

3 The Kurdish issue and levels of ontological security

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Introduction

Ontological security, that is, the certainty which stems from having a consistent sense of self that is recognized by others (Zarakol 2010), is relationally constructed and linked to the overall sense of security, that ‘feeds on basic trust’ (2010, p.6). While basic trust between the parties is a requirement for establishment of a peaceful relationship in long-lasting conflicts, asymmetric ontological (in)security felt by conflicting groups can prevent them from engaging in a dialogue with each other. This is true especially in asymmetric relations such as in ethnic conflicts, where one party does not recognize the legitimacy of another party.

When the dominant group feels like its physical security is challenged by the violence perpetrated by some representatives of the minority group, it tends to reject dialogue with the members of that group, generalizing that threat to all group members. Creating a vicious cycle by non-recognition of the minority group by the dominant group, followed by violence perpetuated by some members of the former, and later by physical insecurity felt by the latter; resulting in ontological insecurity of both, this process can go on for years if there is no intervention. Therefore, basic trust and sense of security especially for the dominant group and the state need to be challenged in order to move the dominant actors to recognize the ‘Other’ and start empathizing with it; a prerequisite for long-lasting peace processes. However, such intervention may also lead to anger among the dominant group members if it does lead to new venues of relation construction. In this new phase, there is a need for the securitized self to be brought in touch with the Other to be able to build a new relationship around recognition and trust, and establishing a new meaning system to continue this relationship.

This chapter will discuss the different phases in the Kurdish Issue with a specific focus on the recent peace attempts, their outcomes for the short and long term, and the extent that these attempts were able to satisfy the above mentioned requirements by creating peace anxieties. The Kurdish Issue, different from many examples of inter-state conflicts and conflicts between mutually recognized actors, is an internal conflict in which the state as a dominant actor does not recognize the identity and legitimacy of the other party. According to the framework of

Rumelili, it is an unstable conflict, where parties feel different levels of physical and ontological (in)securities due to the nature of this asymmetric relationship.

In contrast to what is commonly believed, the Kurdish Issue is not a problem that exists only between the Turkish state, and the PKK (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan – Kurdistan Workers' Party) and its sympathizers. It involves multiple issues and actors.¹ What we hear from the Turkish and Kurdish political discourses is mostly the exchanges between the leaders of the two sides, that is, only the possibility of negotiations between the Turkish state and the PKK, or addressing the issue through structural reforms. However, we need to take into consideration the perceptions of the ordinary people towards different socio-political actors, and inter-group relations to understand these complex, dynamic and interrelated issues and products of interrelated political and social processes as well as the macro-level initiatives. In this chapter, I will argue that the peace processes concerning the Kurdish Issue in Turkey since 2009 need to move Turks to a state of anxiety at various levels and require reconsideration of state security to be successful. Although this might sound contradictory, it is necessary to reconsider different relations between different actors at various levels to open up new and healthier relations to be established in the long term. Ideally, the prospect of peace needs to challenge the fears, deprivations and isolation of groups by bringing them together, but the very process of a such possibility can create a sense of anxiety (Rumelili Chapter 1) since individuals, groups and the state need to question their previous understanding of the 'Other' and open themselves up for new definitions and group relations. This process requires changing the narratives of, feelings towards, and understanding of the 'Other' in order to act more peacefully. However, for a long-lasting and stable peace, these anxieties also need to be channelled constructively to bring ontological insecurities to a feeling of ontological security in the long run. While the failure of the first attempt for peace in Turkey between 2009 and 2010 can be explained by the inability of bringing Turks to a stage of ontological insecurity, and fuelling their confirmed fears, the susceptibility of the second stage of the peace process in 2013 is that effective strategies to bring parties to a stage of ontological security have not yet been designed nor even thought of.

In what follows, I will, first, briefly talk about the Kurdish Issue historically and the Kurdish Opening in 2009 specifically, followed by a discussion of how the Opening furthered Turks' fears rather than their anxieties to move them to a state of ontological insecurity. Later, possible outcomes and impediments to the second peace attempt in 2013 will be discussed. Lastly, I will discuss the possible ways to deal with various issues in the conflict by different conflict resolution methods, which can address the different identity and security needs of the parties.

The Kurdish Opening in the history of the Kurdish Issue as a turning point

The Kurdish Issue, as a historical ethnic conflict, has gone through various stages since the Ottoman Empire's last decades and in the period to transition to nation-

state. However, the way we talk about it today has taken a new turn with the emergence of the PKK as an armed actor vis-à-vis the Turkish state in 1984. As will be discussed later in the chapter, although there were some improvements in the situation of Kurds in Turkey over the years, the official historical position of the Turkish state has always been to consider the PKK as a terrorist organization, thus, refusing to officially negotiate with it. The Turkish state's ontological existence is, in fact, historically built on the belief that Kurdish nationalism challenges the unity of the state and that there are 'external Others' out there who are always trying to divide the country.

