity of the state and politicians to the people. For example, have you ever seen a martyr funeral in the wealthiest regions of Turkey when the Afrin operation is going on? If martyrdom is such a sacrosanct rank after the prophet’s, why are the richest ones not awarded with it?” (*Bektaş, a male Muslim COr*)

“Have you ever seen a mercenary (*paralı asker*) in any jihad or jihadist attract without first being attacked?” (*Erman, a Kurdish male, Muslim COr*)

Interestingly enough, according to the Muslim COrs, neither the Afrin operation nor the soldiers as part of the operation has anything to do with sacred attributions as the military campaign was operationalized by the paid soldiers. Additionally, the paid military service was just depicted a policy campaign the government enacts when it needs money. However, as they all argued, this system is not designed for the whole society. As *Bircan, a self-declared Turkish woman and Muslim COr*, asserted to build on others’ arguments, although it is a big and well-known cliché, only rich people benefit from it. In her view, the paid military service is just a strategic way to comfort the middle or upper-class people while making others, namely, poorest, sacrificial victims of the war. As all participants underscored, injustice is aggravated between the poor and rich people when the government comes to the idea of paid military service, which in fact, contradicts with Islam’s strong emphasis on justice. In this regard, participants clearly declared their negative attitudes towards the paid military service which has been enacted multiple times under the AKP rule. On the one hand, the state has promoted affirmative ideas and positive feelings about the military duty by explicitly glorifying the notion of ‘self-sacrifice’ and ‘martyrdom’ as a demonstration of love for the homeland, not only in case of the Afrin operation but in general. On the other, the paid military service has been used as a customary policy in Turkey when either money was needed for the government or

the number of deserters or evaders (*bakaya*) increased. Even though participants were not asked about the paid military service, they thought that it is the manifestation of the AKP's nodal and inconsistent policy given its repetitive highlight on Islamic valorization of the military duty and the operation itself. In their views, the paid military service further proves the Janus-faced nature of the government which does not associate paid soldiers with disloyalty to the nation and religion, while the COs are frequently deemed as other way around it. As a consequence, the participants' voices unified on the following ironic and self-explanatory sentence, that is, "money is blessed much more than conscience of people, who want to be exempt from the military service, with respect to the former's purchasing power to buy everything". By declaring this fact, Erman (a *Kurdish Muslim CO*) also stated that declaration of a person's CO or struggling for having this right is much more honest and fairer in such political conjunctures. As a final remark, this analysis shows where the deep imbrication of militarism, nationalism and religion is cracked by making visible the contradiction in the way the compulsory military service is handled and circumvented by the government-led alternatives.

6.3. Critical Reevaluation of the Afrin Operation from the Security Perspective

As shown in the discursive portrayal of the Afrin operation, Turkey's military campaign in Syria came to fore as a religious nationalist infused security policy of the AKP. On the state level, this military operation is presented as an exigent national security problem, which is triggered by the threat of terrorism and instability in Syria. As a result, the military operation was just a necessity and reaction to avert imminent security problems to secure the entire nation. In this regard, participants reevaluated Turkey's position vis-à-vis Syrian conflict by explicitly critiquing the use of terms such as 'problem of terror', 'national survival', 'right to self-defense' and 'preemptive action' in structuring the objectives of the operation. Both within and across group discussions brought us to the significance of the concept of security in understanding the way the human insecurities are generated and threats are constructed as artifacts with the help of the utilization of religious nationalist security rhetoric. It is significant to note that participants did not vary in their opinions and perspectives when describing the Afrin

operation with a strong anti-stance against the AKP's ideological vision pertaining Islamist nationalist security projects.

The first question the group 1 addressed when discussing the ways the security discourse were formed during the Afrin operation was the meaning and implications of security on behalf of the state. Since security is always regarded as one of the foremost needs of the state, the participants constantly made references that touched upon other dimension of security including cultural, social and political rights and freedoms of individuals. This illustrates that the state and its well-being are not merely referent objects of security, while the former one generates human insecurities in different levels. In their attempt to define what security really means, they mostly criticized the way the security is thought and sought in Turkey, that is through reproduction of threats and security problems, in order to justify the security-seeking activities of the state even outside of the country. Following this line of thought, some of the participants made the below explanations through performing their own meaning-making capacity in defining what traditional understanding of security is in Turkey:

“I think people’s security is not a matter for states, especially for those who are underdeveloped and dependent to the others like us. I speak in faith that the security of human and living ones is nothing for states and they have no desire to protect us. Then, whose security are we talking right now? The state always produces security problems and threats like having a schizoid disorder. While doing so, it reproduces itself, but of course it also forces us to live in security paranoia.” (*Rukiye, a Kurdish female, Muslim anti-war activist*)

“I want to share one of my personal anecdotes with a person coming from the army. He said to me that we are surrounded by the enemies. Armenia, Greece, Syria, this and that are our enemies. The list of the enemies was too long, but I do not remember them all (*giggling*). Then, he started talking about the enemies in ourselves by saying that ‘these are terrorists and traitors within our country’. In fact, we do not have such a security problem. It is understandable that countries may have some security problems given the excessive amount of population. However, militarization is not necessarily the way to address them. On the contrary, militarization and excessive investment in the army lead to other intractable problems in the society such as curtailment of individual liberties. Having such a security mentality obsessed with the perception of threats, such as the problem of national survival (*beka sorunu*), terrorism, coups, economic crisis, and cross-border issues create problems over and over without a solution. Why do I have to make a trade-off between my freedom and state’s security? I want to pursue my own security and freedom and it is impossible for me to obtain both of them in this militarist system.” (*Halim, a Kurdish male, Muslim CO*)

In light of their preceding remarks, the participants put the national security in dispute to the individual liberties since the former makes the security an unattainable thing for individuals given its excessive militarized and conflictual practices. As Halim previously stated, they do not perceive either the army or the state-led militarist actions as something ensuring the security of people, but as a source of insecurities. Following the same line of discussion, other participants in the group claimed that high level of threats and conflict-laden living conditions in Turkey force them to sacrifice some freedom in order to pursue state-centric interests in lieu of their own well-being. As the participants argued, the Afrin operation was the exact result of the state security agenda which is fraught with the idea of ‘external threats’ rather than of concerning the insecurities of people in the given warlike environment. In sum, as was shown above, common national interest, namely, national security especially in times of crisis is prioritized over any other individual or group-based interests, thereby, it is more than sacred to transcend individual liberties and preferences. The group started discussing the Afrin operation with Özgür’s (*Muslim anti-war activist*) following attention-grabbing analogy, which is highly indebted to religious references:

“This military campaign has been known with two different names; one is the Afrin operation, and other one is the Operation Olive Branch. Why was it the case? This reminds me of the verse from the surah of Al-Baqara (*Bakara suresi*). The verse says that “when Allah is warning them not to commit to mischief (*bozgunculuk*) on the earth, they say that they are not causing mischief, but they are peacemakers. However, they are the ones who are in ignorance and encouraging evil”. I am underlying the terms ‘mischief’ and ‘operation’ by saying that these equal to the Afrin Operation. Also, I am highlighting the term peacemaker who is equal to the ones encouraging the evil.” (*Özgür, a male Muslim anti-war activist*)

As he argued, neither bringing peace and stability to the Afrin region nor protecting the people of Syria is a moral thing that can be pursued under the political custody of the Turkish state and the military. Another argument related to the Afrin operation took Turkey’s right to self-defense in Syria and its use of preventive war against the threat of terrorism as its primary justifications based on the fact that there was no direct attack coming from Syria. In this regard, the participants rejected the objectives of the operation based on restating the security and stability alongside Turkey’s borders. One of the primary objections of the participants to the Afrin operation was in the form of skepticism about the military campaign launched in the context of fight against terrorism. As both Ersin (a

Kurdish Muslim COr) and Rukiye (a *Kurdish Muslim anti-war activist*) put forwarded, the operation was just an assault against the Kurdish national movement and manifestation of Turkey's long-standing 'Kurdish phobia', which is estheticized with so-called Islamic notions. By following the same line of explanation, the participants mostly focused on the Kurdish aspect of the operation as follows:

