

ONTOLOGICAL SECURITY AND SUPPORT FOR PEACE
PROCESSES

by
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ABSTRACT

ONTOLOGICAL SECURITY AND SUPPORT FOR PEACE PROCESSES

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CONFLICT ANALYSIS AND RESOLUTION, M.A. THESIS, JULY 2021

Thesis Supervisor: Prof. Ayşe Betül Çelik

Keywords: Ontological Security, Fear, Anxiety, Support, Kurdish Issue, Peace
Process

This thesis addresses the question of how ontological (in)securities affect public support for peace processes. For this purpose, the Kurdish Issue in Turkey is chosen as a case and the Wise People Committee members were interviewed about the participants of the meetings that they held during the second peace process in Turkey (2013-2015). The thesis establishes that ontological insecurities of the majority group are likely to have resulted in reservations about supporting the peace process among the Turkish groups while minority groups seemed to have remained highly supportive of the process despite also having significant ontological security challenges. Therefore, the thesis concludes that ontological security is an important determinant for the level of support to the peace process mostly among the minority groups, but it still affects the tendency of the majority group to quickly abandon the peace process.

ÖZET

ONTOLOJİK GÜVENLİK VE BARIŞ SÜREÇLERİNE DESTEK

EBUBEKİR FURKAN ERDOĞAN

UYUŞMAZLIK ANALİZİ VE ÇÖZÜMÜ, YÜKSEK LİSANS, TEMMUZ 2021

Tez Danışmanı: Prof. Dr. Ayşe Betül Çelik

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ontolojik Güvenlik, Korku, Kaygı, Destek, Kürt Meselesi,
Çözüm Süreci

Bu tez, ontolojik güven(siz)liğin barış süreçlerine toplumsal desteği nasıl etkilediği sorusunu ele almaktadır. Bu amaçla Türkiye'deki Kürt Meselesi vaka olarak seçilmiş ve Akil İnsanlar Komitesi üyeleri ile Türkiye'deki ikinci çözüm sürecinde (2013-2015) yaptıkları toplantıların katılımcıları hakkında görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Bu tez, çoğunluk grubunun (Türklerin) ontolojik güvensizliklerinin barış sürecini destekleme konusunda çekincelere yol açmış olabileceğini, azınlık gruplarının ise önemli ontolojik güvenlik sorunlarına rağmen yüksek destek sergilediklerini ortaya koymaktadır. Bu nedenle tez, ontolojik güvenliğin azınlık grupları arasında barış sürecine verilen desteğin düzeyi için önemli bir belirleyici olduğu, ancak yine de çoğunluk grubunun barış sürecini hızla terk etme eğilimini etkilediği sonucuna varmaktadır.

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To those who deserve peace but also fear from it

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AKP Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi - Justice and Development Party	18, 19, 20, 21, 31
EU European Union	18
HDP Halkların Demokratik Partisi - Peoples' Democratic Party	20, 21, 22, 30, 48
MHP Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi - Nationalist Movement Party	31
PKK Partîya Karkerên Kurdistanê - Kurdistan Workers Party	17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 42, 43, 46, 47, 48
WPC Akil İnsanlar Heyeti - Wise People Committee	1, 26, 32, 33, 34, 36, 38

1. INTRODUCTION

The term ‘peace process’ and peace processes in general are usual sights in today’s conflict resolution scholarship. The need for exploring the determinants of success for peace processes is clear in the face of numerous attempts of initiating peace that fall short of their aims (Darby and Mac Ginty 2008*b*). The two peace processes in Turkey between 2009 and 2011 and between 2013 and 2015 aimed to amend the Kurdish issue in Turkey. While reforms and attempts of communicating the issue to the public have gone a long way in preparing the public scene, the peace process came to an abrupt end and the conflict went back to even higher levels of violence after the process.

Studying ontological security in the context of peace processes would improve the understanding of opportunities and obstacles faced through the course of these attempts. Exploring how individuals manifest and react to ontological (in)securities during these processes would also make practitioners of peace more alert in monitoring these manifestations and reactions so that preemptive strategies for obstacles can be developed and the arising opportunities can be made use of. Attending to the ontological security needs of the public would hopefully increase the likelihood of attaining peace and avoiding pitfalls in the process. Knowing the importance of public support for the successful finalization of peace processes, this thesis explores the relationship between the sense of ontological security felt by minority and majority groups and support for peace processes in the case of Turkey’s second peace process between 2013 and 2015. As the attempts of making the public engage with the peace process took place during this second phase, the focus of this thesis is on the process between 2013 and 2015 instead of the one between 2009 and 2011. Building on the ontological security and conflict resolution literature, the thesis uses the case of the Wise People Committees (WPC) that were formed in support of the peace process to observe and discuss the manifestations of ontological (in)security among the public and tries to relate it to the level of societal support that the peace process received from the public.

Therefore, the research question of this thesis is “How did ontological (in)securities affect societal support for the peace process in the Kurdish issue?” Since support in peace processes is thought to be important for the successful resolution of conflicts, answering this research question would enable scholars and practitioners to be wary of the ontological security concerns of the public in conflict and peace scenarios. As such, preemptive strategies may be developed to avoid the pitfalls created by these ontological security concerns and to devise methods to peacefully transform conflicts by also attending to ontological security needs of the parties.

An answer to this research question has been sought by exploring the manifestations of ontological (in)security and support of individuals who participated to the meetings of the Wise People Committee. 5 members of the Wise People Committee have been interviewed and several written works of members were used. However, the more important aim of this thesis remains as having a scholarly approach to the Wise People Committee and suggesting the future areas of focus for conflict resolution and ontological security literatures, rather than providing full-fledged inferences about the ontological (in)securities and the support of the public or producing a critique of the peace process and the Wise People Committee.

The manifestations of ontological security were divided into three distinct but related categories and their examples have been provided by the use of the semi-structured interviews conducted with the members of the Wise People Committee from different regions of Turkey and secondary data reflecting their experiences during the peace process. Then, the ontological security possessed by different groups were related to the level of support that the public offered for the peace process. The findings implicate that even before the beginning of the process, ontological insecurity was already high among the minority groups, and especially Kurdish individuals. This is thought to be a result of the uneven relationship between the Turkish state and the discarded demands and existence of the Kurdish people. On the other hand, the initiation and the proceeding of the peace process severely hurt the ontological security of the majority group, Turks. While the minority groups’ search for ontological security was through the improvement of their rights and freedoms by the peace process, there were always signs that the nationalist and extremist Turkish groups desired a return to the previous days of the conflict where everything was predictable and their self-narratives and meaning systems were not challenged. Therefore, this thesis suggests that the sense of ontological security was a determinant of majority support since the minority group was already supporting the peace process despite their ontological insecurities.

In mid-2015, with the end of the peace process, the then-frozen conflict turned

hot again. The results suggest that the public was taken to the necessary phase of the process where the ontological insecurities of the parties were high. However, the abrupt end of the peace process and sudden return of the parties to their pre-negotiation behaviors show that there were no opportunities provided for reconstructing the self-narratives and the meaning systems of the majority groups without a central focus on conflictual relationships.

In the following chapter, I provide a review of the relevant literature on peace processes, support for peace processes, and ontological security along with the ontological security framework that this study depends on. Afterwards, a brief historical overview of the Kurdish issue follows to put the peace process between 2013 and 2015 into a clearer context. After the literature review, I provide the details of the methodology I followed in collecting and analyzing the data obtained through a series of semi-structured interviews conducted with the Wise People Committee members for the purpose of observing the manifestations of ontological security and support among the participants of the committee meetings. A secondary source of data is the written works of the Wise People Committee members reflecting on their meetings. Finally, the observations on ontological security of various groups and its effects on their level of support for the peace process are given a relational discussion followed by a general conclusion chapter.

This thesis concludes with the findings that the peace process generated ontological insecurity among the wide sections of the public. The manifestations of ontological insecurity that mostly intensified around the objects of fear, Self-Other relationships, and moral systems point out the anxiety felt by individuals. The Kurdish and minority groups are found to be supporting the process despite their lack of ontological security and their abundant anxieties. However, the support from majority groups to the peace process always remained lower than the minority groups. This is related to the anxieties they experienced and the subsequent state of ontological insecurity. The disregard and negligence for the ontological security needs of the public resulted in the desire of the public to return to their previous conflictual behaviors. This desire is thought to be a reason as to why the abandonment of the peace process was so sudden and welcomed by some societal groups without a major discontent.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section will lay out and commentate on the current literature on the peace processes that are initiated with the aim of ending or transforming ethnic conflicts, the importance of public support for initiatives of peace, and the relationship between the concept of ontological security and conflict resolution. Before concluding, the analytical framework devised by Bahar Rumelili (2014) will be explained for the purpose of laying out the theoretical base of this thesis. Finally, the gap to which this thesis will try to fit will be pinpointed and the contribution of the thesis will be discussed by laying down its theoretical expectations.

2.1 Ethnicity, Ethnic Conflict and Peace Processes

Ethnicity is a difficult concept to define, and this complexity is reflected in the width of the ethnicity literature. There are several and very distinct definitions of both ethnicity and ethnic conflicts. According to Kaufman (2010), ethnicity is an ascriptive adjective and can be best understood if one utilizes the definition by Anthony Smith (1986). Smith (1986) defines an ethnic group based on its distinct name, actual or discursive common predecessor, common language or religion, common understanding of its collective history, and common land which its members regard as their own. Also, ethnic conflict is defined by Cordell and Wolff (2010, 4) as a conflict “in which the goals of at least one conflict party are defined in (exclusively) ethnic terms, and in which the primary fault line of confrontation is one of ethnic distinctions”. Ethnic conflicts may take on different forms and qualities, from intense violence, such as genocides, to minor tensions between conflict parties (Cordell and Wolff 2010). For a party to situate itself according to ethnic distinction, there has to be another group which is ethnically different than itself. Guelke (2004, 7) provides scholars with a tool to understand ethnically diverse societies, namely the concept of ethnic order. According to him, an ethnic order is an unstable regime that tries

to unify the public under one ethnic identity. It is a regime that “privileges . . . one ethnic group . . . over all other groups”, either by jurisdiction or unlawful measures, and these privileges are usually incorporated in the society (Guelke 2004, 8-9). The term ‘peace process’ usually denotes an attempt at resolving, transforming, or managing a conflict with either an aim of eliminating violence or enabling cohabitation. In the literature, it is used to denote the situations in which there are “attempts at mediation, transformation or resolution” (Tonge 2014, 15). A stricter definition makes use of the circumstances of the process and as such the actors, aims, and the perseverance of the process are included in the definition (Darby and Mac Ginty 2008*a*). While conceptualizing the latter understanding, it is important to note that peace processes in which non-violence and the eventual resolution of the conflict are sought may not always proceed in linear trajectories, may even worsen, and generally take significant time (Darby and Mac Ginty 2008*a*; Tonge 2014). On another aspect of these processes, it is also argued that they can often take on many forms as to whether they are formal, public, and subject to support (Darby and Mac Ginty 2008*a*).

As such, a need for a minimal definition arises. According to Darby and Mac Ginty (2008*a*), attempts of conflict management, resolution or transformation should fulfill 5 criteria to be called peace processes. These are the willingness of the conflict parties to negotiate with the aim of achieving peace, the inclusion of the stakeholders of the conflict in the process, the negotiation of the most important issues pertaining to the conflict, the absence of violence as a mean to achieve targets in the process, and the parties’ commitment to long-lasting peace (Darby and Mac Ginty 2008*a*, 3).

The mentioned differences in the conceptualizations of peace processes should not come as a surprise to many since the term ‘peace’ itself carries significantly different meanings according to various scholars. On one hand, peace is sometimes thought of as the end or the absence of physical violence. On the other hand, a larger set of criteria, including human rights, systemic and psychological violence, etc. determine whether there is peace or not. While the former understanding came to be called the ‘negative peace’ (Tonge 2014, 18), the latter came to be called ‘positive peace’ (Tonge 2014, 18).

Peace processes, as would be expected as a result of the numerous deadly conflicts found around the globe to this present day, are already difficult for the divergences in the approaches discussed above. However, the substance of these processes also contains inherent difficulties that should be overcome to reach peace. In most ethnic conflicts, one of the parties are not recognized by the state as a legitimate actor and rather called a ‘terrorist’ organization. Such an asymmetry of power is also put

forward as an important contextual determinant of the success of the peace process by Ozerdem and Mac Ginty (2019, 4). The reason for the use of the terrorism frame is the incompatibility between the states' inherent claim on sovereignty within its borders and the claim of ethnic groups on a specific territory. As one of the properties of an ethnic group is the mentioned as regarding a common land as their own by Smith (1986), it is not in the interest of the state to legitimize an entity claiming a right to a part of its sovereignty. In such cases where one of the parties is framed as a terrorist organization, the public does not generally condone negotiating with armed groups in order not to legitimize those groups and therefore does not provide high support for the process (Powell 2015). The individuals who feel the most strongly about these issues may then become spoilers for the peace process (Guelke 2008). Other spoilers have an interest in the continuation of the conflict (Darby and Mac Ginty 2008c; Stedman 2008).

2.2 Societal Support for Peace Processes

Lederach (1997) divides the society into three parts in order to better analyze their effects on peace initiatives. The well-known key leaders of the conflict parties who have the representative legitimacy to negotiate and argue for their respective sides in the eyes of their constituencies and decision-making power are classified as the top-level leadership (Lederach 1997, 38). However, their high profile restricts them in easily changing their positions with regards to the issues of the conflict. The individuals who are considered leaders among the public but are not situated within the hierarchical structures of the conflict parties such as the governments and opposition groups are classified as the middle-range leadership (Lederach 1997, 41). These middle-level leaders are mostly known by the top-level leaders of the group they belong to and also have strong relations with the general public. Finally, individuals who operate among the public as part of various public networks such as NGOs, refugee camps or health organizations are named grassroots leadership (Lederach 1997, 42).