Although the conflict can be described as largely taking place between the PKK and the Turkish security forces, it can be analysed at three levels:

- 1 At one level the conflict is between the Turkish state and an ethnic minority (Kurds), especially on the issue of cultural and political rights. These disputed rights include mother-tongue education, forming political parties representing Kurds, using Kurdish in election propaganda, having some sort of autonomy in the southeastern part of the country.
 - 2 At another level, the conflict is between the Turkish state and an insurgent group, the PKK. At this level, issues are mostly about disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration and how to confront the past mistakes undertaken by the PKK and state security forces, including the military, gendarmerie and village guards.
 - 3 And lastly, at another level, there is a conflict in the form of social tension between Turks and Kurds throughout Turkey, especially in the bigger cities in western Turkey which received high numbers of internally displaced Kurds.
- (Çelik & Blum 2007)

Since the emergence of the PKK as an important actor, the Kurdish Issue has gone through various stages, where Kurds and Turks experienced various levels of physical and ontological (in)securities. In the following sections, let us examine these at each stage of the conflict and peace process (see Table 3.1).

Phase I (Escalation 1984–1999): When the PKK took up arms against the Turkish state in 1984 to carve out an independent Kurdistan in the southeastern part of the country, an armed conflict which was to last more than 30 years started. The most violent clashes between the Turkish security forces and the PKK took place in the rural parts of eastern and southeastern Anatolia in the 1990s resulting in killings and various forms of human rights abuses such as torture, village evacuation and forced migration. Most Turks in the 1990s did not know much about what Kurds were going through in the eastern parts of the country.

Since 1984, the general state approach to resolve the conflict has been to increase state security by fighting the PKK by rigid military measures. For this reason, in 1987 it imposed a state of emergency (OHAL – *Olağanüstü Hal*) in several cities of eastern and southeastern Anatolia where Kurds are highly concentrated. Mayors of the OHAL region enjoyed extraordinary measures and restricted many Kurdish citizens' rights. During this period, many human

Table 3.1 Summary of physical and ontological securities of the groups

Phase of conflict	Turks	Kurds
Phase 1 (1984–1999)	Both physically and ontologically secure	Experience high levels of physical and ontological insecurity
Phase 2 (1999–2005)	Have physical and ontological security	Have physical security and ontological insecurity
Phase 3 (2005–2009)	Have ontological security and physical insecurity	Have physical and ontological insecurity
Phase 4 (2009–2011)	Have physical security; emergence of ontological insecurity	Have physical security; emergence of ontological security
Phase 5 (2011–2012)	Re-gaining of ontological security; experience of low levels of physical insecurity	Have low levels of ontological security; experience low levels of physical insecurity
Phase 6 (2013–?)	Have physical and ontological security	Have physical and low levels of ontological security (peace anxiety)

rights abuses, extrajudicial killings, forced disappearances and evacuations of villages were undertaken by the military forces, the gendarmerie, village guards and the PKK (Kurban *et al.* 2007; Çelik 2010). While until the mid-1990s Turks felt physically and ontologically secure, Kurds, especially those residing in the southeastern parts of the country, on the other hand, had high levels of both physical and ontological insecurities resulting from being exposed to the violence between the PKK and the state and lacking most of their citizenship rights.

Phase 2 (De-escalation 1999–2005): Besides taking extrajudicial measures in the Kurdish region, one of the Turkish state's tactics of fighting against the PKK was forcing the countries that support the PKK to cut off their aid. Such measures resulted in the capture of the PKK leader, Abdullah Öcalan, in 1999 after Syria, who supported the PKK as a bargaining chip against the Turkish state, forced Öcalan to leave the country as soon as it secured an agreement on the usage of water basins.

The years between 1999 and 2004 can be labelled as 'de-escalation of conflict' and 'reform years' since there was a unilateral ceasefire declared by the PKK after Öcalan's capture, and the Turkish state passed laws liberating certain spheres to allow greater representation of the Kurdish culture. As part of harmonizing its laws with the European norms in the accession process to the European Union (EU) after the acceptance of Turkish candidacy by the EU, the Grand National Assembly of Turkey allowed broadcasting in other languages besides Turkish, eased restrictions on these languages (especially Kurdish), abolished the death penalty, and signed international treaties protecting the economic, social, cultural, and political rights of its citizens (see Çelik 2005 for a detailed analysis of legal changes). Because of the unilateral ceasefire of the PKK and relative calm due

to the reforms necessitated by the EU candidacy, Kurds as well as Turks felt physically secure in this phase. However, the reforms did not secure the important cultural and political demands of the Kurds, such as teaching in Kurdish, some sort of local autonomy and addressing past injustices. Moreover, there was no attempt to address the increasing social polarization between Kurds and Turks. Thus, many Kurds still felt ontologically insecure while Turks continued to enjoy ontological security.