“In Turkey, we are close to something similar to Assad's authoritarian attitude in Syria. We saw the violence in Cizre, Sur, Diyarbakır, Nusaybin and Kızıltepe a few years ago. This was a pilot study in our lands before the operation. Therefore, Afrin Operation is not something unusual to me. Remember the speculations about the president before the operation. Some say that he is the man of America and he is cooperating with Israel. Also, ISIS declared that Turkey was profane during those days. If you notice, there was chaos. Of course, there was going to be a military operation in that region. If we take the Kurdish cantons into account, the legitimate ground of the operation was ready. This is such a wonderfully sauced meal in our plates. The president's popularity was raised, and he made himself the Commander-in-chief.” (*Rukiye, a Kurdish female, Muslim anti-war activist*)

“For example, it is significant to comprehend the rationale behind why the Turkish-backed military forces first destroyed the Kawa statute (*Kurd's cultural symbol of resistance*) in Syria's Afrin. This had been done due to both Islamic and Arab-nationalist roots of our culture.” (*Ersin, a Kurdish male, Muslim COr*) (italics added)

As can be seen from these examples, the participants deconstructed the image of dangerous and threatening other, namely Kurds, through defying the military action in the Kurdish populated regions in the name of national security. In that sense, their attempts aimed at redefining what a threat is and is not to challenge the normative understanding of security which is mostly based on exclusionary practices against certain ethico-political segments. Interestingly enough, Rukiye's preceding excerpt also described the chaotic political conjuncture in which the Afrin operation was born. In brief terms, the participants did not assess the Afrin operation as something defined by national security, but rather concerned result of different political interests and aims. Similar to the other participants, Özgür also stated that the problem lies behind the Afrin operation is just the need for chaos and conflict feeding politicians and providing them with a suitable environment to exploit people's sensibilities. And exactly at this point, all the participants drew attention to the need of questioning security discourse of elites who always promote the idea that 'we need to protect ourselves from the threatening outside world'. By rejecting such performance of security task, Hasan, a *self-declared Turkish*

*Muslim CO*r, explained the importance of convincing ourselves that we have always alternatives even in the midst of war, as in the following remarks:

“All the political elites used the power of religion to militarize people during the course of the operation. For that reason, we need people who interpret our religion and Quran in a rational way. Before going to war by saying ‘Allah Allah’, we first need to ask that why we are going to enter Afrin for a war, who are there, and say ‘let’s first talk and try to come to an agreement’.”
(*Hasan, a Turkish male, Muslim anti-war activist*)

In what follows, Doğuş (*a Muslim CO*r) expressed his idea on the fact that the elites’ use of religiously infiltrated security rhetoric made people unable to criticize the one-handed military operation, which was launched under the AKP hegemony. According to Doğuş, here is the example of this:

“During the Afrin operation, two groups have criticized the operation; one was the Turkish Medical Association (*Türk Tabipler Birliği, TTP*), and the other was the Furkan Foundation (*Furkan Vakfi*). Both of them faced with a serious punishment. Everyone talks about the Turkish Medical Association and it has many supporters. However, nobody knows about the Furkan Foundation. Why? Since they are Islamists and their religious rhetoric contradicts with AKP’s religious political references, they have been perceived as more threatening than the other.” (*Doğuş, a male Muslim CO*r)

His above-mentioned example showed who are eligible to speak on issues pertaining security matters while others, in other words, non-state actors are forbidden to do so. As plainly seen, he particularly criticized the society’s negligence towards the *Furkan Foundation* while many supported the *TTP* given the former one was represented as ‘the other in us’, meaning that they are the ones creating a fissure within the Islamic community. Such overt discrepancy between the foundation’s interpretation of Islam and AKP’s religiously inspired security discourse put automatically some limits on the voice of the former one. In this regard, the participants did not only challenge the AKP and its policies but defied the AKP’s Islamic and conservative arguments as part of a security discourse, which are in fact a cornerstone of its hegemony.

The character of the debate over the Afrin operation is exactly same in the focus group 2. Following the same line of thinking, the participants of the group 2 also mentioned how the use of religiously infused security discourse was espoused by the current government to alleviate any ideological and action-based opposition amidst the

surrounding military-based chaos. As was explained by the participants, since crisis moments require an unconditional alliance of people with the state, the Afrin operation was a golden opportunity for the state to detect whose voice was creating a fissure against the AKP's security policies. As it was shown in the discursive portrayal of the operation, the way the operation was depicted seemed to be quite persuasive in catching people's support as well as in deterring any oppositional idea against the cause of operation and the AKP's rule. Ali, *a self-identified Muslim COr*, further explained in more detail how the government downplayed and averted the repercussions of the operation as in the following remarks:

“For example, the state has imprisoned the people who have rejected the war, who stood against the war. What does that mean? It means that the state does not want any questioning whatsoever. This is a kind of fascism. We are not even able to tell that we do not support the war. So, we know the nature, character, perspective of the state that we are living in. We know TC [*a pejorative abbreviation used for the Turkish Republic*] very well.” (*Ali, a male Muslim COr*) (mt italics)

Ali's foregoing interpretation of the way the security discourse was framed and actualized in the political realm is vital to comprehend who has the monopoly over speaking issues related to security, national interests and politics. In his view, it seems that while the state arbitrarily incorporates some issues into the security agenda, it concomitantly leaves other issues pertaining individual liberties in terms of freedom of expression and speech aside, as it is a unilateral political decision. Noticing the fact that domestic security matters, such as improvement of human rights and liberties are always of secondary importance at the institutional level, the participants defied the role of the military, which is assumed to be devoted to the security and prosperity of the whole nation. Overall, it is understood that although the securitization and militarization mostly affect the lives of people, non-state actors are not allowed to challenge or pose critiques towards the operation itself. Moreover, all Muslim COrs in the group also mentioned that it was really hard to challenge the silence of critics towards the AKP-led policies including cross-border military operations, which in fact, take their legitimacy from Islamism and conservatism. For Lütfiye, *a female Muslim COr*, the AKP succeeded in transforming its conservative party policy to the national security issue by emphasizing the 'problem of national survival' (*beka sorunu*). In her view, this ensued with the presence of people whose lives are drifting into the wars as a very natural consequence

of constant war propagandas. Similar to Lütfiye's claim, other participants made a strong emphasis on the way the government dramatically officialized and transformed its own party project or ideology to a state policy with those cross-border military operations. However, the sad story for Kılıç, *a Kurdish Muslim COs*, was the people who did not start questioning the real motivation behind wars even though they were not gaining from these wars. Kılıç further exemplified his ideas in the context of the Afrin operation as follows:

“My problem is not with the state, government or opposition. Of course, all of them support wars, and otherwise it would be surprising. I have a problem with how people who have discontent with the way that events are unfolding, with the loss of unity, solidarity, and peace, react and respond to all these. This worries me more. For example, an acquaintance of mine said that soldiers in Afrin are liberators, they are taking peace there. Volunteering for war is common among nationalist youth. But one also should keep in mind that, now it is their time, they have plenty of ground for being a hero.” (*Kılıç, a Kurdish male, Muslim COs*)

Taking into consideration that the use of such security rhetoric has always been an integral component of the AKP, the Afrin operation is just something where this discourse was validated and operationalized by the TAF's military action in the region. However, what Kılıç and other Muslim COs problematized is how much this national security consciousness, despite its artifact nature is espoused by people while the dissolution of 'peace', 'cohesion' and 'solidarity' went hand in hand in the current political system. As seen, Muslim COs were unified in their critiques to how the elites' security discourse and praxis are embraced and reproduced in societal relations.