According to Lederach (1997) a general majority of the public should be convinced to support peace in to attain a sustainable peace agreement. Therefore, the peace process in Turkey also tried to address this necessity by engaging the public. The Wise People Committee served the purpose of bringing together the middle-range leadership and the grassroots since academics, columnists, artists, etc. contacted the general public during the meetings of the committee. The aim was to increase

support in the society for the initiated peace process.

The literature on peace processes attribute extensive power to societal support for determining the outcome of the peace process. The predicament of governments in initiating and concluding peace processes between what is necessary to achieve peace and what is acceptable for their constituency was denoted as ‘two-level games’ by Robert Putnam (1988, 434). In such predicaments, the government has to negotiate and convince the other party of the conflict to a peace agreement while simultaneously convincing the public to support the peace process so as not to lose its popular support.

Additionally, public support is necessary for the sustainability of the reached agreements because the public either ratifies the agreements itself or elects the legislative bodies which will. A lack of support means the agreement cannot be ratified or the legislative body acting against the public opinion will suffer a loss of electoral power. The two-level games concept of Putnam (1988) has also been used in analyzing the Kurdish issue in Turkey by Kubicek (1997), albeit with an addition of a “third game” that is between the negotiating entity and the international community (Kubicek 1997, 82). The general literature on the role of constituency and the specific interest in applying this literature to the Kurdish issue elaborate clearly the importance of societal support during the peace process. Additionally, it is also recognized that the future of the minority groups and their own conceptions of their future should be taken into account since they are important determinants of support for peace processes in ethnic conflicts (Lake and Rothchild 1996).

Apart from the question of who should support peace to achieve a peaceful resolution that Lederach (1997) addresses, the question of when people support peace is addressed by Dean Pruitt (1997) who argues that people become ready to support peaceful settlements when they have enough incentives to pursue peace for their own good and the belief that it is possible to achieve peace. As achieving sustainable peace is not possible without initiating a peace attempt, readiness appears as a major determinant of whether peace is possible. The public (and the parties of the conflict) should be ready for the initiation of such attempts if the aim is to reach a peaceful conclusion at the end of the negotiations. For satisfying the two criteria of the readiness theory by Pruitt (1997), peace should be perceived as beneficial by the public and the parties by contributing to their agendas, whatever they may be, and it should be perceived as possible. Still, this is easier said than done. Çuhadar (2020) emphasizes that the dominant group has a tendency to reject being included in the peace process as a result of their perception that they may lose their privileged status. This becomes an obstacle in the way of peace when both Leder-

ach's (1997) and Pruitt's (1997) arguments are considered. The majority group's withdrawal means obtaining majority support is almost impossible, and that the majority group lacks the motivation to initiate or support peace attempts.

2.3 Ontological Security

Rumelili (2015) recommends that physical and ontological security should be properly distinguished from each other, and argues that these two types of security, both of which need to be changed for a successful resolution of a conflict, are closely related, and any change in one necessitates a change in the other. Additionally, she argues that preventing securitization, which means removing issues from political discussion by framing them as security issues (Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde 1998), offers chances for increasing ontological security and that ontologically insecure actors are more likely to fail in de-securitizing their issues. In order to gain a more detailed understanding of ontological (in)security as it is used in this thesis, the distinction of fear and anxiety should clearly be made. Individuals try to find ways of transforming their anxieties into fears. Anxieties lack the objects that they can be projected on while fears have such objects. In the words of Anthony Giddens (1991) one fears death but is anxious about the uncertainty of what is to come next after it. He/she can take actions against his/her predictions of what may bring about the feared death and therefore it becomes easier to deal with such a fear. Subsequently, one becomes able to carry on with their life in a sense of continuity. However, there is no escape from the anxiety about the aftermath of death because one cannot make the aftermath predictable as he/she does with the fear of death by trying to estimate how it may be prevented.

The term ontological security was first used by Anthony Giddens (1991) as a concept. Giddens' use of the concept was mainly concerned with psychology, which he used to refer to the sense of continuity of activities perceived by an individual, the sense of self-identity that this perception of continuity creates in the individual, and the individual's narration of this sense to the Others.

Such a conception implies that a change in the habitual politics of a nation-state and an ethnic group will lead to anxiety since it will decrease the sense of ontological security by annulling the continuity for both the state and the ethnic group. This line of thought also necessitates the emergence of resistance, either by the state or the ethnic group against that change. It has also been argued that since ontological security is found for some in the continuity of their actions and routines, attempts

of political or sociological change are expected to create resistance if they diminish the objects of fear and the meaning systems of individuals, resulting in anxiety (Browning and Joenniemi 2017). If the probability of change persists or change happens despite this increase in anxiety, one can expect to observe loss of support for those changes by the entities whose ontological security is decreased (Kinnvall and Mitzen 2020).

The ontological security concept in psychology was later adopted and applied to the political science field as scholars instrumentalized it to explain the actions of states, which are sometimes impossible to explain by rational choice models (e.g., Kinnvall and Mitzen 2020; Mitzen 2006; Steele 2008). As such, it was argued that states do not act only to capitalize on material interests but are also concerned with their interests relating to their identity (Steele 2008). This approach could also be considered in line with the image theory in order to explain the maintenance of positive self-images by political actors. According to the image theory¹, the need of the states to be able to frame their conflictual opponent as the enemy serves to this maintenance so that their self-image does not become one of a state that attacks or oppresses an innocent group or state (Alexander, Levin, and Henry 2005).

An important piece in the literature on how states attempt to increase ontological security was written by Jennifer Mitzen (2006), who formulated and related ontological security at both individual and state levels as well as discussing the implications of ontological security on the security dilemma instead of discussing those implications with a focus on physical security as has been frequently done. Another point she makes which holds high explanatory power on the intractability of conflicts is that sometimes conflicts are helpful to states in maintaining their self of sense, and therefore resolving such conflicts may create ontological insecurity for them as a result of annulling their self-narratives. In such cases, the conflict is bound to be persistent (Mitzen 2006).

However, in the attainment of ontological security, one should bear in mind that conflicts, including ethnic conflicts, usually encompasses a wide variety of issues and areas. Lupovici (2012) recognizes this fact and argues that sometimes the contradictory nature of the solutions to each of these issues means that conflict parties face a trade-off, which means that a part of the proposed solution may create ontological security for one reason while another part of it decreases ontological security for another reason. He terms this phenomenon ‘ontological dissonance,’ and argues that in such cases parties may choose to resume the conflict rather than

¹Image theory argues that decision-makers’ perceptions (images) about other actors determine the type of action they take against those others (for more information, see Alexander, Levin, and Henry 2005, 28-29)

to engage in resolution attempts (Lupovici 2012, 809).

Adding to the literature, Zarakol (2010) introduces a new variable to the studies of ontological security via her case studies on Turkey and Japan. While attempting to explain why and when states are unable to take responsibility for past crimes and atrocities, she argues that taking the “temporal and spatial dimensions” (Zarakol 2010, 4) into the equation is necessary, meaning that where the state finds itself on the world combines with the contemporary domestic and internal conditions which the state endures to create specific ontological security implications that may lead to hesitancy for apologizing or even recognizing previous wrongdoings.

Apart from all these studies that take on the subject of ontological security mainly on the state level, Croft (2012) advocates for the use of ontological security in understanding the actions and motives of individuals, as well as their sense of security, much like the human security approach in security studies. He rests his claim on the argument of Krolkowski (2008) that instead of being the referent of ontological security, state is the provider of it to its citizens. Therefore, it becomes important to explore the dynamics of ontological security and insecurity at the individual level along with the state level when trying to analyze conflicts with the help of this ontological security lens.

2.4 Ontological Security in Conflict Resolution

Following these various studies and conceptions, a new literature which analyzed conflicts, including the Kurdish conflict, from the point of ontological security emerged (e.g., Çelik 2014; Geri 2017, 2018; Kay 2012; Rumelili 2014, 2015; Rumelili and Çelik 2017). In these contributions, the ontological security levels of the conflict parties are found to be major determinants for successful initiation and conclusion of peace processes. For example, Kay (2012) examined the Northern Ireland conflict with the assumption that ontological security is the best tool to analyze it. His argument is that the root causes of the conflict are ignored by the state because those root causes were a determinant of the high level of ontological security of the state and its constituency, an argument which may be generalized onto other conflicts like the Kurdish issue in Turkey.

Relating ontological security literature to the Kurdish issue, Çelik (2014) argues that the discrepancy between the ontological security levels of the state and the Kurds makes the state unwilling to take initiative for peaceful resolution since it does not

suffer from ontological insecurity to the extent that the Kurds do. Therefore, she argues that any viable peace option should necessarily create ontological insecurity for Turks to act for peace as well as the minority groups. Her analysis of the timeline of the Kurdish issue evaluates how different events and attempts of resolution led to changes in the ontological security levels of the parties. Her findings suggest that failing to decrease the ontological security of Turks and the inability to find ways of peacefully reinstating ontological securities of the parties once the Turkish side starts experiencing ontological insecurity are the reasons for the failure of resolution attempts at different points in time. Thus, the implication is that there is a very fine line that must be walked, namely reducing the ontological security of the state while subsequently finding ways of increasing it along with the ontological security of the Kurds.

Conversely, Geri (2018) analyzes the policies of Turkey regarding the Kurdish issue by making use of the securitization theory (Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde 1998), which argues that political issues are removed from the discussion table when they are framed as security issues. He identifies that the Kurdish issue has recently been de-securitized with the resolution attempts aimed at the Kurdish issue and re-securitized after 2015. His analysis concludes that one of the main reasons for the re-securitization of the issue was the decrease in the ontological security of the Turkish state. By comparing the Aceh and Kurdish minorities in Indonesia and Turkey, Geri (2018) argues that in democratizing countries, ontological insecurity, combined with other factors such as self-interested political elites, the international context including the effect of international organizations, and the political history of democratic institutions in the country, results in the securitization of minorities while ontologically secure states might not feel the need to securitize minorities.

In another study which is concerned with ontological security and the Kurdish issue, Rumelili and Çelik (2017) use ontological asymmetry to denote the situations in which there is a significant discrepancy between the ontological security levels of a state and an ethnic group in a conflict. In such cases, one party, namely the state, has the power to create or defend its sense of self while the other, namely the minority group, is sometimes not even legitimate in the eyes of the other. One difference this discrepancy makes compared to the cases where the two parties of the conflict are equally capable of maintaining ontological security is in the resolution opportunities. Since the “peace processes are mostly easier to initiate but harder to conclude” in such conflicts, the mentioned difference is of utmost importance for peace (Rumelili and Çelik 2017, 283). Rumelili and Çelik (2017) also point out the reason for this difficulty of concluding peace processes which has greater implications for understanding the necessary conditions, including support for a

successful resolution. The ontological security of the majority party makes it less rewarding for it to pursue a change in the status-quo, which implies that there have to be considerations in mind for addressing this discrepancy while still keeping both parties at the table for resolution. Their offer for managing such discrepancies and increasing ontological security lies in agonistic peace, which denotes the situation in which the conflict parties do not stop opposing each other but their methods of opposition are transformed to be more peaceful and democratic (Rumelili and Çelik 2017, 284).

2.5 Ontological Security and Support for Peace

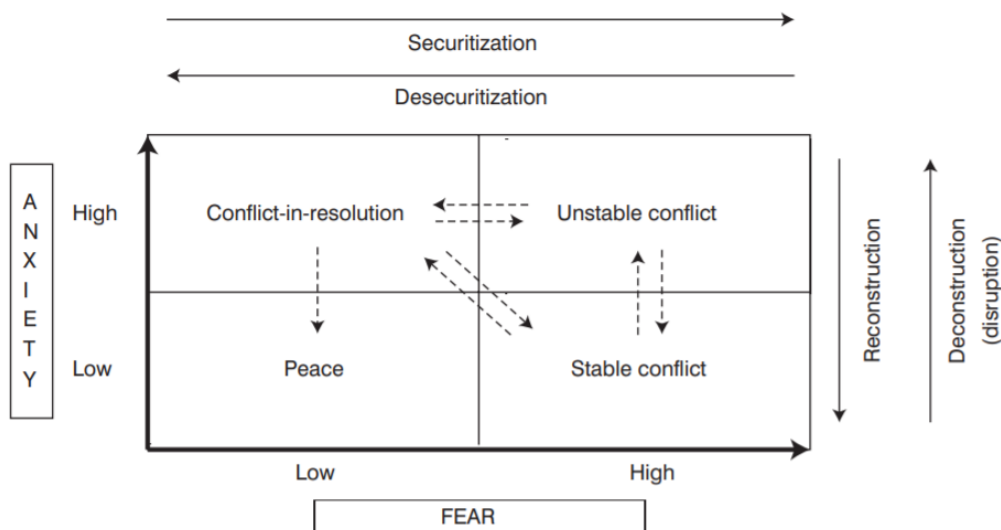
To be able to analyze the manifestations of the ontological securities and insecurities of the society which came up during the Wise People Committee meetings, the framework devised by Rumelili (2014) should be explained and discussed in depth. Firstly, the integral parts of ontological security as brought forward by Rumelili's (2014) framework will be explained. Then the discussion of what these components look like during ontologically secure and insecure periods will follow.

As previously discussed, ontological security is made up of the continuity in the activities of the individuals such as their habits and rituals, an identification of self stemming from this continuity, and the narrative that the individual can construct upon the continuity and self-identification to represent to the society (Giddens 1991). All of these components serve a specific purpose, creating expectations of what is to come from the future. The lack of such expectations about the future creates a feeling of anxiety, which cannot be dealt with by taking precautions since it lacks the objects that one can take precautions against. Therefore, it is unlike fear in that sense (Rumelili 2014; Tillich 2000), which gives individuals an expectation of the future and objects to direct their fear towards. In order to attain ontological security, then, anxiety should be contained by having a stable idea of what is to come, and doing so requires the existence or the creation of objects of fear. Accordingly, Rumelili (2014, 21) creates a typology of conflicts with respect to the levels and dynamics of anxiety and fear. In this typology, fear is increased by a process of securitization and decreased by a process of desecuritization. Anxieties on the other hand are increased by the deconstruction of meaning systems and decreased by the reconstruction (either as a return to old meaning systems or creation of a new meaning system) of those systems.

A situation of low anxiety and low fear resulting from the desecuritization of the

conflict and the deconstructing the meaning systems created by the conflict is categorized as *peace*. A conflict where fears are high as a result of distinct objects of fear and anxieties are low as a result of the meaning systems in place is denoted as a *stable conflict*. Heightened anxieties as a result of the lack of meaning systems and high fears mean that the situation is an *unstable conflict*. Finally, the low levels of fear achieved by the desecuritization of the conflict and the heightened anxieties as a result of deconstruction as well as the diminishing of the objects of fear means the situation is a *conflict-in-resolution*. However, an understanding of the types of anxieties is necessary for enabling us to appreciate and use this typology (see Figure 2.1 for typology from Rumelili 2014, 21).

Figure 2.1 Conflict resolution and ontological security: four states - Taken from Rumelili (2014, 21)



Neither all anxieties result from the same reason, nor do all serve a single purpose about ontological security. One can discuss three main types of anxieties: “. . . the ultimate anxiety of death, . . . , the anxiety of meaninglessness and the anxiety of guilt/condemnation.” (Tillich 2000 as cited in Rumelili 2014, 12). Rumelili (2014) argues that conflicts are useful in addressing these anxieties by turning them into fears and projecting them onto objects, or by constructing meaning systems and schemas to keep the self-identity and the narrative stable. As such, conflicts may be sources of ontological security for individuals. A natural result of this relationship is that when conflicts are tried to be resolved, the fears and the meaning systems become null, which increases ontological insecurity and anxieties. This result is then expected to decrease support for peace processes that carry on despite the anxieties and resistance of people against losing their ontological security (Browning and Joenniemi 2017; Kinnvall and Mitzen 2020). It is important here to mention that

such a state of ontological insecurity creates two possibilities (Rumelili 2014). One is to move beyond the conflict to create a new self-identity and new meaning systems by which individuals manage their expectations to achieve a different ontologically secure state of being, while the other is to resist the change that is brought about by the possibility of resolution and return to the old fears, self-identity, and meaning systems to get back to the previous ontological security.

In the managing of anxieties, different mechanisms are at work. One is the clear distinction between the friend and the enemy, or Self and Other, during conflict scenarios. Such a distinction is conducive to the creation of a continuous identity, the creation of an Ethos of Conflict that dictates what is right and wrong to do to reinstate morality for individuals, and the meaning they attribute to their being. Another such mechanism is the securitization (Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde 1998; Waever 1995) of the issues pertaining to conflict, which enables people to project fears onto the securitized objects instead of lacking an object and experiencing anxiety. Therefore, conflict enables securitization by providing issues that can be framed as security problems. That is why a return to conflict and resecuritization in conflict resolution attempts is a favorable choice for individuals whose ontological security was lowered as a result of the lack of securitization and the deconstruction of the stable meaning systems it brings (Rumelili 2014).

Since the start of the republic, the Kurdish population in Turkey always had certain demands about cultural or political rights. The start of the conflict can be even taken back to the 1920s. Although the prevalence of the issue was already high, the violent attacks carried out by the PKK and the strong military measures that were taken against it increased the issue's prevalence even further. With the early period being marked by distinct denial of Kurdish identity and the existence of Kurdish demands, the conflict had already created a continuous self-narrative for the state and the Turkish society. A parallel fear of secession and loss of territorial integrity served as the objects of fear and the moral value system depended heavily on the Turkish society being provoked and therefore reacting rightfully. Later on, the securitization of the conflict along with strong military measures meant the objects of fear were provided by the securitized issues, and the Self/Other relationship provided a source of meaning and moral values. Finally, the peace attempts disrupted these processes and deprived the state and the society of the chance of meaningful existence, the possession of moral high ground, and the objects of fear. Therefore, the mentioned duration of the Kurdish issue witnessed changes in almost all aspects of the framework of Rumelili (2014). So, applying this framework for the purposes of this thesis will help stay relevant to the past of the issue as well as the possible reasons of the shortcomings of the latest peace process.

Analyzing the manifestations of ontological security and of societal support for peace processes requires a clear and systemic distinction between ontological security and insecurity, and between fears and anxieties. That is why, an analysis of the manifestations of support for peace process during the Wise People Committee meetings with this framework in mind may prove more useful.

2.6 The Gap and Contribution to Literature

As can be seen from the selected literature, analyzing conflicts, conflict resolution attempts, and the transformations which these attempts bring from the point of ontological security, and not necessarily discarding physical security, could help generate ideas for when peace processes would successfully begin and end, as well as how they affect and are affected by the psychological states of the conflict parties.

Among the discussed literature, ontological security, ethnic conflicts, and the ontological security issues pertaining to conflict have been widely studied. The Kurdish issue in Turkey has received its fair share of attention from this scholarly trend. There emerged several studies exploring, explaining, and analyzing both the Kurdish issue and the resolution attempts pertaining to it using the ontological security literature. However, on the specific subject of the Kurdish issue, despite that there are arguments on how the initiation of peace processes affected the ontological security levels of the conflicting parties, and in turn the success of the process, the number of studies analyzing the ontological security of the public, their fears and anxieties during the peace process remain rather low. Therefore, this thesis will try to put forward such an analysis and relate it to the success of the peace process with the help of the discussed literature.

The literature shows that the ontological security of individuals can be affected by initiation of peace processes in three ways. As a result of the sudden pause of violence from where individuals expect it, individuals may lose their objects of fear, which would transform their fears into anxieties because of lacking a reasonable expectation of danger. This transformation could prove problematic for ontological security, which depends on the inexistence of anxieties and having dependable expectations about the future. Individuals may also experience changes in their self-narratives as a result of the changes that the peace process introduces to the current Self-Other relationships by trying to transform adversarial relationships to peaceful ones. Since the Self-Other relationships serve an important function in forming self-perceptions and identities, a change in these relationships may disturb the sense of continuity

for individuals. Therefore, they may fail to attribute meaning to their lives, have an anxiety of meaninglessness and experience ontological insecurity. Finally, the morality systems created during years of conflict may change due to the attempts of abolishing the animosity and therefore the morality of displaying some behaviors against enemies. When individuals get deprived of such ways to attribute a sense of rightfulness, they may experience the anxiety of condemnation or guilt. In these scenarios, the literature suggests to possible ways that the conflict may embark upon. Either the conflictual relationships and the conflictual sources of ontological security are turned into peaceful and non-violent sources of ontological security or the failure to find such new sources results in a return to the violent and adversarial norms of the conflict before the peace process.

While it is expected that the Wise People Committee meetings will provide insights into the ontological (in)securities of the public with respect to the peace process, this thesis does not try to make strong inferences as much as it tries to make contributions by suggesting a prospective direction for ontological security and conflict resolution literatures.

3. THE KURDISH CONFLICT AND THE PEACE PROCESS

One of the deadliest and most durable ethnic conflicts in the world is the Kurdish conflict in Turkey. Beginning even before the formation of the current Turkish state, Kurds and the state have been on conflicting terms starting with the efforts of centralization in the Ottoman Empire (Yanmış 2016). Even one of the very first rebellions of the republican era was a Kurdish rebellion led by Sheikh Said (Gunter 2014).

Since 1984 with the start of the Kurdish insurgency by the PKK (Partîya Karkerên Kurdistanê – Kurdistan Workers Party), the conflict is estimated to have claimed over 45.000 deaths and - millions of displaced people (Uluğ and Cohrs 2019). With the Kurdish population of Turkey being the largest minority with a ratio of around 14% (KONDA 2011), the issue presents one of the most important and urgent, yet durable problems of Turkey.

The Turkish state's view of the Kurdish issue went through various phases (Özdemir and Sarıgil 2015). Before the foundation of the current republic, promises of recognition were made to the Kurdish population on the subject of their ethnic demands of autonomy by both the rulers of the Ottoman Empire and by the future founders of the republic (Yeğen 2010). However, this outlook that the political leaders embraced was changed shortly after the foundation of the new Turkish state. With the newfound authority of the republic and its need to construct a unitary nation within its borders, the founders decisively reversed this stance to “not only deny the ethnic aspect of the Kurdish question but even the existence of Kurds” (Yeğen 2010, 68). It is argued in the literature that after the traumatic experiences of the nationalist trends that saw the demise of the Ottoman Empire, a fear of further losses of territory and secession as a result of the malicious activities of foreign actors and groups, called ‘the Sevres Syndrome’, emerged among the Kemalist elite to “locate the origins of their problems not within the country but outside, caused by others.” (Göçek 2011, 101). This syndrome necessitated an assimilationist approach and a militaristic response to Kurds and their rebellions after the foundation of the

republic in order to prevent the feared possibility of secession. Such an assimilationist approach to the issue persisted for a couple of decades until the official view transformed to include a socioeconomic paradigm in the 1950s (Yeğen 2010). The solution of the issue was sought in addressing the lack of development in the region. Therefore, economic and developmental efforts joined the militaristic and assimilationist methods (Yeğen 2010). During this and the previous period, the issue was seen as having social and economic roots rather than ethnic grievances. The ethnic identity of Kurdishness was neither a reality nor a talking point for the state elite. As such, the Kurdish identity was almost a taboo in these timeframes.

Although the existence of Kurds ceased to be a taboo in the late 20th century, the suppression of the Kurdish demands did not. The acceptance of the Kurdish identity in the 1990s enabled the state to begin the first attempts of peace in the history of the issue, but the turbulent political developments and the resurgence of violence meant a quick return to the old ways. Having acknowledged the existence of Kurdish identity in the 1990s under the governance of the then-prime minister Süleyman Demirel, the state framed the issue as a problem of ethnic secessionism. Such framing both enabled and brought back the militarist responses of the past, but with severely increased destructivity. Additionally, Kurdish political parties were repeatedly closed down during this period (Yeğen 2010).

With the dawn of the 2000s, significant divergences could be found in the attitude of the state towards the issue. With the candidacy of Turkey for becoming a member state to the European Union (EU), several Kurdish demands found answers in the introduced reforms which recognized some cultural rights of the Kurds. The ban on the public use of the Kurdish language was abolished, teaching the Kurdish language in private courses was made possible, and a time slot was allocated on the state broadcasts for weekly Kurdish programmes (Yeğen 2010). However, discrimination carried on without hesitance in various areas, such as Kurdish politics, cultural celebrations, and the statements of state agencies, as well as the unofficial public discrimination Kurdish individuals encountered among the public (Yeğen 2010).

The first attempt of peace came about in 2009 with the declaration of Beşir Atalay, the then-Minister of Interior, and after the initial political reforms that the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi – AKP) government carried out for the purpose of easing Turkish candidacy to the EU. The initiation of the process, initially called as the ‘Kurdish Opening,’ later renamed as the ‘Democratic Initiative’, and finally the ‘National Union and Brotherhood Project’, has marked a shift in the state’s approach to the Kurdish issue. Whereas previously the issue was deemed appropriate for political exclusion and militaristic responses, for the first

time it was an arena open to debate and available for peace between the Turkish state and the Kurdish segments of the population. Although the resolution effort started abroad in Oslo, Norway, the contact between the state and the PKK was not shared with the public. The talks became known to the public only after the religious movement of Fethullah Gülen tried to discredit and decrease the popularity of the AKP government by various means including the release of the secretly recorded tapes of the negotiations in Oslo (Savran 2020). The leaking of the recordings came after the strong reaction of the Turkish public against the welcoming of the PKK members from the Southeastern borders into Turkey with widespread celebrations in the area (Kayhan Pusane 2014). These reactions did not lead to the instant abandonment of the Opening. However, the ongoing secret negotiations were accompanied by the military operations of Turkey against the PKK (Kayhan Pusane 2014) in order to contain the nationalist sentiments among the public. Still, when the ceasefire declared by the PKK came to an end in June 2011 as was initially announced, it was not renewed as a result of the evolving attitude of the government towards the issue (Kayhan Pusane 2014) and the Kurdish Opening came to an end. While the failure of the Opening is attributed to the divisions between the political parties themselves and among the several Kurdish groups with stakes in the conflict (Kayhan Pusane 2014), an investigation of public opinion revealed that the process fueled fears of secession and division among the public (BILGESAM 2013). These fears and the divide between the opposition parties and the government inside the Turkish side and among the Kurdish actors led to a decreasing support level of around 57% among the population (BILGESAM 2013, 7).