Another highlighted theme within the group discussion was the use of justificatory concepts, such as 'self-defense' and 'preemptive action' for the sake of eradicating the danger of terrorism in forming the security discourse of the Afrin operation. As the participants argued, the aforementioned terms were just part of the AKP's skillfully designed maneuver to legitimize its single-handed launched military operation in the territories of another country. The use of threat discourse by the state was perceived by the participants as something taking advantage of people's economic, political and social discontent with the current political system. In their rendering, the subjects of threats, in other words, the PKK's ideological offshoots proximity to the Middle East countries were abstractions, lying no concrete evidence, and beyond these were just manifestations of the paranoid view of the state. Given the fact that there is almost no geographical area

falling out of Turkey's perception of threat and vulnerability, the participants drew attention to the reciprocal violence, which is embedded in this mentality. To illustrate why reciprocity is not desirable for Islamic understanding even in case of self-defense, Cihan expressed his ideas as follows:

“Is there something as opting out for self-defense in Islam? Remember what one of Adam's sons said to the other. He said, “that thank God, I am going to kill you”. The other replied and said, “thank God, I am not going to reciprocate”. We should not forget that solidarity and reconciliation are priorities in our religion.” (*Cihan, a male Muslim COr*)

As the participants argued, the notion of self-defense becomes even more complicated if we think about where defense starts, where it ends, whether there is preventive defense. All of them found the state argument indicating that the Turkish state took a preventive action in Afrin to avert disintegration and to defend its security perplexing by making explicit references to Turkey's capitalist and imperialist geographical ambitions in Syria. In his further explanation, Ali claimed that not only Turkey, but many countries emptied out the above-mentioned concepts to further their interests:

“If I am not mistaken, preventive self-defense for the first time emerged during the Iraq war. It was legitimized as a preemptive war after 9/11. As Muslims, can we think that “against the possibility that they are going to attack me, I should attack first”? Should I kill the thief, whom I know will rob my house, before he does so? As a Muslim, I do not think that this is the right thing to do. The US attacked Iraq even though Iraq did not attack the US. While doing that, the US said that I am bringing democracy and using my right of preventive self-defense. It is not pleasant when the US does it but is it pleasant if Turkey does it? Does it matter that the US is a great imperial power and Turkey is a small one? Both is nasty, both have massacred. We need to pray God that imperialists' power does not increase. If preventive self-defense is something that states can use as a strategy in international arena to further their gains, it becomes something that bothers me. For me, what is more legitimate is saying no to a war that is either taking place on my own territory or in another one's territory.” (*Ali, a male Muslim COr*)

Apparently, the participants contested Turkey's right to defend its border security in Syria under the principles of self-defense and preventive war. In their views, the Afrin military operation was just portrayed as the representation of the state's permanent reproduction of threats rather than as the state's legitimate response to danger threatening

the territorial integrity of Turkey. In what follows, by making a comparison between the US and Turkey in a particular context of cross-border military operations in the Middle East region, Muslim COs united in their oppositional view declaring that the use of such security rhetoric is unjustifiable taking the materialist needs and goals of these military campaigns into account.

Another heated discussion subject reoccurring during the focus group 3 meeting was the state's ultimate authority in defining what the threats were, what and whom we had to be afraid of and how the military should protect us. As they argued, the security process which produces constant enemies and dangers was continuously juxtaposing the state's hegemonic and exclusionary practices with the preferences of individuals whose desire is to live in peace and prosperity. In the context of the Afrin operation, Muslim COs and anti-war activists claimed that targeting Syria as a source of threat based on the assumption that Kurdish separatist groups existed there did not culminate in more security and well-being for people inside. Contrary to the feeling of safety and protection, the participants voiced how much they were excluded and stigmatized as the 'other' during the Afrin operation given that they cried out the war in Afrin was not what they were told.

Emre, *a self-declared Kurdish Muslim CO*, criticized the politicians who were always telling citizens what patriotism, devotion to the state, and love of country mean during the operation. In his view, the state used such official security discourse pragmatically to deceive people. By following Emre's previous explanation, other participants in the group told again that their aim was to reveal the fact that there were always alternative ways to seek security. As seen, the security is perceived by participants as something not only limited to a military matter, but it is a more of an inclusive concept pertaining to individual and societal development. Coupling their understanding of security with the Afrin military operation, the participants put forward the explanations below to show how much there is a need for broadening security agenda in Turkey:

“You know the ‘foreign forces’ that we keep making fun of are one of the most important factors that trigger the wars like Afrin. The lingering feeling of being at stake and ready for war causes immense insecurity for us after all. So, we should defend the war of choice and anti-militarism.” (*Duygu, a Turkish-Kurdish female, Muslim CO*)

“The stronger the army, the more powerful the state is. This is what we have memorized so far. However, there are different fields that can be worked on to create a powerful state such as improving the economy, investing on education of our youth, finding new means of production either for

agriculture or technology. I feel like this might be a solution to the constant security threat perceived by Turkey. Turkish state, first, needs to be fully independent not to be conceived as an incapable state and be fearful of possible attacks all the time. Praising the military, and giving the full endeavor to recruit more soldiers have nothing to do with security and development.” (*Serkan, a male Muslim anti-war activist*)

“We live in such a generous geography where the lands are fruitful, and the climate is pretty suitable for any sorts of agricultural production so that we do not really need to invest in armament. The money and time spent on proliferating guns and developing defense mechanisms could be spent on other things, and more effort can be put on improving governmental institutions for social and economic development of our nation.” (*Emrah, a Kurdish male, Muslim anti-war activist*)

In light of the foregoing remarks of the participants, the questions about the state’s security policy including the Afrin operation were posed in an active voice, and the participants put forward the idea that ‘security’ and ‘development’ are inextricably linked. In comparison to the other groups, the group 3 heavily focused on the issue of ‘human security’, which according to them, was put at risk in the name of the state and national security. This explicitly illustrates that how the participants strengthen the belief that being secured from a danger has something to do with other sectors of security besides militarization such as economic, social and political development of the nation. Otherwise, security is very much impossible thing that can ever be fulfilled by individuals in case the state continues to consolidate its militarized practices.

In the last focus group, the long-standing security mentality of the Turkish state was seen directly related to the broader dynamics of the Afrin conflict. All participants described Turkey’s cross-border military operation in Syria as ‘occupation’. In this line of argument, the participants expressed their opinions below to show their critical stance towards the Afrin operation:

“About the Syria issue, I assume that Syrians could create an opposition by using their internal dynamics. For instance, I would not want a foreign force to overthrow Erdoğan, if it needs to be done, internal forces should be the only ones taking action about it. No offense, but no Muslim country has the right to launch such an operation, if help is needed, it should be their decision and they should ask for it.” (*Bektaş, a male Muslim CO*)

“There are always agreements between organizations and governments, but the civilians are always the ones who get hurt. That is why anti-militarism is a must. From my point of view, the greatest creators of terrorism are the governments and the armies. So, can you defend that the US government

makes wars, but the Turkish government is totally innocent? If we cannot face the reality: our nationalism is to blame for our denial. The US army is not the only institution that is responsible for what is going on in Afrin today. Any army that crosses the lines of self-defense is an occupying force. For example, what are you doing in Afrin?" (*İbrahim, a male Muslim COr*)

The previously stated responses of the participants did reflect that Turkey's exigent reaction to the security threat in Syria could not be evaluated from the pure security perspective. Parallel to the previous group discussions, the group 3 also assessed the Afrin operation not in the context of fight against terrorism and self-defense. As can easily be inferred from the preceding quotes, participants were very much concerned about Turkey's armed-based interference in another country and the effect of the conflict on the lives of civilians. However, as they argued the conditions that prepared the 'legitimate' grounds for such operation traced back to the aggressive and offensive security agenda, which has been pursued by the state and the army for a long time. In their renderings, the current government exacerbated the use of such security rhetoric through utilizing religious affinity of people, as it was planned to bring about both personal and communal loyalty to the government's political agenda. Erman (a *Kurdish Muslim COr*) explained his particular ideas about the way security is thought and militarism is used by the state as a potential solution to the problems as in the following:

"The security problem is only the problem of the state and the result of the security politics the state pursues. The party in power and the state elites in general are pursuing an antagonist and belligerent policy which produce conflicts with the neighboring countries. Turkey has a wicked eye for Dodecanese [*twelve islands in the Aegean Sea*], Syria, Iraq...In short, the source of the security politics causing wars is the party in power. The state uses the politics of fear not only on its people, but also outside of the country. What I understand from the state security is constant violence, which is produced and marketed by the state (*iktidar erki*). Surprisingly, there are lots of people who are ready to buy it." (*Erman, a Kurdish male, Muslim COr*)

Following this line of thought, Bircan, a *self-declared Turkish Muslim COr*, further added that the *raison d'être* of the Turkish state is to create enemies. As was asserted by her, militarism is not used when the problems are seen as unresolvable, but it is used as an apparatus in case the problems are not wanted to be resolved. In fact, her explanation attracted Ahmet's attention, who as a Muslim COr contested on the production and reproduction of the 'danger discourse' in the following way:

“I do not perceive the external powers (*diş mihraklar*), even it is hard to define who they are, surrounding Turkey as the true and real threats for our security. Looks at Switzerland and the relationship between Germany and France, which managed to sustain peace after the war. If you have always been afraid of being targeted and divided by your neighbors, it is your fault. It is not politically correct to use such a security rhetoric in each crisis moment. However, the rhetoric of threat and external powers is almost an everyday practice for our politicians. It is like an opium for the masses given our people’s subjection to the state, [which acts] like their father.”