A second resolution attempt took place in 2013, which was labelled as the Peace Process by the Turkish state and the Resolution Process by the Kurdish nationalist movement in Turkey. This second process mostly consisted of negotiations between the state and the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan and the PKK outposts in the Kandil mountains, with some information given to the public unlike the first process between 2009 and 2011 where there was no information given to the public. Although during the Opening the state leadership held meetings with public figures on the subject of the process, there was not an additional structure for communicating the process to the public as there was in the peace process between 2013 and 2015. During this second peace process, a selection of reforms was carried out in line with the negotiations and efforts were concentrated on keeping the process alive as well as communicating the rationale behind the process to the public. For this purpose, *Wise People Committees* were formed. A total of 7 committees from the 7 geographical regions of Turkey with originally 63 members, later reduced to 62 in total started holding meetings with various civil society actors, businesspeople, the

media, and the public in their respective regions. The committees included a range of members including academics, columnists, high-profile artists, etc. However, it remained a weakness of the ad-hoc WPC that the committee lacked the ability to communicate the possible outcomes of the peace process to the public and remained rather limited to only promoting peace and communicating the perceptions of the public to the political elite. Therefore, the public could not be provided with the incentives required to be ready for peace. This meant that the readiness conditions of Pruitt (1997) were not met. With the turbulent political climate of the Middle East at the time and a shift of political power in the Kurdish-majority provinces of Turkey, the resurrection of violence between the state and the PKK brought about the end of the peace process and the Wise People Committee meetings. The end of the process was marked by the statements of President Erdogan, who denied the latest negotiation attempts at Dolmabahçe Palace and called for snap elections. Although the Dolmabahçe Palace meeting was going to set the context and timelines of the peace negotiations, it, nevertheless, ended the peace process of two years. The lack of increase in the popular support for the AKP and the increase of support for Peoples' Democratic Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi – HDP) is thought to be one of the reasons for why the AKP government abandoned its pursuit of resolution (Yavuz and Özcan 2015). This dynamic can also be related to the ‘two-level games’ concept of Putnam (1988) since the AKP could not benefit from the peace process in the eyes of the constituency.

Apart from the political goals of the government, there are other reasons discussed in the literature that are argued to have affected the success of the peace process. For example, Başer and Özerdem (2019) take a critical approach to the peace process that ended in 2015 to argue that it was a top-down process which was aimed at settling the issue into a state of negative peace, rather than transforming the violent relationship between the conflict parties to a more peaceful interaction in the form of positive peace. Therefore, the root causes of the conflict were failed to be given central concern in the process, rather the emphasis was on the short-term political goals of the conflict parties. According to them, the peace process lacked “a clear road map to a sustainable long-term settlement” (Baser and Ozerdem 2019, 17).

In a similar vein, Özpek (2017) in his book *The Peace Process between Turkey and the Kurds* sets out to find the reasons of the mentioned failure, but in order to do so he delves deep into the historical context of the issue as well. However, the work is far from being an historical analysis as it also pays due attention to the recent developments under the AKP government, too. According to Özpek (2017, 50-51), the peace processes failed because of the obstacle that poor democratic performance put in front of the process, which is the ability of the ruling party and the Kurdish

elites to dominate their respective sides, prevented institutionalized and sustainable resolution because when the strategic calculations of these dominating forces no longer saw the process as beneficial, and it was quickly abandoned.

Gurses (2020) goes more into these developments under the AKP government, analyzing both the strategic political moves of the ruling party and of the Kurdish political movement, HDP. One interesting finding of Gurses's (2020) study is that despite the major ideological differences between the founders of the republic and the current ruling party, the latter embraces almost without hesitancy the discourses of the former on the Kurdish issue, consisting of a denial and military measures, for the time being.

Uluğ and Cohrs (2019) set out to understand and analyze the 'ordinary people's views of the Turks and Kurds on the Kurdish issue, including what they think to be the subject of the conflict; why they think there is a conflict and how they think it might be resolved. Their findings identify 5 "viewpoints" found among the public as follows: blaming 1) the separatists; 2) the foreign powers and the economy; 3) the authoritarian state; 4) poor democracy; and 5) the oppression of the Kurds as the reason for the ongoing conflict. Each of these viewpoints come with their subsequent implications for resolution, meaning that depending on the viewpoint that an individual possesses, the individual's beliefs on what would bring about peace also change. Such a finding is crucial in evaluating the previous resolution attempts and at the very least for devising ideas on how they may have affected public opinion, while also signifying an easy-to-gloss-over aspect of conflicts in general, that the views of the conflict are rarely uniform among the parties and their supporters.

The public opinion about ethnic identities is also studied by public opinion polling firms. According to a poll conducted by KONDA in 2011, at least 45% of the Kurds in Turkey feel some inhibitions about freely living with their identities. A discrepancy about the perspectives on the Kurdish issue emerges between the Turks and Kurds about the reasons of the conflict. While the Turks mostly attribute the conflict to the malicious activities of the foreign powers and the PKK, Kurds cite the discriminatory practices of the state, the need of the Kurdish individuals to render their identities accepted, and the socio-economic circumstances of the Kurdish-dominated regions (KONDA 2011).

However, regardless of the differences in the understanding of the root causes of the conflict, peace process has largely been supported by both Turks and Kurds. Another polling firm, BILGESAM, found in 2013 that 52% of the population supported the peace process. This support was even higher when only the answers of Kurds were considered. 86% of all Kurds supported the peace process although support

remained at 52% among Turks (BILGESAM 2013, 8). UKAM also found in 2013 that 72% of respondents approved the steps taken since 2003 for the resolution of the Kurdish issue. According to another poll, the evolution of people's views on the solution of the issue has revealed that those who propose 'constructive' plans, meaning peaceful methods, have increased in their numbers from 22% in 2012 to 32% in 2015 (KONDA 2015, 40). Although it should be noted that proposing constructive plans is not the same thing as supporting the peace process and people can also support the process without proposing these plans, it is still an important indicator of the increasing support for the peaceful resolution of the issue instead of violent means to end the conflict.

In another study that aims to explore the public opinion of the Kurdish population on the developments after the end of the peace process, Yanmış (2016) communicates the views of Kurdish opinion leaders in several Kurdish-populated cities in Turkey in addition to the public opinion tendencies found among the Kurds. He also offers a beneficial and quick overview of the timeline of the conflict starting from the foundation of the Turkish state, mentioning several religious Kurdish rebellions, the increasing grievance among the Kurdish population between 1940 to 1970, and the emergence of armed violence that followed, which culminated in the violent attacks of PKK. The importance of Yanmış's (2016) study also comes from the fact that it explores the attitudes of the Kurdish people after the peace process. Yanmış (2016) finds that young Kurdish individuals were joining the PKK more than before and this tendency of the Kurdish youth started to worry the Turkish state when coupled with the establishment of a Kurdish regional government just outside the borders of the country. He also finds that the end of the peace process led the nationalist Kurds to argue for self-defense in the form of digging trenches in cities and forming barricades. Therefore, the PKK is observed to return to violence and pursue contentious tactics after the end of the peace process (Yanmış 2016). Additionally, the participants of Yanmış's (2016) study see the reason for the abandonment of the peace process in the hesitation of the government to make amendments during the process, the nation-state ideology, and the dissatisfaction of the government with the increased political support to the Kurdish party HDP. In a similar work that explores the aftermath of the peace process, Ayşe Köse Badur and Fuat Keyman (2019) explore the local dynamics and opinions of the public in various areas (Keyman and Köse Badur 2019). Their findings reflect the disappointment of the Kurdish groups about the end of the peace process and their subsequent fears and anxieties. Additionally, they also draw attention to the regional importance that the Kurdish issue has achieved as a result of the political and structural developments in the Middle East, such as the Syrian civil war. The Kurdish demands and the issue in general is now

necessary to be considered within this context of diminishing and emerging states of the Middle East as the Turkish state is also forced to consider whether the same developments can take place in Turkey as a result of the Kurdish conflict (Keyman and Köse Badur 2019).

Looking at the Turkish side, Yeğen (2007) explores the perception of the Kurdish issue in the Turkish nationalist thought. He provides the change of perception over time and explains how the Kurdish issue transformed from a modernity problem to an economic problem, and later, to an ideological problem. His additional but important conclusion is that the Turkish nationalism had for a long time sought to Turkify Kurds, but there is a growing pessimism about the possibility of such Turkification among Kurds. Accordingly, Keyman (2016) argues for the abolishment of the assimilationist outlook towards Kurds and suggests the prioritization of constitutional citizenship for the resolution of the conflict. Keyman (2016) also argues that the Self-Other relationship between the Turkish and other portions of the society stems from the early political decisions of the founding elite of the state. These Self-Other relationships have resulted in the assimilationist policies towards the Kurdish population. However, for the resolution of the Kurdish conflict for improving Turkey's democracy and society, his suggestion is the transformation of such relationships with a clear emphasis on the concept of citizenship as an inclusive basis for the provision of rights (Keyman 2016).

While such studies trace the public opinion on the issue, Sarıgil and Fazlıoğlu (2014) trace the reasons behind the emergence and the sustenance of Kurdish ethno-nationalism. They refute the arguments that diminishing the socio-economic disparities between the Turks and Kurds may decrease ethnonationalism and that more religious Kurds are less likely to support ethno-nationalist movements. Their argument is supported by the finding that the perception of discrimination is one of the strongest factors of these sentiments and that the religious argument actually works differently in practice. Accordingly, they shed light on one of the lesser-known determinants as they find that Kurds who subscribe to the Shafi sect of Islam, who are generally more rigid in their religious opinions are more likely to hold ethno-nationalist views than those who subscribe to the Hanafi sect, who generally are more flexible on religious issues.

In summary, the Kurdish issue dates back to the imperial history of Turkey. The response of the Turkish state after the foundation of the republic to the current times included several shifts but the common themes of the state's response to the issue have focused around rejectionist, assimilationist, and militaristic attitudes. Starting from the late 20th century and into the 2000s, various democratizing reforms and

different approaches to the issue paved the way for a resolution attempt. Such an attempt first happened in 2009 and later in 2013. Societal support for these peace processes has been always higher among the Kurds compared to Turks according to various public opinion surveys. Several limitations of the peace process explained in the literature, the political motivations of the government, and the relatively low support of Turks enabled the collapse of the peace process and a quick and decisive return to the attitudes that have been found in the historical legacy of the issue.

4. METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the conceptualization and operationalization of ontological security that were employed to understand the dynamics and manifestations of an elusive, abstract, and difficult concept such as ontological (in)security are going to be discussed. Also, the data employed in this thesis will be explained and the method of analysis for the data will be provided.

4.1 Concepts and Operationalizations

Ontological security is conceptualized, as a sense of continuous self-narrative that can be shared to the outer world and a sense of continuity in the habitual or ritual activities of an individual. This conception also makes ontological security applicable to societal actors by just projecting the senses to a greater population. For understanding manifestations of ontological insecurity, the primary indicators are chosen as follows:

- longing for the conflictual past (including previous habitual and ritual activities) (since it creates a sense of knowing what happens),
- showing signs of trying to estimate and expect what is going to happen as a result of the peace process in the future (since the peace process creates a sense of uncertainty),
- trying to sustain previous objects of fear or to have new objects of fear,
- trying to sustain the moral values created as a result of the conflict (such as the martyrdom concept), and
- trying to sustain Self/Other dichotomies by shifting the boundaries of the Self or the Other (e.g., declaring Wise People Committee members traitors,

assigning new adversarial groups to the role of Other, etc.).

This choice of operationalization enables the researcher to assess the changes in ontological security of the society using the statements of the participants provided by the interviewees and mentioned in the written works of the members of the Wise People Committee.

4.2 Data Collection

In this study, the main research question is “How did ontological (in)securities affect societal support for the peace process in the Kurdish issue?” The unit of analysis of the research is individual society members. However due to the limitations imposed by the pandemic, instead of observing the sense of ontological (in)securities of individuals, reflections of the WPC members of their meetings during the peace process were used as a data source.

The members to be contacted have been chosen through purposive sampling. The justification for such non-random sampling is the personal networks of the advisor of this thesis, which are acquired through years of communication and cooperation with certain members of the Wise People Committee. Also, some members of the committee have been more public than others about their experiences and reflections on the proceedings of the committee meetings in their books or newspaper columns. This means that some individuals in the research universe are expected to be more informative about the subject of this study. Therefore, those members of the committee who are known to be willing to share their experience and to comment on these matters were contacted through personal networks.

Since the contents of the meetings were unknown as to which of them would provide more useful and substantive data, such circumstances had required the use of purposive sampling method. Although this sample will be far from being representative of all members of the Wise People Committee, the contribution of the sampled members has been most valuable about the reactions, statements, and the routines of the participants of Wise People’s Committee meetings. 7 members of the committee were asked to contribute to this thesis. A total of 5 members of the Wise People Committee accepted to be interviewed. The interviews were conducted using the Zoom and WhatsApp applications in addition to a single interview conducted face-to face in the office of the interviewee where the researcher was invited. Since the interviewees agreed to be identified in the thesis, their names

were used in thesis. Mehmet Emin Ekmen (Southeastern Anatolian Region), Deniz Ülke Arıboğan (Marmara Region), Vahap Coşkun (Central Anatolian Region), Fuat Keyman (Aegean Region), and Celalettin Can (Central Anatolian Region) kindly accepted to answer the sub-structured interview questions designed to understand the ontological (in)securities of the participants of the WPC meetings. The duration of the interviews ranged from 20 minutes to 45 minutes with the exception of the face-to-face interview conducted with Celalettin Can, which took more than 2 hours.

As has been also expressed and explained to the interviewees, none of them were going to be identified unless they specifically asked to be. However, all interviewees agreed to have their names disclosed in this thesis in the form that the researcher sees necessary. It was clearly expressed to the interviewees in the Consent Form (see Appendix B) that they were not forced or required to answer any question that they did not want to answer, and they could request the researcher to stop the meeting at any time. The signatures of the interviewees for the Consent Form or the recording of the interviewees expressing their consent in lieu of their signature was required before the interviews were conducted. The data collected as a result of these interviews, the recordings, and the notes taken during and after the interviews were stored in a password-protected computer owned by the Sabancı University and lent to the researcher for his study. The password was only known by the researcher and the documents were shared only with his advisor.

In the semi-structured interviews which were aimed at gaining a holistic understanding of the atmosphere, the feelings and reactions of the participants of the meetings the WP held in the cities of the regions they were assigned to, and the support or opposition that the Wise People Committee witnessed, the committee members were asked to recite the statements of the meeting participants, comment on how they seemed to feel about the Kurdish issue and the peace process, and to what extent they seemed supportive of or against the peace process. They were also asked to comment on whether the participants seemed to have created objects of fear, that is, persons, groups, or processes that they identified as a source of their fear. In order to relate meeting participants' statements to the abstract and complex ontological security concept and the relevant indicators, these theoretical concepts were expressed in terms of everyday language in questions. The reason for this simplification of the wording of the questions is that the participants of the meeting were not expected to make informed and clear-cut distinctions between fears and anxieties, Self-Other dichotomies, or moral systems in academic terms. Additionally, the indicators are not the main subject of the questions. Rather, the questions are designed to enable the researcher to make inferences on whether these indicators were present among

the society or not. On the other hand, support and its expression are easy to perceive. Therefore, the question of whether participants seemed to support the peace process was asked directly and the answers did not require the researcher to make inferences.

In addition to the responses of the participants, the committee members were also asked to share their observations about the participants in general, such as whether the ones who expressed their fears, anxieties, or dissatisfaction with the peace process were distinct in their level of support for the process from those who did not express such reactions. The interviewees were asked to provide information on which groups seemed to be more wary or supportive of the peace process, whether it was possible to distinguish significant differences between these different groups on support and discontent levels, and which issues seemed to be more controversial than others in the discussions of the peace process.

The other sources of data were also chosen through purposive sampling to find the pieces written by the firsthand observers and members of the Wise People Committee meetings since these pieces were expected to be the most informative ones. These sources were a book written by Baskın Oran (2014), *Kürt Barışında Batı Cephesi: Ben Ege'de Akılken*, a book co-authored by Fuat Keyman and Ayşe Köse Badur (2019), *Kürt Sorunu: Yerel Dinamikler ve Çatışma Çözümü*, and the report written by Deniz Ülke Arıboğan (2013) about the committee meetings. From these sources, manifestations of ontological security were also observed within the context of the Kurdish issue. To answer the research question, two qualitative methods have been applied. The sources of data used for the thesis are: a) semi-structured interviews (see Appendix A for a non-exhaustive list of initial questions) conducted with Wise People Committee members; and b) written works by the Wise People Committee members (books, articles, and reports).

4.3 Data Analysis

To analyze the data collected, a thematic analysis of both the interviews and the written sources was conducted. Choosing such a qualitative method enables the researcher to explore the setting of the committee meetings as well as to understand the incidents more clearly and deeply than it would have ever been possible with a quantitative methodology. Qualitative methods also allow the researcher to refine and revisit his/her conceptualizations and operationalizations of the phenomenon of interest, which is ontological security in this instance (Neuman 2014). Therefore,

the thematic analysis applied in this thesis allows the researcher to create themes and categories after the data is collected. As such, the categories become ever more useful for a thorough analysis of the data since none of the collected data are excluded from the categories. Additionally, the creation of categories after the collection of data allows the researcher to incorporate unexpected information into the thesis. Creating categories after collecting data means that the data is important in this thesis not only for the analysis but also for how the analysis is going to be conducted, thanks to the chosen methodology. The thematic analysis method gives the researcher a freedom of not being confined by predetermined assumptions and categories that may have been insufficient or irrelevant for the collected data.

For analyzing the data collected about the individuals who participated in the meetings of the Wise People Committee, the ontological security framework for conflict resolution developed by Bahar Rumelili (2014) has been used. According to this framework as has been discussed in a previous chapter, ontological insecurity is the result of the anxieties induced in individuals because of the uncertainty of “death, meaningless, and condemnation” (Rumelili 2014, 12). This means that individuals find themselves in an emotion that they cannot overcome because anxiety is not projected onto material beings unlike fear. Therefore, individuals deal with the death anxieties and the consequent ontological insecurities by creating objects of fear. Rather than being paralyzed by death anxiety, they create objects of fear relating to death so that they can deal with the emotion by acting against their fears (Rumelili 2014). The same process is also true for anxieties relating to meaninglessness and condemnation. Individuals construct meaning schemas that enable them to identify enemies as the ‘other’ so that they give meaning to their life and construct moral codes in order to be able to judge whether they are being ethical or not. All these processes are disturbed when a peace process begins because of how the self-identification narratives and the meaning systems of individuals undergo massive changes. Support for peace processes, or its lack thereof, can be analyzed through this lens.

This mentioned framework is useful in determining whether the ontological security of individuals has been disturbed since the ones with decreased sense of ontological security display anxiety as a result of the changes that are created by the peace process in the identification of fear objects. These individuals cannot project their existential anxieties to fear objects because their fear objects have been nullified by the peace process. It was announced by officials and media that they should not fear the objects they previously did. So, the information provided by the interviewees and the secondary sources was analyzed with the fear and anxiety dichotomy in mind so that the ones who did not display objects of fear could be concluded to

display decreased ontological security levels. In accordance with such an approach to the relationship between ontological security and conflict resolution, the researcher also explored the statements or actions of the meeting participants as narrated by the Wise People, which reveal their previous routines, narratives, and beliefs; and which implicate that these are being disturbed by the peace process. This exploration enabled the researcher to infer whether the participants were longing to keep their previous coping mechanisms against their ontological insecurities and anxieties. When this inference was available, the researcher could analyze if the individuals who experienced such disturbances in their coping mechanisms supported the peace process. Additionally, the same analysis was carried out to find out if there were groups of participants who found new coping mechanisms, to infer whether finding ontological security through such novel mechanisms increased their support level. The mentioned analysis processes helped the researcher to reach conclusions on whether individuals' sense of ontological security decreased during the peace process, the reasons for ontological insecurity, and the possible relationship between sense of ontological security and support for the peace process.

The analysis of the written sources was carried out in a similar manner to the thematic analysis of the interview data, that is by following Rumelili's (2014) argument that the individuals with changing self-identification mechanisms and meaning systems experience lower ontological security and seeking the indicators of such dynamics mentioned above. Therefore, such statements and reactions of individuals and groups that presented a lack of meaning systems or changing self-narratives were sought. The general atmosphere and the negativity or positivity of the individuals and groups as narrated by the authors were taken as indicators of the level of support. Conclusions depended on whether the meetings where unsupportive participants were encountered, and where the generally unsupported meetings of the Wise People Committee took place coincided with the displaying of ontological insecurity indicators.

4.4 Limitations

One of the main limitations of this study stems from the fact that the peace process and the Kurdish issue are almost taboos in the contemporary Turkish politics. With the abandonment of the peace process in 2015, the issue was mostly left out of political and public debates. Furthermore, with the imprisonment of Selahattin Demirtaş, the former head of the Kurdish party HDP, and the formation of an

electoral alliance between the ruling AKP and the Turkish nationalist Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (Nationalist Movement Party – MHP), the issue has been almost criminalized in the country. Consequently, the difficulty of finding respondents for the interviews has arisen. However, the purposive sampling technique employed in this study allowed the researcher to build a more transparent relationship with the members of the Wise People Committee as a result of the personal network of the advisor of this thesis.

Another limitation is the result of depending on the statements of the committee members on the actions of the participants of the meetings rather than asking the participants directly. This limitation means that the interviews and the analysis of the written pieces may not fully reflect emotions of the individuals experiencing the ontological security issues. Their emotions and opinions are incorporated to the extent that the interviewees could perceive. Also, it means that the perceptions of the interviewees have to be taken at face value, taking the risk of misperception. Still, contacting the committee members instead of the meeting participants presents another opportunity. Through a single interview with one member of the committee, the researcher gained information on all the meetings that the interviewee was present in. If the interviews were conducted with participants rather than committee members, one interview would provide information on only one meeting of the committee. Finally, the interviews were conducted with the members of 4 regional committees out of a total of 7 regional committees. These regions are the Marmara, Central Anatolian, Aegean, and the Southeastern Anatolian regions. Therefore, a lack of interviewees from the Black Sea, Eastern Anatolian, and the Mediterranean regions presents another limitation of this thesis.

5. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The data collected through the interviews have been categorized into three distinct themes. These three themes are namely objects of fear, self-identity and narration of the outer world, and morality systems. In the following chapter, I will provide the categorized data along with the exploration of indications of support (or its lack thereof) for the peace process. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a discussion between the themes and their relationship to support for the peace process.

All interviewees shared that a general anxiety that encompasses the three mentioned themes was found among the participants of the meetings. Regardless of whether individuals were experiencing ontological insecurity as a result of changes in their objects of fear, self-identities, or morality systems, participants experienced a general anxiety about the future. This anxiety is the result of the unknown nature of the peace process's aims, progressions, and possible results and the lack of transparency on the negotiations along with people's habitual conceptions of war. The mentioned habitual conceptions are most clearly explained by Deniz Ülke Arıboğan in the report she published on her website about the Wise People Committee meetings:

"Now [during the peace process], people are being told that the 30 years of struggle was fundamentally wrong, and they are suggested a shift to another mental world. Since this would partly mean that people should contradict themselves and turn their previous beliefs around, we inevitably see those who did not question the war, questioning the peace. This is, in fact, a state of self-defense for their 30-year-old identities and stands." (Arıboğan 2013)

Her words are also found in the way that the WPC members talked about the ordinary people's fears of peace coupled with the lack of transparency in the peace process. In line with the lack of transparency in the process, all interviewees described instances where the Wise People Committee was accused of trying to convince peo-

ple for a peace process that very little was known about even by the committee members, who were seen as representatives of the peace process by the public. The changes in people's expectations about where danger might come from, their objects of fear, in other words, aggravated the uncertainty of the future and resulted in further ontological insecurity.

5.1 Objects of Fear

The distinction between fear and anxiety is the cornerstone of discussing the relationship between objects of fear and ontological security. According to Tillich (2000), fear has objects to be projected on, which means that individuals fear things. These are the objects of fear. However, as Heidegger (1962) argues, anxiety lacks such objects. Therefore, an individual tries to transform their anxieties to fears by finding objects of fear so that their fears can be managed by acting against these objects (Rumelili 2014), which is not possible when they are anxieties because of a lack of object. As Rumelili (2014) defines ontological insecurity as the inability to contain anxieties, we can argue that these anxieties are transformed into fears through the use of definite objects of fear. Such objects of fear enable the individual to take precautions against the danger of death and know where the danger can come from. Otherwise, with the lack of an object to direct their anxieties, the individuals cannot keep on with their routinized lives without constantly looking for dangers. Destruction of objects of fear is therefore expected to increase anxieties of individuals and consequently lead to ontological insecurity. The response is generally a resistance against the changes that are destroying their objects of fear or the creation of new objects of fear (Browning and Joenniemi 2017).

Participants of the WPC meetings showed strong signs of not wanting to let go of their objects of fear. These objects of fear provided enabled individuals to expect where danger may originate from and how it may be faced, transforming anxieties into fears. They were, therefore, a source of ontological security. However, a possibility of peace meant that objects of fear from which individuals normally expected danger might disappear, and this created an anxiety. Many participants of the WPC meetings expressed their anxiety for peace. One of the interviewees, Deniz Ülke Arıboğan from the Marmara Committee, explained this anxiety in her response to a question about her observations as to why some individuals were seemingly not supporting peace:

"A society that has normalized a 30-year-old conflict hates the mention of peace and does not know what peace is. It is anxious about the uncertainty of peace because the war has taken the form of a normalcy. This is a system of war, but it is preferable to the uncertainty of what peace may bring." (Deniz Ülke Arıboğan. Interviewed by the author. May 2021)

One such object of fear for the generality of the Turkish society but especially for the right-wing and left-wing nationalist¹ circles is the armed PKK movement. As a result of the longevity of the conflict and the acclimatization of the society to its existence, people learned to expect danger and violence to come from the PKK. Consequently, the existential fears long grounded in the society found an object to be projected onto and were transformed into fears since people could take various precautions against the PKK, their object of fear, now. This projection was a mechanism for preventing ontological insecurity since it diminished anxieties. Therefore, for the sustainment of their ontological security, the public and especially the nationalist circles needed PKK as a referent of their fears.

Another issue about existential anxieties in the absence of objects of fear concerns the Wise People Committee members. With the dynamic mentioned above, the WPC members observed that some participants tried to frame the Wise People Committee as a new object of fear, which they thought would divide the country, and consequently labeled them as traitors (Arıboğan 2013). This creation of new objects of fear was also a trait mostly found among the Turkish and nationalist participants. The mentioned effort to frame new entities as objects of fear shows that the diminishing or annulling of an object of fear led participants to unconsciously find new objects of fear in order to transform their anxieties into fears and attain ontological security.

Apart from the PKK and other ethnic groups, there was another entity that was an apparent object of fear. Vahap Coşkun (Interviewed by the author. May 2021), a member of the committee in the Central Anatolian region, argued that the Kurdish issue was framed by the participants of the meetings he attended as the creation of foreign powers who had various aims to realize within the borders of Turkey. Participants used this framing to argue how issues like the Kurdish issue were never going to end because these foreign powers were always going to create new issues and conflicts through [possibly] creating new organizations if they wish so. Vahap Coşkun explained this in his interview as follows:

¹The right-wing nationalist groups are the supporters of the Nationalist Movement Party and the group called Ülkücüler (idealists) in Turkish, the left-wing nationalists generally support a variety of political parties, but they are usually known as Ulusalçılar (nationalists) in Turkish.

"The opposers [to the peace process] came up with the argument that the organization [PKK] was "a pair of tongs for external powers" [was used by them]. There were those who held this tong. They would come up with another organization tomorrow if the organization was abolished today." (Vahap Coşkun. Interviewed by the author. May 2021)

How the participants looked at the world and found another object of fear in the face of a possibility of peace is a clear indication of their attempts of not being deprived of objects to take precautions against. Therefore, it is also clear that such arguments on the part of participants reflected increases in ontological insecurities and anxieties.