As plainly seen, all participants stood against the use of the ‘threat’, ‘terrorism’ and ‘enemies’ rhetorics that legitimize any physical confrontation and violence against the one who is perceived as the ‘other’. Therefore, they did not assess the Afrin operation as an exceptional or unusual case in the contemporary Turkish politics, but as a natural consequence of the politics of threat. Taking seriously the criticisms raised by the participants in regard to the security practices of the state, it is plausible to claim that their main focus was on the peace and security agenda which needs an exigent demilitarization and de-securitization over the issues pertaining both foreign and domestic politics.

6.4. Cases of Ambiguity: Religious CO an Individualist Resistance or a Collective Movement?

Having discussed why Muslim COs and anti-war activists refuse to participate in a given military campaign, namely the Afrin operation, or to be perceived by the state as being citizen-warriors, here I will focus on whether there is a consensus or at least rhetorical commonality across the participants concerning their act of objection to the military service and war. In fact, such discussion topic naturally emerged out of the group discussions, when participants were asked to clarify whether Muslim COs and anti-war activists have mutually agreed or common discourse amongst themselves in refusing the military service or state-led war practices. The participants sometimes stepped beyond rhetoric and put their identities into play when discussing their positions both within Muslim COs and the CO movement in general. In fact, this analysis has several further implications for the study of both cases of Muslim COs and the CO movement in the Turkish context by illustrating whether they are able to form an alliance with different identities and political specificities as part of the same dissident movement. By closely

scrutinizing the ways in which the governing elites frame and securitize the debate over the Afrin operation in Turkey, elites' opinions towards securitization were shown to be not only rife but also solidified with a strong unanimity. For that reason, understanding the participants' orientations towards the CO movement from the lenses of individualist/collective action has utmost importance to show whether they are capable of transforming their individual-based act of objection to the organized political one. This, in turn, reflects the Muslim COs' and anti-war activists' ability to challenge the above-mentioned rigid security conception.

As it was heavily stressed in the focus group 1, all the participants approached the CO as an act of 'self-realization' and 'self-salvation', even though they also discussed needs for such collective endeavors for disarmament, non-militarization, and military-free civilian zones. They argued that Muslim COs do not make up a single and coherent political unit, since they differ in terms of interests, visions and reasons for declaring their refusal of the compulsory military service. As a result, Ersin, *a self-identified Kurdish Muslim CO*, for example, perceived the subjective and individual value of the CO movement as its essence by emphasizing distinctiveness between the identities of Muslims:

I think Muslims' attitude on this issue is not absolutely monolithic. For instance, Salafi Muslims' stance in interpreting religion sharply diverges from other Muslims living in Turkey. A person having Salafi roots may say that my robe (*cübbe*) and my beard show my religious attitude, and that they are untouchable so that I cannot perform in the military. We, as Muslim COs, question the state and all power holders (*iktidarlar*), since they contradict with the power of God, but our religious attitudes are somehow different. Some Muslims may have problem with the military uniform, or the secular structure of the state, but my actual problem is the state and the army." (*Ersin, a male Kurdish, Muslim CO*)

As a matter of fact, some of the participants put forward the idea that Muslim identity is crucial for them to develop a critical stance towards the state and the military. However, as Ersin further claimed in his speech, Muslim COs came from different Islamic traditions, some of which can even be associated with extremist and radical Islamist groups. By denouncing the violent tactics and construction of religion in the name of radical Islamism, not only Ersin but also other group members stated how much their religious worldview and lifestyle are distinct from those who are associated with radical Islamism in Turkey. All in all, by emphasizing the visibility of either notable or

lesser differences across Muslim COs and anti-war activists, the participants in the focus-group 1 recognized the centrality of the subjectivity of each individual in the CO movement. In their views, although CO as a ‘civil disobedience act’ ultimately serves the common good of the society namely, peace, peaceful coexistence between different the nations and de-militarization it is an inescapably individualist stance from the outset when even considering some uncompromising grounds between the Muslim COs.

Another reason that was discussed by the focus group 2 to explain the lack of organization and cohesion among Muslim COs relied on the claim that CO remained as a less of a concern for Muslims besides their bigger concerns, such as construction of an Islamic identity in today’s political landscape. Alper, a Kurdish Muslim CO, explained this in his below statement to show the presence of deep divisions within the Muslim community regarding the military and the state:

“Some Muslims have decided how to deal with the state while some are still questioning the state. In the past, there was a clash between the Islamic identity and the Turkish military. Then the tables have turned, the chief of general staff started praying and showing this off in the eyes of the public. CO movement may have faded because of this as well. Some Muslims are still confused about how to relate themselves to the state and the military.”
(*Alper, a Kurdish male, Muslim CO*)

As seen in his speech, although Muslim COs are very much disturbed by the state’s and the military’s use of Islamism as a dominant state ideology, it seems that this conservative interpretation of Islamism thrives on winning the hearts and minds of many Muslims living in Turkey. Given the prevalence of this view both at the institutional and societal level over time, it is very natural to see that either Muslim COs’ outlook or the notion of Islamic CO remains at the margins. Alper also further claimed that only small groups support the Islamic CO, since it has a great potential to politicize very natural emotions, opinions, and faith of people in Turkey’s precarious Islamic public:

“Maybe I was the most appropriate person to politicize conscientious objection, but I prevented it because I did not want it to become another source of oppression. Because I believe that Muslims, whose identity building process is moving very slowly, will get wasted. They will not be able to use conscientious objection as a right material. Unless identity building of Muslims is completed, we cannot politicize this as a collective movement.”
(*Alper, a Kurdish male, Muslim CO*)

Having made the foregoing speech, Alper explained the way the Islamic groups and the media politicized his religious causes and wanted to make use of him. As he declared, when they failed in using him as a counter case vis-à-vis the state and the army, they otherized him as a deviant person whose Islamic objection was just an example of devolution of Islam in Turkey. His emphasis on ‘politicization’ illustrates how much the Islamist CO is relatively weak to inspire or call other Muslims to unite on the idea of CO collectively while the pervasive Islamic understanding endorses Islamic and nationalist valorization of Turkish militarism with a strong support from the state. By buttressing the opinion raised by Alper, Kılıç (a *Kurdish Muslim CO*) also expressed the reasons that led him to think that Muslim CO lacks in capacity to be a collectively organized action, as in the following remarks:

“Maybe, we could not find a ground for ourselves maybe. We could not problematize this as Muslims. Anti-war activists, LGBT activists, Kurdish movement activists embraced this cause more than we did. It was not even on our agenda. If it did, it would have provided people with motivation to become conscientious objectors. A political struggle can be possible with motivation, organization, and support from others. It should be on the agenda. If you are imprisoned, tortured, subjected to civilian death, it should mean something. If you want something to change, put something on agenda, political struggle is the way for it. We lack this organization. Even if there are people who think like us, they resort to other ways before declaring their conscientious objection. Maybe they prefer paid military service or postpone military service through their academic studies. I view becoming organized as important for political struggle. For example, when someone within the Kurdish movement is imprisoned, he/she has the grounds to think that a political group and organization is continuing the struggle. But for us, there is no such collective political ground.” (*Kılıç, a Kurdish male, Muslim CO*)

As seen in Kılıç’s previous excerpt, he criticized themselves as Muslim COs for not going far enough with their political efforts to transform their individual-based act of objection to the collective value upheld by Muslims. In doing so, he explicitly made a comparison between the Muslim COs and other activists in the CO movement, such as the LGBT members and the Kurdish COs whose voices became more prominent and unified due to their strong political convictions towards the CO movement and their relatively high degree of organization and mobilization. This was a very prolific discussion topic in terms of comprehending why CO has remained as a less important political issue in Muslims’ agenda in Turkey even though, as participants argued, it deserves a greater public attention. In addition to Kılıç’s comments, other participants in

the group also reminded that faith-based CO (*imani ret*) has become a concept developed by people, who were latecomers to the CO movement. In their views, adding military service to Muslims' political agenda is a novel thing and this, in turn, makes it hard for Muslim COs to take the collective form of act and resistance. As a result, the Muslim COs have remained as a less visible group in the CO movement when declaring their newly emerged political subjectivities with respect to the rejection of the embodiment of state-based and militarized interpretation of Islam. However, by expressing his dissent in terms of putting the 'selfhood' and 'individual subjectivities at the center of the CO movement, Ali as a Muslim CO explained why the core of the CO for Muslims requires to be a collective struggle for not merely the recognition of CO as a right but also for justice:

“We need to struggle for our rights. If we had struggled in 2012, 2014, or 2015, people today would not be required to perform military service for 21 days. When you do not struggle against something, you accept a form of slavery and injustice. We should remember that Muslims base their understanding on the idea of justice. If we have tackled and challenged it collectively, I believe that there would be no such thing as 21 days requirement.⁵⁴ It is so unjust that while the one who paid for it will be gone shortly, another who did not have the money to pay for it will remain there for months. Under the same roof, one is doing something, the other one is doing something different. It shows us that it has nothing to do with national service. This is a waste and forced labor. Wasting is forbidden by religion. Wasting time, people, and space is also a waste. All of this militarist discourse, beginning from the making of the uniforms that soldiers wear to sanctifying the state, takes place during military service. Schools, mosques, Quran courses, Friday khutbahs, and the military service. We need to object to these as all Muslim COs. We need to question this mentality that enters into our minds and souls. CO creates a suitable ground for this, but we first need to organize by leaving all particular individualist concerns aside.”

In Ali's view, CO is represented as something which necessarily needs to take place on the political ground that is open to the participation and engagement of many instead of limited number of activists to alter the unjust system. Thus, contrary to the arguments of the focus group 1, the group 2 claimed that the CO for both Muslims and other activists within the group belongs to the political realm with a specific focus on change in the

⁵⁴ In the recent law concerning the paid military service, people who pay for exemption from military service are required to receive a 21-day military training in the barracks. In comparison to the previous bills on the paid military service, this 21-day requirement is a new regulation. See the related news which retrieved from: <https://bianet.org/english/militarism/199707-law-on-paid-military-service-published-on-official-gazette> [Accessed on 28 June, 2019]

system where injustice and militarism are deeply engrained in both the institutional and societal culture. As Ali argued in his above-mentioned statement, since they, as Muslim COs, are searching for justice on the legitimate grounds to change institutional arrangements or decisions such as the paid military service, which infringes justice and equality, change is seen only possible with the contribution of ‘everyone’ in practice and in principle. As seen, since COs including Muslims lack in motivational and organizational capacity in fostering the idea of CO over the past few years, they were not able to influence the government’s policy on the paid military service, which in fact still requires military training in the barracks. The participants used that discussion as an opportunity through which they expressed their self-criticisms towards both the CO movement and themselves as Muslim COs. In brief terms, as the group argued, COs regardless of their own personal identifications were not really able to constitute a powerful and remarkable discourse or act of opposition in order to be heard by the public and the state as well.

In the group 3, CO, by its definition, was manifested as a collective dissent which is expressed with the common desire to change cultural and institutional codes which abound with the militarist and warlike ideas. However, as Duygu, *a self-declared Turkish-Kurdish Muslim CO*, further claimed, it is not enough to see criticisms only coming from antimilitarist and antiwar activist groups to manage the establishments of a collective movement. In her view, it will be much more influential if a critical voice and attitude come directly from the society given the military and the state are constantly creating militarized conception of citizenship. It was interesting to see that even if both CO and anti-war activism originally initiated by those people defining themselves as activists, the responsibility of turning this act of objection to the collective movement also bears on the society’s critical approach in terms of interrogating givenness of the militarized culture. In that sense, the views of the group contributed to the previous group conversations by adding a societal perspective to the discussion on why both Muslim COs and other activists have a difficulty turning their resistance to a collective movement. All in all, it is understood that CO may become an ‘issue’ only when many people succeed in questioning the taken-for-granted nature of the military service and starting to believe that it needs a public and institutional resolution due to the military’s severe interference in a civilian life of people. Additionally, the participants in the group related the CO to both their individual and collective rights, such as having a ‘right to freedom of speech, conscience and expression’. In her further elaboration, Nurten (*a Turkish female and*

Muslim anti-war activist) claimed that even though the demands of the COs and anti-war activists for ‘freedom’ are perceived as individually and morally oriented at the first glance, the broader aim is to create a society in which all people collectively enjoy “high level of democratization, peace and justice”. In what follows, Emre as a *Kurdish Muslim CO* added that since the Turkish state has continuously rejected calls for the recognition of both individual and collective rights of COs in terms of being exempt from the compulsory military service, it is significant for them to be able to act with the support of society to achieve the recognition of those rights in the legal system. In sum, it seems that on the one hand, CO is as intricately related to the participants’ moral and subjective characters, on the other, it has a sort of a collectivist aspect with specific focus on more peaceful and democratic society. Quite separate from the other focus groups, the participants of the group 3 stayed more focused on the importance of cooperating with the society in their system-critical rhetoric and action in order to be regarded as an organized political movement.

The last group stressed the collectivist facet of the CO both at the levels of rhetoric and action even though the ways in which they expressed themselves and their identities could vary. To clarify this, Ahmet as Muslim COs made the following explanation:

“Of course, there is a strong highlight on the individuality of each person in the CO movement in Turkey, and this does not mean that the movement itself is divided and even polarized. CO does not only mean pure anti-militarism, pacifism and anti-war activism. This is unfortunately a wishful thinking in Turkey’s political environment. COs are neither heroes nor angels. If there is a war and there is an army, and you are against to be part of it, then you are a CO. You do not necessarily refuse to each and every war. However, our actions and rhetoric are non-violent since we are not hurting anybody by just saying ‘no’ (*giggling*). Even some Turkish nationalists say that we cannot fight against our Kurdish brothers and sisters, and they are against any armed conflict between the people of two brotherly nations.” (*Ahmet, a male Muslim CO*)

By making explicit references to the presence of different typologies in the movement, the first thing Ahmet emphasized was that the meaning of CO and types of COs vary in the Turkish context. Contrary to the focus group 1 meeting in which the discussion revolved around some uncompromised attitudes across Muslim COs, Ahmet’s approach was more than welcomed by the COs and anti-war activists. In a similar vein, Bircan, *a self-identified Turkish Muslim CO*, claimed that the variation in the identities, objectives and causes of COs was a beautiful thing they experienced in the

CO movement. As the group argued, this does not mean that how much they are divided but shows how comprehensive the movement is. In the light of their preceding remarks, it is understandable that their actions are politically organized in essence, and that they are not much concerned of subjective differences, which may be thought as an obstacle for them to be a united CO movement. Additionally, the general ideal of the participants seems not to contradict with each other given the glorification of human life as a common goal despite distinctiveness in the self-understanding of the participants. By using an ironic language, Bircan stated that the ultimate political goal of the resisters is to achieve peace with a new recipe, meaning that seeking peace with different methods and a vision rather than of militarization and securitization:

“We are also fighters (*giggling*), but we are fighting without using violence and weapon. Our idea is to fight with unarmed forces (*silahsız kuvvetler*) both as a both philosophical and a practical principle. We are not only struggling for Muslim COs or peace activists, but for the whole humanity.” (*Bircan, a female Muslim CO*)

As seen in her statement, although CO is initially based on a personal initiative by refusing conscription, it serves for the extension of the meaning and concept of the CO to the other parts of social life such as achievement of peace and non-violence. As one of the major focus of the group discussion, not only Bircan but also other members of the group explained the reason why the public and collective aspects of the CO need to be recognized as they stand against the exiting traditional practices and norms around militarization. In this regard, Ünsal as a *Kurdish Muslim CO* gave the following example to illustrate how much their resistance is interlinked with the good of the society in terms of eradicating root causes of militarization, namely, its human resource of it:

“Let’s assume that you reject participating in the military due to the ongoing cross-border military campaigns. Is it only about your life and your personal well-being? It is just one part of it, the other side of the coin is about the people whose lives may be at risk in the region in which the military operation is deployed. Since we reject to be part of such murderous practices, we are serving for the good of the society.” (*Ünsal, a Kurdish male, Muslim CO*)