The creation of new objects of fear or the attempt of keeping current objects of fear reflects the resistance against the desecuritization of the issue among the public as a result of the habitual contributions of the securitization of the issues and groups with regards to the Kurdish conflict (Geri 2017). The mentioned examples taken from the statements of the interviewees provide a manifestation of the existence of ontological insecurity among the meeting participants. This ontological insecurity came as a result of the loss of the objects of fear, as demonstrated by their resistance to change and their search for new objects of fear.

5.2 Self-Narrative and Meaning Systems

As mentioned before, individuals need meaning systems that enable them to formulate a coherent self-identity and narrative so that they can be free of an anxiety of meaninglessness. These meaning systems include the relationships that individuals construct between themselves and their Others and enable individuals to have a continuous sense of their Self. In conflict scenarios, when these delineations between the Self and the Other become even more prevalent, the conflict becomes a provider of a meaning system. Thus, the meaning system is used in managing the mentioned anxiety of meaninglessness. Conflicts help individuals contain this anxiety, and therefore in producing ontological security, by creating clear Self-Other distinctions that help individuals attain meaning to their being. Trying to attain ontological security was apparent even from the founding of the Turkish state by the Kemalist elite, as Keyman provides the initial formation of Others:

"Kemalist nationalism initiated its boundary-producing performance be-

tween the self and the Other. Hence, the national identity was meant to be an organic unity of the secular and national non-class based identity which necessarily involved the subjugation of its Other, i.e. the Kurdish identity, Islamic identity and non-Muslim minorities." (Keyman 2016, 79)

Despite the evolution of the conceptualizations of ethnic identity by the Turkish state and changing responses to the demands of Kurdish rights and freedoms, the Other status of Kurdish citizens in relation to the Turkish Self remained the same. "The Kurdish identity has always been constructed as the Other of Turkish national identity" since the foundation of the republic (Keyman 2016, 78). However, the changing responses of the state to the demands of Kurds led the Turkish state and public to make some distinctions as to who is legitimate and who is not because losing the Other altogether would have been costly in terms of self-narratives and ontological security. Within that context of the Kurdish issue, there is a general tendency to distinguish between the violent PKK and the Kurdish citizens among the Turkish population. Distinguishing between the two enables individuals to keep the PKK as their Other while also accommodating some demands of the Kurds. This tendency of the participants to distinguish the PKK from the general Kurdish population has also been apparent in WPC meetings. Therefore, it is understood that the Turkish individuals live in a meaning system where the significant Other is the PKK and not the Kurds in general. Sometimes the Other category also includes Kurdish individuals who are not part of the PKK but are thought by the Turks to be potential PKK members due to their sympathies to the organization. In this context, the possibility of ending the PKK violence and the possible dissolution of the PKK meant that there was a risk of losing their Other with which they construct a self-narrative for Turkish individuals and losing meaning in their lives. The risk of losing their Other has been the reason for the Turkish participants of the meeting to either try to stay in the conflict where this Other provides them with ontological security, or to create a new Other, in the form of an adversary, to contain the anxieties emerging as a result of the peace process. However, trying to keep or create Others is not necessarily a voluntary choice. These Self-Other relationships are "ingrained in the ontological framework in which individuals make sense of themselves and the world around them, and become embedded in their practical consciousness" (Rumelili 2014, 20). Fuat Keyman expressed in his interview some of the participants' eagerness to blame the PKK and Öcalan even when other groups were carrying out attacks in Southeastern Turkey:

"The attacks of ISIS in Şanlıurfa that happened when we were in Akhisar were attributed to the PKK by the public even though the perpetrator was known to be ISIS at the time. The attack fueled the negative sentiments towards the PKK and Öcalan during the meetings. It gave the nationalists and the left-wing a reason to oppose. There was such a fragility. " (Fuat Keyman. Interviewed by the author. May 2021)

This observation has been taken as a clear indication of the hesitancy of the public to give up their Others -especially the *known* Other-, even in the face of events that present opportunities for creating new ones. Although the attack could have been rightly attributed to the ISIS and the Self-Other relationship could transform to use that organization as a new adversary, individuals carried on with their existing conceptions of the Other since it helps continue the certainty created in the past conflict years. It can be argued that individuals were ultimately trying not to lose their ontological security by keeping the known Other that provided the most certainty about the future. They sought certainty because as Tillich (2000) argues, anxieties result from the lack of certainty, and the inexistence of various anxieties about the future can be classified as a state of ontological security (Rumelili 2014).

While those who tried to stay in conflict made remarks about how it was not acceptable to negotiate with terrorists and how the struggle against terrorism should continue until there is not one terrorist left, others changed the form of their significant Others. Accordingly, it has been observed by the interviewees that there was increased sensitivity about Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of PKK who has been jailed in Turkey since 1999, among the participants. The participants argued that he, under any circumstance, could not be allowed to live freely in Turkey and should be decisively punished. Such sensitivity was a result of the participants culminating the 'evilness' of the PKK in the person of Öcalan and appointing him to the role of an enemy for themselves to keep their Other. On the other hand, the creation of new Others was sometimes concerned with other ethnic groups. According to Celalettin Can's (Interviewed by the author. June 2021) answer to whether participants expressed negative emotions towards ethnic groups other than Turks or Kurds, participants excessively used other ethnic names as derogations, especially in heated moments. The use of Armenians, Rums, and Syrians in the discussions by the participants points out the search for a new significant other in the face of the risk of losing their current other, the PKK. For example, Syrian refugees became the newfound Other for various groups. Baskın Oran quotes a participant of the Aegean meetings as an example of these behaviors:

"I am from Hatay [a city in the Mediterranean region of Turkey]. Now when I go to my hometown I feel as if I went to Syria. There is theft [carried out by Syrians] among other things." (Oran 2014, 353)

The participant clearly dislikes the existence of Syrians in their hometown and associates criminal activities such as theft with the Syrians. The activities previously associated with the conflictual Other were shifted to newfound Syrian refugees. This shift is thought to be a result of the changing Self-Other relationships and a trial of replacing the Other who can be blamed and alienated.

Apart from the individuals who instinctively tried not to lose the PKK as their Other because of the prominent place it occupied in their embedded meaning systems, the creation of new Others was also an apparent manifestation of the challenged meaning systems of the individuals. Some individuals believed that the Kurdish issue resulted from the aims of foreign powers rather than the activities and demands of the PKK or the inequality between the Turkish and Kurdish groups. These individuals tried to prevent the loss of their Others by assigning to this role the external states that were not going to be absent due to the peace process. Giving such a role to external states helped individuals to sustain their self-narratives through the use of Others. The attempts of creating new Others were also apparent in the writings of Baskin Oran (2014), as several participants were mentioned to frame some foreign states, the most frequent ones being the United States and Israel. Oran (2014) shares the common arguments of the participants related to foreign powers. Some argued that the peace process was a project of the US and Israel and that the WPC was being the mouthpiece of the cooperation between these two powers. Oran quotes one of the participants who made such claims:

"I wonder whether Zionism or Europe that carried out 19-20 Crusades against Turkey will take our [Turks'] side or support the end of the PKK. I don't think that Zionism would withdraw its support from PKK or let the PKK end [its operations] in Turkey." (Oran 2014, 171)

The participant's argument about the foreign powers marks the search for new Others to take the place of the PKK that was thought to be absent when the process ends.

Some other groups neither tried to keep their Others nor to create new ones but those groups still experienced anxieties. For example, the village guards are armed by the state against the PKK to guard their villages against PKK's attacks. Their

self-identities and narratives heavily depend on their role against the PKK, a very significant Other for them. When asked if there were participants who felt insecure about the aftermath of the process, Mehmet Emin Ekmen shared that some groups had doubts about the possibility of becoming the new oppressed groups of the society:

"In our group [the Southeastern Anatolia Committee], religious groups, Hezbollah sympathizers, and village guards displayed a psychology of fear about becoming the new oppressed group of the society after the peace process. They thought, "will we pay a price for not being members of the PKK [which was going to stop being the other]?" (Mehmet Emin Ekmen. Interviewed by the author. May 2021)

The changes brought by the peace process in this Self-Other relationship make these groups highly likely to experience anxieties. Therefore, these groups are in a state of ontological insecurity.

Another such group whose anxieties resulting from the loss of their Others were apparent is those who did not want to argue for the continuation of the conflict but also could not find new Others. Their anxieties came to the surface in their statements. They complained about how expressing Turkishness was going to be criminalized, how the Turkish identity was going to lose its value, and how the direction of the peace process could even lead to secession with so many unknowns in the way. They can also be argued to have suffered a loss of ontological security if their anxieties are taken into account. Since these individuals tried to reinstate their ontological security through symbols that were important for their self-narrative, their statements focused on the flag of the nation and the indivisibility of the borders. Celalettin Can exemplified one of the issues in his interview by sharing the attitudes of those who did not approach the peace process with a positive outlook:

"They [opposers of the peace process] tried to create an artificial flag crisis. They brought and put a flag on our desk and told us to hold up the flag. They said they would believe us if we did so." (Celalettin Can. Interviewed by the author. June 2021)

These individuals brought up the issue about the flag to see their symbols being upheld by the bearers of the change in their eyes. Seeing the flag being upheld and respected would have enabled them to believe that the changes would not include

the destruction of their symbols, and therefore their self-narratives that they use for attaining ontological security.

Another interviewee, Mehmet Emin Ekmen, pointed out an often-neglected effect of the peace process. He shared that in the Kurdish-majority region where he was part of the Wise People Committee, Alevi Kurds experienced an anxiety about their role in the aftermath of the peace process:

"There was an anxiety among the Alevi Kurds about whether Sunni Kurds and Sunni Turks could come together as it happened in Çaldıran [a war between the Ottoman Empire and the Shia Safavids in 1514] and persecuted the Alevi Kurds and Turks. . . There was an anxiety about how the animosities and Others of the past would be in the future."
(Mehmet Emin Ekmen. Interviewed by the author. May 2021)

Oran (2014) provided another group, Assyrians, who were displaying similar signs of anxiety in his book. Although Assyrians were already an Other for the majority group due to their religious identity, they were still anxious about becoming the new and lonely Others of the relationships to be constructed at the end of the process. Their anxiety resulted from the possibility of carrying the burden of being the central and most prominent Other without another group to share the burden because of the changing role of the Kurdish minority. As a result of a process external to Assyrians, their self-narratives were changing. They did not know what to expect for themselves in the future. Therefore, they were open to an anxiety of meaninglessness. The loss of self-narrative and the anxiety of meaninglessness experienced by these individuals should have necessarily led to a sense of ontological insecurity.

Surprisingly, there was one group that was satisfied with the changing form of the Self-Other relationships. According to Fuat Keyman, the businesspeople in the Aegean region were keen on developing the economic relations between the Eastern and Western parts of Turkey. As the armed confrontation between the PKK and the state decreased in Eastern Turkey as a result of the peace process, the businesspeople enjoyed the improved trade relations and the increased integration of the two parts of the country:

"The peace process accompanied the livening up of the economy in the areas where conflict had stopped. We had been writing at the time that the results of the peace process would also contribute to Turkey's economy, be it unemployment, poverty, or economic stability. Through

the course of our efforts, these economic benefits cultivated the hopes of an improved life. " (Fuat Keyman. Interviewed by the author. May 2021)

Therefore, for the groups most concerned with trade relations and the economic well-being of Turkey for the development of their businesses, a Self-Other relationship in the form of traders and businesspeople from across the country was possible with a cooperative emphasis rather than an adversarial one. The possibility of such a relationship does not hurt ontological security. Rather, it has the potential of becoming a source of ontological security and a way of containing anxieties by being able to create expectations about the actions of the Others. Unfortunately, the rather unexpected ending of the peace process witnessed a return to the previous anxieties due to their desired Self-Other relationships not coming to life. In a book co-authored by Keyman and Ayşe Köse Badur, the mentioned return to Self-Other relationships is explained to cause problems:

"The business circle in the Western part of the country feels anxiety and insecurity when working with the economic actors from the areas where the conflict takes place. However, such an economic alienation can occur within those areas as well; for example, . . . a businessperson in Van can approach another businessperson from the conflict-intensive areas with the same anxieties." (Keyman and Köse Badur 2019, 67)

The quote above exemplifies the ontological insecurity and anxiety felt by businesspeople because of the return to the Self-Other relationships of the past that they were not satisfied with.

These processes can be thought of as the manifestations of the anxieties of different groups in the public as a result of the changes in their meaning system concerning their self-identity, narrative, and Self-Other relationships. The existence of such anxieties shows us the ontologically insecure states of the mentioned groups.

5.3 Morality Systems

The morality systems that individuals construct in conflict situations justify their thoughts, attitudes, and moral values against their adversarial group. The base of this comparison comes from the privileges some groups enjoy among the population

as a result of what Guelke (2004) calls an ethnic order, meaning a hierarchical system in which one ethnic group, the Turkish group in this case, is held above all other ethnic groups by the state. By comparing themselves to their opponent in the conflict, they avoid the anxiety of guilt or condemnation because they believe that they are doing what is right to their opponents. For example, being ready to give up their life in the conflict against the enemy provides a sense of righteousness that reduces the anxiety of condemnation or guilt. As expected, the absence of this anxiety gives way to an ontologically secure state of being.