In his further elaboration, Ünsal criticized both the individualization of CO and portrayal of the COs as selfish people whose responsibilities and interest are restricted to protect their own selves and well-being in times of crisis. As he argued, it is unfair to

label COs as being military deserters or runaways given their effort to tell people what war and militarization are really like, meaning that both bring about more victims living in a constant fear even after the war had ended. Similarly, Bektaş as a *Muslim CO* denounced too much focus on the value of individual conscience which, in turns, cultivates understanding of the CO as a dispersed and even failed attempt of only a group of activists in the following way:

“Instead of saying CO is not a collective movement given people’s various identities and convictions, it is more plausible to say that it is not a very common thing to do in Turkey. The reason is simple. Militarization is something like an everyday confrontation for us, it is in the army, in the schools, and even in your street (*mahalle*). We all have been told that the nation and the state are so sacred things to defend. Therefore, any little objection to this turns easily into a case in which you are labelled as a treason or at least be an ‘other’. There are legal threats for COs such as imprisonment, custody and economic obstacles. When we think about the restrictions imposed on us, people understandably prefer to stay in silence.”
(*Bektaş, a male Muslim CO*)

Similar to what has been denoted in the focus group 2 meeting, Bektaş also highlighted why CO has remained as an unpersuasive idel for many based on the fact that militarism as an ideology propagates itself through the use of fear and internalization of the militarist ideals in different public and private spheres. In such context, it is hard to publicly problematize issues pertaining the military and militarism as both an institution and ideology. In his preceding view, militarism is described as a multi-layered process which gains legitimacy and popularity through the long-lived acceptance of both the state and society. As a result, as it is anticipated, COs struggle has not gained a mass base or support in order to become an organized collective activity. Another reason contributing to the lack of collective organization not only across Muslim COs but COs in general is that since they have suffered from serious hardships, such as imprisonment or economic burnout for years, this naturally causes exhaustion on them, and widespread fear on people who even feel sympathy for the idea of CO. In that sense, although there is a collective consciousness through aiming to demilitarize the conflict-laden context of Turkey, it seems that above-mentioned reasons further complicate for COs to strengthen the struggle of CO at the moment due to the lack of solidarity and cooperation at the societal level. In sum, all the participants not only engaged in introspection and even self-criticism in discussing their lack of organization in the CO movement, but also paid close

attention to the need of societal cooperation and public visibility to transform the CO to the collective ideal.

7. CONCLUSION: DISCUSSION ON THE KEY FINDINGS

This final chapter serves a number of purposes in terms of reviewing the principle findings of each of the analysis and their contributions to the relevant scholarships. First, I will discuss why I established the umbrella term ‘religious nationalism’ as the main explanatory framework in the security discourse of the Afrin operation by revealing the concluding remarks of the discourse analysis of the military operation. In what follows, I will explain the findings of the focus group analysis by coupling it with the theoretical discussion, namely, CSS, which adds a new critical edge to the studies on security-religion nexus from the lenses of the non-state actors. As a concluding remark, I will discuss how this research has a potential to offer new insights into the relevant studies on both the cases of Muslim COs and CO movement in general.

Initially, I take the concept of religious nationalism as the central framework of the governing elites’ security discourses over the Afrin operation and the military duty, given their heavy use of religious nationalist attachments in the contemporary political rhetoric. Rather than assuming the triumph of religion over nationalism or vice versa, the discursive portrayal of the Afrin operation demonstrates that the relationship between the two is more complex and complementary in securing the role of the military service and armed-based operation both at the institutional and societal level. In brief terms, today it is not really possible to split Islamism from nationalism while confluence of the two redefines and reinforces what it means to be pious and patriotic citizens. As an example of this, the analysis demonstrates that the governing elites instrumentalize the political discourse of ‘martyrdom’, ‘jihad’ and ‘holy war’ not only to justify the objectives of the Afrin operation to convince the general public, but also to securitize the ‘sacred’ role of soldiering at the societal level in the midst of the conflict.

In this regard, the research on the Afrin operation visualizes the way the security discourses and practices have been shaped around conservative, in other words, Islamist interpretation of nationalism, as mostly promoted by the governing elites. As one of the

central findings of the discourse analysis, under the reign of the AKP, religious nationalism plays a pivotal role in many areas such the media and security policy of the state pertaining to both domestic and foreign issues. What is more, the study reveals how much religious nationalism is crucial in defining what nation, national identity and interests are, as particularly exemplified in the case of the Afrin operation. Religious nationalism manifested itself in the case of the Afrin Operation in a way that national security interests and missions were portrayed from an Islamist perception and they were securitized by making explicit references to the warlike spirit of Turks and Muslims inherited from the Ottoman past. By envisioning such a historical past and vision, the government and most of the media outlets skillfully displayed Turkey's military involvement in Syria as a necessity and historical responsibility of Turkey.

Although the relationship between the military politics and religion has been assumed in influx over time by many scholars, as it was discussed in more detail in the literature review part, the case description of the Afrin operation illustrates that the military closely interacts with religiously infused nationalism to promote the idea of devout citizen-soldiers, whose support is especially needed when there is a military crisis. As a result, the governing elites use such security rhetoric as an instrument to mobilize both political and social forces towards the common objective, that is the sanctification of the military operation and military duty within the scope of this research. As was demonstrated, the governing elites' understanding of security often carries out religious nationalist imprints and this, in turn, dominates all public sphere by limiting the oppositional voices. In that sense, the power of Islamically oriented nationalism was used by the governing officials as a determining principle and overarching identity to both grip attention of the masses, their backup as well, and render the rest, namely, any oppositional idea or figure against the operation as 'sacrilegious'. Overall, it seems that the Afrin military crisis provided the AKP elites with a favorable environment to limit public or political discussion on the Afrin operation as a security matter by marginalizing any act of dissidence as being 'betrayers' or at least 'others' who, in fact, desecrated the religious nationalist infused security trajectories of the AKP.

Since only examining the ways the institutional discourse has been shaped over the Afrin operation disregards the voices of who has been labeled as 'others', the research also aimed at empowering Muslim COs and anti-war activists with a consultative focus group venue in which they freely express themselves. Such qualitative fieldwork is much more needed not only to allay relative scarce attention to the cases of Muslim COs and

anti-war activists, but also to shed light on what counter or alternative discourse is formed by the non-state agents. The latter objective additionally serves to extend theoretical principles of the CSS from the lenses of Muslim dissidents as it gives voice to the insecurities of these actors, whose critiques have long been silenced given their act of objection to the military service and state-defined security mentality. In brief terms, the focus groups conducted with the Islamic non-state actors was very significant attempt to map out what kind of discourse is adopted by the religiously oriented non-state actors with a specific focus on the compulsory military service and securitization of the Afrin military crisis. While doing so, the study directly deciphers the imaginings of these actors on the ideal way the security, peace, and individual rights and liberties are thought and practiced in the Turkish context with their reverence of de-militarization, de-securitization and human rights.

As one of the prominent findings of the analysis, the Muslim COs and anti-war activists are amorphous, given that their identities and Islamic backgrounds vary both among themselves and across other COs. However, they mostly have no discernible conflictual relationship and rhetoric among themselves at any point. Even though it seems hard to establish one-dimensional moral or political rhetoric across all Muslim COs and anti-war activists, given that Islamism is very much open to personal interpretation, they collectively turn Islam into both an oppositional identity and a cause of resistance against the current prevailing understanding of Islamism namely, the AKP-led conservative governance. Despite the conventional wisdom on the relative homogeneity of the Islamic movement and thought in Turkey, the empirical cases of the Muslim COs and anti-war activists illustrate how much Islamic dissidence has been internalized by some as a reaction to the current political system. In brief terms, the participants' critical discourse and resistance elicit that they have a deep conflictive relationship with the AKP given its repressive practices on the citizens. Overall, conducting such active research with the participants enunciated how much a pious Muslim identity has become a contested issue pertaining to the military and security even though it has long been promoted as a grand overarching strategy regulating the relationship between the state and the obedient Muslim citizens.