With the beginning of the peace process, there was an implied sense in the society that the attitude towards the Kurds and the PKK was going to change at the end of the process. Therefore, the attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs of the society about the conflict and how to engage with the Other were under serious consideration. As Deniz Ülke Arıboğan (Interviewed by the author. May 2021) suggested, the public was so used to the conflict and the embedded behavior schemes inside it, they did not welcome peace instantly. Such behavior schemes increasingly shifted in moral value. Whereas the behaviors of conflict were deemed appropriate in the past, they would not be so in the future and the peace process has brought this change. Moreover, these behaviors were used by individuals to construct a sense of morality for themselves. Without being able to use performative actions against the enemy, such as sacrificing their lives or fighting for the national unity against the PKK, the individuals lost sense of how to communicate to the outer world that they were moral human beings. The anxiety of condemnation resulted from not having these previous methods of exhibiting morality and constructing a moral sense of Self. Those who listened to the horrifying experiences and losses of the Kurdish population through the Wise People Committee meetings might have lost the moral high ground and experienced the anxiety of condemnation. When asked about the reasons for support and the lack of support by participants, Celalettin Can (Interviewed by the author. June 2021), Vahap Coşkun (Interviewed by the author. May 2021), and Deniz Ülke Arıboğan (Interviewed by the author. May 2021) have all expressed that there was a significant number of participants who learned about the experiences of their Kurdish counterparts during the meeting. These participants have long been disinformed about the Kurdish conflict, the official numbers about casualties of the conflict, etc. Deniz Ülke Arıboğan provided an example of such an instance in her interview while discussing the support for the peace process:

"A delegate from Diyarbakır stood up and said, "Let us make a calculation: out of the 40.000 people who died, 30.000 are Kurds. They died in Diyarbakır, and here and there. Now, half of the police force there is

Kurdish, half of the military [there] is Kurdish. Only 10 percent of those who died are Turkish. I have to think about the future of my family and kids in this fire. There is a fire in me, and you [Turks] only deal with the sparks. You don't know that where I am from, there is not a single family who did not lose or mourn a family member because of this issue." No one could say a word after this." (Deniz Ülke Arıboğan. Interviewed by the author. May 2021)

Vahap Coşkun (Interviewed by the author. May 2021) and Celalettin Can (Interviewed by the author. June 2021) also argue that this sudden revelation has completely changed the atmosphere of the meetings for the better whenever it was experienced. The Turkish individuals neither had a way of countering the loss of moral high ground nor did they try to do so. Although this inaction of the Turks does not seem like a problem at first sight, such a sudden and serious loss of morality systems means that the anxiety of condemnation emerges as a result of the learning of the injustices. The anxieties that were previously contained by behaving in the way that the meaning systems prescribed most likely came to the fore, and the emergence of anxieties shows that they were experiencing ontological insecurity.

While the Turkish individuals who learned about Kurds' suffering did not attempt to keep their meaning systems intact and moral high ground, some participants did attempt to keep their moral high ground when discussing other issues. For example, mentioning the martyrs and how they did for moral causes by the participants was frequent by martyr families and nationalists. As a result of the moral system created by the conflict, dying for a sacred cause against the enemy was attributed a sacred value. Especially the families of martyrs, but the nationalists in general, questioned whether the Turkish martyrs sacrificed their lives for nothing. For example, Vahap Coşkun (Interviewed by the author. May 2021) argued that the families of martyrs asked if their sons died for nothing and if all their suffering was in vain. Those families complained that the wrong side of the conflict, the PKK, was being awarded instead of the martyrs and their families by the peace process. The complaints of martyrs' families show the anxieties of condemnation that these groups experience because of losing their meaning systems with the possibility of peace. Naturally, these anxieties can be expected to be accompanied by a sense of ontological insecurity.

In addition to the families of martyrs, Alevi individuals also tried to keep their moral high ground over the Kurds. According to Vahap Coşkun (Interviewed by the author. May 2021), the Alevis, having constructed a self-narrative on being peaceful, referred to their own problems during the meeting to assert that they also need a peace process. To explain this Coşkun gave the example of an Alevi participant who

argued the following:

"A delegate from Diyarbakır stood up and said, "Let us make a calculation: out of the 40.000 people who died, 30.000 are Kurds. They died in Diyarbakır, and here and there. Now, half of the police force there is Kurdish, half of the military [there] is Kurdish. Only 10 percent of those who died are Turkish. I have to think about the future of my family and kids in this fire. There is a fire in me, and you [Turks] only deal with the sparks. You don't know that where I am from, there is not a single family who did not lose or mourn a family member because of this issue." No one could say a word after this." (Vahap Coşkun. Interviewed by the author. May 2021)

This quote can be related to the changing nature of the Kurdish attempts to attain rights. While the attempts heavily depended on violence before the peace process, the peaceful talks held about Kurdish demands meant that Alevis no longer had the moral high ground among the minorities of Turkey. Their rhetoric points at the anxiety of condemnation as a result of the changing moral systems of conflict and, therefore, can be related to a decreasing sense of ontological security.

Oran also points out that the Turkish groups were anxious about losing their privileged position among the population:

"When the Republic of Turkey was founded, the Turkish identity took the place of the dominant identity at the expense of the Muslim identity. Now that the Kurds are going to be declared equals as well, the Turks jump up and say, "We are losing Turkishness" . . . We are not able to accept the descent of the concept of Turkishness that promoted itself to an overarching identity, back to a state of equality." (Oran 2014, 118)

The quote exemplifies Turks' resistance against losing their privileged positions compared to other ethnic elements of the society. As the peace process aimed to diminish privileges and create equality between different portions of the public, the individuals whose identity involved a strong regard to Turkishness were going to lose the ability to compare their state to the other parts of the public. As such, the moral values of the population were going to change because everyone needed to be regarded with the same level of respect and moral values. The possibility of such a change in the moral system prompted Turkish nationalist individuals to claim that the Turkish people were going to be second-class citizens in Turkey. Their statements can be

speculated to mean that they would be on the same level with the groups that they previously perceived to be second-class citizens. These statements are the consequence of the mentioned changes in their morality systems that prescribe how each group deserves to be treated.

5.4 Support for the Peace Process

There were significant differences in the level of support for the peace process among different groups as observed and explained by the interviewees. In the Marmara, Aegean, and Central Anatolian Regions, where the meeting participants mostly consisted of Turkish individuals, significant groups did not condone the peace process, although the numbers of those who supported the process far exceeded the numbers of those who did not. Right and left-wing nationalists, conservative Muslims, and martyr families (although not all families) were the most prevalent among those who did not support the process. These findings are in line with the arguments that those who have an interest in the continuation of the conflict, Turkish martyr families in this case as a result of their self-narratives, have the possibility to become spoilers by withdrawing support for the peace attempts (Darby and Mac Ginty 2008c; Guelke 2008; Stedman 2008). Celalettin Can ([Interviewed by the author. June 2021), a member of the committee in the Central Anatolian region, argued that some Turkish martyr families did not even want to communicate with the Wise People Committee members since they saw the members as traitors.

As to the reason for the lack of support, important divergences were found among different groups who opposed the peace process. While the nationalist groups most frequently cited the immorality of negotiating with terrorist groups and attributing legitimacy to them, the martyr families cited the sacrifices they and their relatives made for the security of the state. They mostly compared the sacrifices of the martyrs to the attainment of freedoms and rights by the Kurds to argue that the peace process was rewarding the wrong side of the conflict. Of course, this should not be taken as a general point about all Turkish martyr families since some were observed to wish that no one else would suffer as much as they did, and therefore, supported the peace process. In addition, the support level of the participating martyr families increased through the course of the Wise People Committee meetings to such an extent that some even accepted that Abdullah Öcalan might have to be released as a result of the peace process (Celalettin Can. Interviewed by the author. June 2021).

Mehmet Emin Ekmen (Interviewed by the author. May 2021) argued that the conservative Muslim groups opposed the peace process from a pragmatic point of view because they suspected to become the new marginalized groups of the society when the peace process is concluded. Alevi also had such a concern about the aftermath of the peace process, but the interviewees never observed an opposition to the peace process by Alevi. Other arguments that were diffused among the Turkish participants of all groups included the suspicion that significant concessions must have been given to the PKK as the price of peace, the possibility of secession following the increased rights given to the Kurds, the idea that putting an end to concessions would be impossible once the negotiations start, and the peace process was being carried out behind closed doors with the directives of foreign powers, so it had to include unpalatable concessions. These arguments reflect that the 'Serves Syndrome' (Göçek 2011) that was common among the political elite also diffused to the public. The indicators of anxieties discussed created a ground for the arguments made by the public. Since people were unconsciously searching for ways to reinstate ontological security, individuals used the aforementioned arguments to oppose the peace process. These findings partially support the findings of Uluğ and Cohrs (2019) that the population attributes the existence of the conflict to five different foci. In this thesis, two of the five foci that they mention are observable in blaming the separatists, namely their significant Other PKK, and the blaming of foreign powers who agitate the sensitivities of the Turkish state and nation.

Additionally, the problems encountered during the first peace attempt between 2009 and 2011 about the division within the Turkish political sides (Kayhan Pusane 2014) seemed to have been transferred to the peace process as well. For example, Celalettin Can argued that:

"The segments whom we can call conservatives behaved in accordance with the stance of the [then] Prime Minister Erdoğan. This was apparent in the meetings when we came to mutual understandings, but I knew they were coming to terms [with what we proposed] because they knew the attitude of Erdoğan in the last analysis. That made their reversals easier." (Celalettin Can. Interviewed by the author. June 2021)

This stance revealed that the conservative circles directed their support at a political leader rather than the process itself. Therefore, the abandonment of the peace process did not create a reaction among these groups since they easily adjusted their positions in line with the leader they supported. However, the opposition was not very different as they were doing the exact opposite of what conservatives did.

Deniz Ülke Arıboğan said the following about the subject:

"Tayyip Erdogan is a very powerful leader and presents a fault line. There is a very big crowd in Turkey that moves to whatever side he is on or his opposite side, irrelevant to the context. If he was to direct people to break the bread they eat, 50% would break it, and 50% would cut it." (Deniz Ülke Arıboğan. Interviewed by the author. May 2021)

Apparently, supporting or not supporting the peace process was highly affected by the political preferences and leader perceptions of the public. However, other than the political preferences, the mentioned 'Sevres Syndrome' about the possibility of secession was apparent in the statements of the participants who thought that the issue and the peace process were the acts of malicious foreign powers. These individuals who had a Sevres Syndrome and Otherized the foreign powers were apparently opposing the peace process according to Vahap Coşkun's argument, as he narrated what a participant said in a meeting he attended:

"If you begin negotiating [with the PKK] now, you can never know where it would end. It would take the country right up to secession. This [the peace process] is not even the project of Turkey, it aims to divide Turkey." (Vahap Coşkun. Interviewed by the author. May 2021)

Coşkun counted similar statements to the one above among the arguments of those Turkish groups that strongly opposed the peace process.

On the other hand, Kurdish groups were found to be highly supportive of the peace process. Despite their concerns, Alevis were argued to approach the issue with a positive outlook by Celalettin Can (Interviewed by the author. June 2021). Additionally, Mehmet Emin Ekmen explained that some individuals initially hesitated to support the peace process:

"For the first few days, we felt that the youth with a tendency for the PKK stayed distant from the process. However, this was overcome after a few days, and in our region, we never encountered opposition to the process." (Mehmet Emin Ekmen. Interviewed by the author. May 2021)

Ekmen (Interviewed by the author. May 2021) argued that the youth in South-eastern Anatolia hesitated because they thought that Abdullah Öcalan might have changed his stance on armed resistance as a result of being held captive by the Turkish state. However, this hesitancy quickly dissipated after both the Kurdish political party HDP and the PKK announced their unconditional support for the process, according to Ekmen. The widespread support among the Kurdish population was not affected by the hesitancies of individuals, unlike the support of the Turkish groups. Despite various differences in what they understood from the words 'peace' and 'peace process', and even some discontent about the administration of the process, Ekmen argued that Kurds provided strong public support. This finding was not related to geographical location, either; Kurds in the Western parts of Turkey were also found to provide strong public support, which was significantly higher than their Turkish counterparts. Deniz Ülke Arıboğan shared her observation on this issue in her personal report:

"We observed through the committee meetings that the ones who provided the highest support for the peace process were the ones who were the most affected by the conflict environment and, therefore, most deeply felt the psychology of war. The Marmara region was a place of migration for the Kurds and the victimized Kurdish population who had to leave their homes for the last 30 years." (Arıboğan 2013)

The differences in the levels of support between different groups bring attention to the different nature of groups on opposite sides. While groups with majority status and privileged freedoms and rights were less supportive of the peace process, minority groups supported it even when they had reservations and concerns about the process. This difference between majority and minority groups can be attributed to the fact that the minority groups already suffered low ontological security and high anxieties as a result of the asymmetric nature of the conflict, as argued by Rumelili and Çelik (2017). Therefore, their support was the result of their hopes of addressing their anxieties through a self-narrative that was bought by the Others and the creation of new meaning systems where they are not the 'evil terrorists' who deserved the fiery punishment of the state.

As has also been suggested by the interviewees, public opinion polls reflect an increase in the number of people who think that the Kurdish conflict should be addressed in some peaceful way (KONDA 2015). While the percentage of those who believed that the issue should be resolved was around 49% in 2012, this number rose to 57% in 2015 after the efforts of the Wise People Committee (KONDA 2015).

From the same report of KONDA (2015), the number of individuals who believe that the conflict was an issue of human rights and democracy also increased from 27% in 2012 to 38% in 2015.

When it comes to the abandonment of the peace process, the lack of support and a reaction to the process's end is closely related to the unknown possibilities that the process brought. Since the peace process lacked a clear and public roadmap, the public did not know the next steps of the process. Thus, it can be concluded that the government was unprepared to base the process on reliable expectations for the future. Keyman made a similar argument:

"It became clear that the peace process was initiated without preparation. It was unprepared at the level of political parties and legal frameworks in addition to [not] informing the public. This proved very problematic. This lack of preparation increased uncertainty, and when the process came to an end, it brought about the heightening of the conflict." (Fuat Keyman. Interviewed by the author. May 2021)

This argument shows that even though the process accumulated a certain level of public support, it was rendered fragile by the unpreparedness of the process and the uncertainty it created at the public level.