Secondly, the analysis has shown that the Islamist COs' and anti-war activists' convictions on the role of religion in the military and religious nationalism in the security discourse are starkly different from the state use of religiously infused political rhetoric. Firstly, the participants disagreed with the elites' determination on what it is a proper way

of living for Muslims, who are conceived to be pious and patriotic soldiers for the conscription institution in Turkey. Opposing both militarist and nationalist interpretations of Islam, it is very clear that Muslim COs and anti-war activists locate their dissidence in deeply competing understanding and praxis of Islamic doctrines and concepts. As they acted as counter non-state agents, their objection to the compulsory military service aims at protecting their self-defined religious customs, glorifying the life of human beings and individual liberties vis-à-vis the excess of the state and the military power, especially on the lives of individuals. The participants, without exception, defined religion as an autonomous private sphere of human beings by defying reification and instrumentalization of religion in the hands of politicians. As part of their discursive oppositional stance, they contested the pragmatic use of Islamic idioms such as ‘martyrdom’ and ‘jihad’, which were assumed to be exploited by the governing elite to dictate what Muslims must say or act in such situations where military crisis needs total defense. As was shown, the portrayal of the operation as a holy struggle and the martyrs as sacrificial heroes of the nation were rejected by the participants, based on the discursive manipulation of the state on these sacred idioms. In this regard, all the group discussions reveal that the use of religious and nationalist valuation of soldiering and the military operation itself are nothing, but a discursive tactic the elites have long enjoyed mobilizing the population. Contrary to the elites’ manifest and normative discursive practices over Islamic faith, the participants believed that Muslims should freely constitute their own moral self, social and political practices without being afraid of prosecuted as the ‘other’ in the Islamic community.

What is more, Muslim COs and anti-war activists brought about new critiques of the role of religion and nationalism in a particular context of the mandatory military service and the Afrin military operation.⁵⁵ In that sense, this research was relatively novel since it enabled the participants to frame new issues and beyond perform their own meaning-making capacity on the following matter, that is the reevaluation of the elites’ security discourses which are abundantly filled with religious and nationalist references. As the study shows, the participants’ prior discontent is closely related to the nationalist usage of Islamism in the context of military campaigns and the compulsory military

⁵⁵ It is here important to note that there was only one participant named Alper, a self-identified Kurdish Muslim CO, benignly approached the objectives of the Afrin military operation with a lesser suspicion, given the fact that the operation launched outside border of Turkey and both the local news coming from the region was not reliable enough to criticize Turkey’s military operation in Syria. In this regard, he was the only one out of total 25 participants, who relatively refrained from speaking over the issue of the Afrin operation as both a security matter for the state, and a source of insecurity for the Islamic COs.

service to garner wide-ranged support from the Muslim populated society. As security discourses and practices of the state predominantly shaped by the governing elites' religiously infused nationalist political rhetoric, the participants adopt Islamically-rooted dissident voice to challenge the former one's authority. In the formulation of security policies, the state-centric elites, who are frequently associated with the AKP officials by the participants, rely upon the positive affirmations of conservative Islamism to justify their security maneuvers and the national identity and interest they imposed. As the participants claimed, the Turkish state has always tried to instrumentalize and use religion for its own goals. In their renderings, such instrumentalization reached its climax under the AKP government whose policies outlawed the political and ethical claims of some segments of the Islamic community as well as the ethnic groups as it is the case for the Kurdish people. All in all, although the AKP seemed to create a considerable appeal among the conservative people in Turkey, Muslim COs and anti-war activists came to fore as the marginalized actors despite their ideological belongingness to the Islamic community. In that sense, instrumentalization of Islam in the nationalist military contexts seem to increasingly intensify the distance between the participants and the current political system. This further may evidence that the presence and struggle of the Islamic group in the movement of CO is promising given the fact that religion and nationalism are the most important two factors nourishing and reproducing the militarist tenets both at the state and societal levels. Today Muslim COs and anti-war activists seem to represent an important challenge to the mainstream Islamist and religious nationalist ideological hegemony of the AKP in which they have been accused of being betrayers, given their defiance of nationalist and religious interpretations of the military. In brief terms, they are not simply interesting counter non-state actors, but they also represent another ideological and ethical niche of Islamism, yet somehow, their ideals have not appealed among many conservative people.

More poignantly, the participants having an Islamic orientation assessed the security policies of the AKP in the specific context of the Afrin operation as hypocrite, given that the party has always followed religiously infused political agenda to achieve its own goals, including material and geographical interests. Furthermore, the study firstly demonstrated that Islamic counter-agents have a problem with the extensive use of religion for nationalist and militarist objectives of the state. In what follows, the participants are against the way the authoritarian political rhetoric, which has been constituted by the use of religious and nationalist sensibilities of people, regulates the

individual rights and liberties in a restricted way, such as freedom of speech and expression. Despite the constraints on the critical voices of the Muslim COs and anti-war activists, they are still able to generate an Islamic dissidence vis-à-vis the popular conservative hegemony of the AKP and its security policies in both inside and outside the country. In fact, these Islamist people are perceived as marginal to the prevalent Islamic understanding in Turkey in which militarist, statist and nationalist trajectories are cherished. However, analysis of the participants' discourses on all aforementioned subjects displays how much Islamic worldviews, understanding and practices could vary even though the state tries to keep convictions about Islamism unified through putting them into the service of both the state's hegemonic discourses and practices.

Last but not least, this analysis has also several further implications for the study of Muslim CO and CO in general. As Onbaşı (2016) stated, there is a growing academic interest on the subject of the CO in the literature focusing mostly on the intersection of militarism and nationalism. However, it is my argument that Muslim COs are the group of people who has received relatively scarce attention in that literature in comparison to the women, pacifists, Kurdish and LGBT+ activists given that religion is the least associated factor pertaining to the challenge or refusal of the compulsory military service. Therefore, while the extant studies have piled between nationalism and militarism in interrogating the cases of COs, this study is novel in terms of adding a religious perspective into the picture.

Besides, there are few studies scrutinizing the cases of Muslim COs, which mostly rely upon the personal interviews conducted with a few Muslim COs, published interviews and the court cases of them to comprehend the bases of the religiously oriented CO (Erol 2013; Öğünç 2013; Kemerli 2015; Kemerli 2018). Therefore, whereas the relevant studies on the cases of Muslim COs just focus on the individualist aspect of faith-based CO, this analysis enabled them to speak out on multiple issues in a flexible and interactive focus group environment. This, in turn, paves way for discovering potentials for discursive alliances and unifications among the participants instead of overemphasizing the moral and political specificity of each Muslim CO. Rather than of just empowering Islamist COs and anti-war activists with a voice on the religious CO, this study also illuminates the reverse side of the story; namely, how they as non-state actors redefine and reshape religious and nationalist reverence of the military service and warlike practices of the state. Additionally, as shown in the scope of this research, it is important to recognize how complex the cases of Muslim COs and anti-war activist in

reality are. This is because, the participants' oppositional stance is a multi-layered process that is not simply related to the refusal of the compulsory military service. Therefore, this research offers new insights on how they express their political agencies in other sectors such as security, military operations, and the use of religious nationalist political rhetoric of the elites. As part of this broader implication, the research additionally illustrates the great divergence between the pervasive interpretation of Islam at the institutional level and the participants' view on Islam. As a corollary to that, the research contributes to understanding how much the presence and critiques of the Islamist counter agents constitute a powerful crack in the system in which militarism has long been shaped around the nationalist and religious tenets. In this regard, the religiously practiced CO of Muslim COs and anti-war activists came to fore as a sacrilegious and unpatriotic praxis which, in turn, makes them the most threatening 'other' in the Islamic community.

Kemerli (2015; 2018) conducted personal interviews with a small group of Muslim COs in her two scholarly studies. In fact, these aforementioned studies are the only ones focusing on the perceptions and cases of Muslim COs. In her renderings, the Muslim COs are perceived as a divided group due to the differences in their Islamic worldviews and traditions, thereby, not succeeded in establishing a consistent and unified discourse across themselves. However, this research conducted with the Muslim COs in group settings reveals inattentiveness of the above-mentioned studies by illustrating that when they convened in such an environment, they can work together on the problems and practices closely related to their personal lives to foster discursive commonalities. As an illustration of it, the Muslim COs and anti-war activists showed a great consensus, at least in the form of consciousness, in a way to challenge religious nationalist mandating of the military service and to oppose nationalist interpretation of Islam in case of security crisis. What is more, they jointly ground their religiously infused dissidence in a position competing with the prevalent understanding and praxis of Islamism which enshrines militarist and nationalist patriotism for Muslims. In this regard, despite the diversifications across the identities and Islamic worldviews of Muslims, their resistance mostly unified in terms of undermining a priori assumptions on the homogeneity of Turkish Islam in Turkey, especially in the context of the military.

As we have seen in the discourses of the participants, the CO movement consists of different groups with various identifications and interests. However, the focus groups conducted with the Muslim COs and anti-war activists enunciate that Muslim activists and the other segments of the movement are not necessarily in opposition, meaning that

they closely intersect each other on the certain grounds. Where these commonalities manifested themselves is the Kurdish issue, exaltation of a human life, and the quest for an alternative security agenda. Given the multiple and intersecting claims across all COs regardless of their personal and political identifications, the Muslim COs' act of objection not only widen the scope and claims the CO put forth but also strengthen it with their new subjectivities and critiques. As a result, the research contributes to understanding the way the CO movement emerged out as an intersectional dissident movement in and through which individuals do not necessarily contest on their identities and subjectivities but to some extent, they cooperate to challenge militarist and nationalist conceptions.

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APPENDIX I

Focus Group Questionnaire (in Turkish)

1. Zorunlu askerlik hizmeti sizin için ne anlam ifade ediyor?
2. Sizce askerlik görevi kişisel kimliğin önemli bir parçası mıdır? (Türklük, erkeklik, Müslümanlık gibi)
3. Türk kültüründe önemli bir yer tuttuğu farz edilen; “ordu-millet”, “Her Türk asker doğar”, “Askerlik Peygamber ocağıdır” gibi ifadeleri nasıl yorumluyorsunuz?
4. Müslüman vicdani retçi ve savaş karşıtı olmayı hangi temellere ve sebeplere dayandırıyorsunuz?
5. Müslüman vicdani retçilerin ve savaş karşıtlarının benimsemiş olduğu ortak bir söylem var mı? Var ise örnekler ile açıklayabilir misiniz?
6. Müslüman vicdani retçiler ve savaş karşıtları olarak savaşa ya da askeri çatışmaya karşı bakış açınız nedir?
7. Afrin operasyonu hakkındaki görüş ve düşünceleriniz nelerdir?
8. Afrin operasyonu boyunca ordu ile ilintendirilen “milliyetçilik”, “din” ve “şehit” ve “gazi” haberleri hakkındaki düşünceleriniz nelerdir?
9. Afrin operasyonunu güvenlik bakış açısı ile nasıl değerlendiriyorsunuz?
10. Afrin operasyonu sürecinde devlet yöneticilerinin ya da siyasetçilerin söylemleri hakkında ne düşünüyorsunuz?
11. Sizce bahsetmiş olduğunuz siyasetçilerin ifadeleri dini milliyetçi öğeler taşıyor mu? Taşındığını düşünüyorsanız örnek verebilir misiniz?
12. Siyasetçilerin ifadelerinin zorunlu askerlik görevi üzerinde, operasyon sürecini de göz önüne alarak, bir etkisi olduğunu düşünüyor musunuz?
13. Siyasetçilerin söylemlerinin operasyonun güvenlik ile ilişkilendirilme sürecinde bir etkisi olduğunu düşünüyor musunuz? Düşünüyorsanız bu etkiyi örnekler ile açıklayabilir misiniz?
14. Son olarak, bu soruların dışında eklemek istedikleriniz ya da bu çalışmaya katkısı olabileceğini düşündüğünüz ek konular/sorular var ise paylaşabilir misiniz?

APPENDIX II

Consent Form

Sabancı Üniversitesi Araştırmaya Katılım Onay Formu

Araştırma Başlığı: Afrin Askeri Operasyonu Vakasında Dini Milliyetçilik Söyleminin Araçsallaştırılması ve Müslüman Vicdani Retçiler⁵⁶

Asli Araştırmacı: Prof. Ayşe Betül Çelik / Tez Danışmanı

Eş Araştırmacı: Hatice Esra Öney / Uyuşmazlık Analizi ve Çözümü Programı Yüksek Lisans Öğrencisi

Uygulayıcı: Hatice Esra Öney

Çalışmanın Amacı:

Bu araştırma Sabancı Üniversitesi Uyuşmazlık Analizi ve Çözümü programı öğretim üyesi Prof. Ayşe Betül Çelik denetimi ve sorumluluğunda aynı programın yüksek lisans öğrencisi Hatice Esra Öney'in tez çalışması için veri ve bilgi toplamayı amaçlamaktadır.

Çalışmanın esas amacı Müslüman vicdani retçiler ve savaş karşıtları ile bir odak grubu analizi oluşturmaktır. Bu kapsamda katılımcıların Afrin askeri operasyonu hakkındaki düşünce ve görüşlerinin nasıl şekillendiği anlaşılmaya çalışılacaktır. Bu söylemler karşısında Müslüman vicdani retçilerin ve savaş karşıtlarının söylemlerinin araştırma konusuna nasıl yaklaştıkları inceleme konusu olacaktır. Müslüman vicdani retçilerin ve savaş karşıtlarının vicdani retlerini ve savaş karşıtlıklarını hangi gerekçeler ile oluşturdukları ve dini milliyetçilik retoriğine ve askeri operasyonun 'güvenleştirilme' biçimlerine yaklaşımları araştırmanın temel amaçları arasındadır.

Çalışma boyunca

Görüşmeler yaklaşık olarak üç ile üç buçuk saat arasında sürecektir. Katılımcılara araştırma konusu ile ilgili olarak açık uçlu sorular yöneltilecektir. Hem Müslüman vicdani retçi kimlikleri hem de Afrin operasyonu ile alakalı olarak katılımcıların konuya nasıl yaklaştıkları ve düşüncelerini diğer grup üyeleri ile tartışılacak şekilde ifade etmeleri istenecektir. Katılımcılar isterler ise odak grubu analizi kapsamında gerçek isimlerini kullanmak yerine takma ad kullanabileceklerdir. Katılımcıların ses kaydı alma konusunda izinlerine danışılacak, ancak gruptan herhangi birinin onay vermemesi halinde çalışmaya not alınarak devam edilecektir.

Bu çalışmayla ilgili olası risk ve rahatsızlıkları aşağıda bulabilirsiniz:

⁵⁶ As shown in the Consent Form, the initial title of the thesis was different. The title changed after the group meetings finished based on the self-identifications of the participants.

Çalışmaya katılım tamamen isteğe bağlıdır. Katılımcılar araştırmaya dahil olmayı reddedebilir veya istekleri doğrultusunda diledikleri an araştırmadan çekilebilir. Çalışmaya katılım için katılımcılara maddi bir teşvik sunulmayacak ve katılımları konusunda ek bir talepte bulunulmayacaktır. Katılımcıların kimlik ve adres bilgileri alınmayacaktır ve verdikleri bilgiler tamamen gizli tutulacaktır. Katılımcıların soruları tartışmalı ya da hassas içerikte bulmaları halinde herhangi bir endişeye sahip olmadan istedikleri soruları cevaplamayabilir ya da çalışmadan ayrılabilirler. Çalışmadan elde edilen veriler bilimsel araştırma kapsamında değerlendirilecek ve sadece bu çalışma kapsamında kullanılacaktır. Katılımcıların tercihine göre görüşmeler ses kayıt cihazı ile kayıt altına alınabilir veya not olarak sürdürülebilir. Katılımcılar görüşmeyi istedikleri anda durdurabilirler ve görüşme sürecinde cevaplamak istemedikleri soruları yanıtızsız bırakabilirler.

Görüşme hakkında daha detaylı bilgiye ulaşmak isterseniz Sabancı Üniversitesi Sanat ve Sosyal Bilimler Fakültesi öğretim üyesi Prof. Ayşe Betül Çelik ile telefon (216) 483 9298 veya e-mail yoluyla bcelik@sabanciuniv.edu iletişime geçebilirsiniz.

Eğer haklarınıza zarar verildiğini düşünüyorsanız lütfen Sabancı Üniversitesi Araştırma Etik Kurulu Başkanı Prof. Mehme Yılmaz ile telefon (216) 300- 1301 veya e-mail aracılığıyla meyildiz@sabanciuniv.edu iletişime geçiniz.

Bu formu imzalayarak çalışmaya katılımınızı onaylıyorsunuz.

Ses kaydı alınmasına izin veriyorum: Evet Hayır

İmza _____

Tarih _____