As seen above, both minority and majority groups experienced ontological insecurity and anxiety as a result of the peace process. This finding aligns with Rumelili's (2015) argument that physical and ontological securities should not be conflated. The absence of physical threats during the peace process should have otherwise meant that the individuals should have felt secure. The awareness that such a distinction brings also enables this thesis to argue that 'positive peace' was never achieved during the peace process; what was achieved was the absence of violence, 'negative peace.' (Tonge 2014, 18).

While manifestations of ontological insecurity were observed frequently among various groups in the public, the support levels were different among these groups. Although all participants of the study and Oran in his book (2014) argued that the levels of peace support by the majority increased during the course of the Wise People Committee meetings, there was a lower support for the peace process among the majority group compared to the minority groups. Building on the argument that the peace process did not do well in addressing the ontological security problems among the public (Rumelili and Çelik 2017), this thesis found that the manifestations of the lack of support to the peace process are closely related with the manifestations

of ontological security and anxiety.

The evolution that the Kurdish issue went through as a result of the peace process can also be explained by the conflict framework of Bahar Rumelili (Rumelili (2014, 21)), for which the Kurdish issue would fit in the ‘stable conflict’ state for the Turkish groups as their fears and anxieties were both low at the beginning of the process. However, with the process, the deconstruction of their objects of fear, meaning systems, and moral systems elevated them to a higher anxiety level and transformed the conflict to an ‘unstable conflict’ state. The political, instead of militaristic, focus of the peace process and the Wise People Committees on the issue reflects the attempt of desecuritizing the issue. However, the ontological security concerns of the public made it difficult to move the discussions away from a physical security outlook. On the other hand, the minority Kurdish groups experienced the conflict at an ‘unstable conflict’ level from the beginning as a result of their already high fears and anxieties. The resistance of the public against desecuritization and the lack of attempts for reconstructing the Self-Other relationships and meaning systems of the public meant that the transition to a ‘peace’ state never came. With the ending of the peace process, a sudden return to the violent practices and meaning systems of the past marked the ontologically insecure groups’ attempts to move to an ontologically secure state again. Therefore, it can be argued that the conflict has moved from a ‘stable conflict’ state to an ‘unstable conflict’ state for the Turkish groups during the peace process. The ‘unstable conflict’ state that the minority group found itself in remained unchanged. The end of the peace process witnessed the state of the Turkish groups move back to ‘stable conflict’. Although the abandonment of the peace process might come as a disappointment for the supporters of peace, it should be remembered that peace processes take a long-time and do not always proceed in a linear path and that it is natural for them to experience developments as well as regressions (Darby and Mac Ginty 2008*a*; Tonge 2014)

The discussion above leads us to conclude that ontological security felt by individuals was a determinant of support for peace processes only when they belonged to the majority groups in asymmetric conflicts. The relationship between the two was such that as ontological security decreased, support for the process also decreased. On the other hand, groups who suffered low ontological security and high anxiety as a result of their minority role still provided high support for the peace process but accepted a return to the violent conflict easily, as has been argued in the literature (Rumelili and Çelik 2017). This result also partly confirms that the increasing of anxieties and ontological securities leads to resistance against the change brought by the peace process (Browning and Joenniemi 2017) and a lack of support for the peace process (Kinnvall and Mitzen 2020).

6. CONCLUSION

This thesis tried to address the question of how ontological securities experienced by minority and majority groups affect the level of societal support for peace processes. For this purpose, the primary source of data has been chosen as the Wise People Committee meetings, and members of the committee were interviewed to gain an insight into the statements of the participants of the meetings organized by the committee. Along with the books of Baskın Oran and Fuat Keyman and the report of Deniz Ülke Arıboğan on the subject of their meetings, these interviews revealed important insights that illustrated the fears and anxieties of the public as observed by the interviewees. Through the thematic analysis of the data, the peace process has been argued to cause a sense of ontological insecurity in various groups, including nationalist Turkish individuals, martyr families, armed village guards, minority groups other than Kurds, and Turkish conservative Muslims.

The thematic analysis suggested various possible reasons for the decrease in ontological security that these groups experienced. I have categorized these into three distinct changes in the groups' normalized conceptions: (1) the loss of objects of fear that give people a sense of predictability as to where dangers to their beings may come from, (2) the loss or changing of the Self-Other relationships that people instrumentalize in constructing a self-identity and narrative, and (3) the loss of morality systems in which they situate themselves on a moral high ground because of the belief that they "righteously" fought against the enemy. Additionally, it has been suggested that the uncertainty of the future due to the peace process was a factor in ontological security of individuals since it is essentially a sense of security obtained by being able to rely on stable expectations about the future. Such changes brought the anxieties of death, meaninglessness, and condemnation to the open. Individuals could not cope with these anxieties to create a sense of ontological security without the mentioned structural systems. Conversely, it is argued that the Kurdish groups experienced ontological insecurities even before the initiation of the peace process because of the uneven nature of the conflict, in which they were not

considered a legitimate actor in the Turkish political system. When the support for the peace process was examined across these different groups, this thesis concludes that the changes in ontological security affect the support level of only the majority, Turkish, groups for the peace process.

While there are signs that the ontological security of the Turkish groups decreased as a result of the peace process, they, in fact, could have become ready for the construction of non-violent meaning systems in which they could obtain ontological security without a need for the existence of the conflict. However, the sudden end of the process and the lack of transparency when it was still in action meant that individuals were in favor of returning to the meaning systems of the conflict to reinstate their ontological security. The lack of a public reaction to the sudden end of the peace process is thought to be a result of this illustrated tendency of reversal among the public.

The implications of this study are two-fold. First of all, the initial literature on ontological security and conflict resolution should focus more from this point onwards on the effects of ontological security to further study its role in determining support for peace initiatives. As one of the limitations of this thesis has already been stated as the inability of observing the manifestations of ontological insecurity and anxiety directly instead of depending on the observations of the witnesses of those manifestations, future research can work directly with the participants of the meetings. Additionally, the relationship of ontological security and support for peace processes may be studied using other cases of ethnic conflict in different countries. Such studies would enable the findings of this thesis to gain more generalizability across different cases of peace attempts. Studying different cases of conflict would also make it possible to explore if manifestations of ontological security always take the form of anxieties about objects of fear, Self-Other relationships, and meaning systems across different peace processes. Finally, comparative studies could reveal if the public support for peace processes is always affected by ontological (in)securities or if there are other underlying factors for the relationship of support and ontological security.

The other implication of this thesis converges with the recommendations of recent research on ontological security and conflict resolution (e.g., Rumelili and Çelik 2017). That is, the construction of new meaning and morality systems, as well as the creation of new Self-Other relationships, are essential for sustainable peace initiations. Therefore, scholars should give more attention to the ways of transforming these systems and relationships from an adversarial and violent nature to a pluralist and peaceful nature. These are especially important as Tonge (2014), and Darby and

Mac Ginty (2008*a*) suggest that peace processes have their ups and downs as well as the periods in which they stop and restart. Therefore, the peace process is still available for resuscitating. In the case of resuscitation, these findings will become important considerations in the formulation of attempts to come.

Undoubtedly, taking the obstacles in front of peace into account would greatly benefit both the peace research and the practices of peace initiation by reducing the likelihood of failure thanks to a consideration of ontological security. In addition, the scholars of conflict resolution focusing on peace initiatives would benefit from taking into account ontological security dynamics of the public as a possible obstacle in the way of sustainable peace and the ontologically insecure individuals as possible spoilers of the process if ways of reinstating ontological security peacefully are not designed. Considering these two aspects will enable future peace proposals and attempts to be more susceptible to such psychological effects of the peace process and take action accordingly. Finally, future research may try to take on the same subject of this thesis with direct communication to the individuals among the public for overcoming the liability of this thesis.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Question (A Non-exhaustive List)

The interviews for this study are designed as semi-structured interviews and therefore variance about the content is inevitable and, in fact, desired. Still, a non-exhaustive list of questions that were initially asked to the participants follows below.

1. How many meetings with the society have been held that you have been a part of by the Wise People's Committee?
2. On average, how many people attended each meeting?
3. What do you think the general stance was among the participants towards the peace process?
4. Was there any difference between the Turkish and Kurdish participants regarding their stance towards the peace process?
5. How secure do you think the Kurdish participants felt about their identities
6. How secure do you think the Turkish participants felt about their identities?
7. What were the most contentious debates during the meetings concerned with?
8. Were there participants who were unsupportive of the peace process?
 - (a) If yes, what do you think was the reason for their lack of support?
9. Why do you think some participants were feeling more secure than others about their identities?
10. Why do you think some participants were supportive of the peace process while others were unsupportive? What was the determining factor in your view that led some participants to support the process and some others to not support it?
11. Do you think that the peace process affected the level of security felt by participants about their identities?

12. What common factors can you identify that affect the support level of both the Turkish and Kurdish participants?
13. What common factors can you identify that affect the security felt by both the Turkish and Kurdish participants concerning their identity?
14. Do you think a factor affecting the level of security felt by Kurds about their identity was affecting it for all Kurdish participants?
15. Do you think a factor affecting the level of security felt by Turks about their identity was affecting it in the same way for all Turkish participants?
16. Which of the following were communicated during the expression of negative views about the process?
 - (a) Behaviors, activities, rituals, etc. that were both frequent and normal before the peace process but may not be normal or permitted after the process
 - (b) The unknown future after the peace process
 - (c) Remarks about a new adversarial group (Kurds expressing negative views towards a group other than Turks or Turks expressing negative views towards a group other than Kurds)

APPENDIX B

Sabancı University Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Study Title: Ontological Security and Peace Processes: The Kurdish Issue in Turkey

Principal Investigator: Prof. Ayşe Betül Çelik / Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences – Thesis Advisor

Co-Investigator: Ebubekir Furkan Erdoğan / Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences- MA Student There will be an informed consent form sent to the participant before the communication for them to read and send back a signed version or express confirmation to the interviewer that they accept the terms on record in the case of online communication. before the communication.

Interviewer: Ebubekir Furkan Erdoğan

The purpose of this study:

As part of the peace process that started in 2009, the Wise People Committee was formed in order to attain peace on the societal level. The committee primarily worked on transferring the objectives of the peace process to the public. Although the process reached an end, the Wise People Committees remain underexplored. Ontological security has been recognized to have significant effects on peace processes and the transfer of peace to the society. Therefore, the ontological security concept is going to be instrumentalized to study this underexplored area of research. For such analysis of ontological security, this study aims to explore the expressions of the insecurities and the experiences of the public during the Wise People's Committee meetings that were held as a complimentary aspect of the peace process. More specifically, ontological insecurity and its signs will be sought to understand how it affected the support of the public to the peace process. Your participation in the study will allow the researcher to explore and analyze the reactions of the people to the peace process and make claims on whether their ontological security levels affected its results. Subsequently, a relationship between ontological security and the success of peace processes may be revealed as a result of this study, although this is not the single variable in understanding peace processes.

The specific objectives of the proposed research are summarized as follows:

Identifying if the participants of the committee meetings showed signs of enduring ontological insecurity, and how they reacted in the face of such an experience. To do so, information on how the public reacted to the statements of the committee or to other participants will be used to identify the points of concern for the public, which will be then related with their habits, rituals, sense of self, and routines; hence, their ontological (in)security.

The communication is limited to 2 hours, but the interviewer expects the communication to take 1 to 1,5 hours.

There are not planned benefits (financial or otherwise) to be offered to the participant of the study.

During the experiment you will be asked to

Describe the most common talking points of the participants of the meetings, and how they seemed to react to either the statements of the committee or to the comments of other participants.

Comment on whether you think the participants experienced any anxiety concerning the security of their identities, and provide examples to the best of your ability.

Comment on whether you think the participants of the meetings experienced any anxiety concerning their habits, rituals, or in any other way their routines, and provide examples to the best of your ability.

You may find the following risks or discomfort from participating in this Study:

The proceedings of the meetings might be difficult to remember. Discussing the heated debates and the emotional responses of the participants might make you also remember the hurtful and inconsiderate comments of the participants towards your person or the committee in general. If you experience any discomfort or you believe that answering a question poses a risk to you, you may end the meeting at any time, postpone it or decide that you do not want to answer a specific question. In case you express your decision to not participate, to skip a question or to postpone the meeting, the interviewer will conform to your decision.

If you volunteer to take part in this study, your name and answers will remain anonymous unless you ask the interviewer to be identified. They will not be shared publicly. They will be integrated into the research in the form of general observations by members of the Wise People Committee.

Please indicate by checking the box or by expressing your consent to the interviewer if you allow the interviewer to record the meeting in video and audio formats

- I consent to being recorded
- I do not consent to being recorded

Please indicate by checking the box or by expressing your consent to the interviewer if you allow the interviewer to take notes of your comments during the meeting

- I allow the interviewer to take notes of my comments
- I do not allow the interviewer to take notes of my comments

Please indicate by checking the box or by expressing your preference to the interviewer if you wish to be identified as a subject of this research

- I want to be identified
- I do not want to be identified

If you have any questions or concerns about the interview/survey, please contact with Prof. Ayşe Betül Çelik at (216) 568-9298 phone number or by email at boelik@sabanciuniv.edu.

If you believe that your rights have been violated in any way, please contact Prof. Mehmet Yıldız, Chair of the Research Ethics Committee at Sabancı University at (216) 483-9010 or by email at mehmet.yildiz@sabanciuniv.edu.

By signing this consent form, you are indicating your consent to participate in this study.

Signature _____

Date _____