Phase 3 (Re-escalation 2005–2009): Since many demands of the Kurdish population have not been met, beginning in 2005, there was a slow, yet continuous increase in the PKK-Turkish state armed confrontation. The measures taken by the state did not directly address the sources of the conflict although there were substantial steps to enhance Kurds' physical security, such as the removal of state of emergency. Moreover such events like burning of the Turkish flag by Kurdish protesters in a Western city in 2005 and bombings of non-military sites in Ankara and Izmir by the PKK in 2007 (Çelik & Blum 2007) started to threaten the physical securities of Turks in western Turkey for the first time. At another level, Turkish fears were also triggered by the establishment of a federal Iraqi Kurdish autonomous region in Northern Iraq in 2005. This political event increased Turkish fears that such could also happen in the borders of the Turkish Republic.

On the other hand, the Turkish state's resorting again to military measures to fight against the PKK, violent uprisings following the funerals of several PKK members in Diyarbakır and increased clashes between the PKK and the Turkish army in 2006, and escalating levels of everyday violence against Kurds in Western metropolises amplified levels of physical insecurity among Kurds. Unfortunately, during this phase, Kurds' ontological insecurities were not diminished, either.

Phase 4 (The Kurdish Opening 2009–2011): 2009 marks an important turning point in this sense. The AKP government's then-Minister of the Interior, Beşir Atalay, in July 2009, initiated what is known as the 'Kurdish Opening', to address the Kurdish Issue.² When the initiative was originally proposed, it was thought to include greater cultural rights for Kurds (excluding teaching in Kurdish), some form of local autonomy, and incentives to demobilize and reintegrate the PKK fighters into society. However, the project ended by only providing a Kurdish channel in the state-owned TV broadcasting network, changes in laws dealing with rehabilitating minors involved in 'terrorist acts' and allowing the use of Kurdish in prisons.

In the positive environment created by the declaration of the Kurdish Opening, several civil society organizations started holding workshops between the prominent Kurdish and Turkish activists, academics, journalists, etc. However, what has mostly been experienced in dialogue groups was the denial that Kurds and Turks have a 'problem' with each other. Most dialogue participants argued that Kurds and Turks do share a common past and want to 'live together'.³

The scope of most of these workshops was what should be done to resolve the conflict, and most of them focused on reform suggestions. In some minor cases, such as the one led by Vamık Volkan under Ekopolitik, there were moments where Kurds and Turks exchanged their fears and worries vis-à-vis each other. However,

these workshops did not last as the positive political environment withered away quickly. Yet, it is important to note some of the psychological issues that were discussed, which relate to the concept of ontological security/insecurity.

In one of these workshops, for example, a Kurdish participant argued that peace could only come if we overcame:

the problems of not addressing Kurds' dignity and Turks' fears; that is, the fear of being divided. How can you overcome this by not conversing with us, visiting us, meeting and discussing with people in Hakkari (a Kurdish city in the far south-eastern tip of Turkey, known by its violent protest by the Turkish public)? ... What do these people want? ... First, you need to call Kurds, Kurds. That is, you need to recognize their essential linguistic rights. Without linguistic rights, without Kurds being able to use their language freely in all aspects of life, we will always have this problem. What shall we do to address the fears of Turks and protect the dignity of Kurds? We also need to get them out of the shadows of the arms and give them to the civic initiatives.

(*Ekopolitik* 2009)

In contrast, some Turkish participants expressed the righteousness of their fears, arguing that the Kurdish nationalist movement was a separatist one, however, trying to differentiate between the PKK and Kurdish citizens:

This [resolving the conflict] is a matter of imagining the future ... Everybody is willing to live together, I see this ... Thus, there is no need to discuss the past ... Earlier, a friend was asking where the fear of being divided was coming from. We need to understand these fears because we became a 180 km square country from a 10 million km square empire after being divided many times. If I see that my Kurdish friends have an understanding of nationalism beyond asking for cultural rights, such as an ethnic nationalism, it is right to have a fear of being divided ... Then, Kurds need to clearly state that they want to live together regardless of any and every condition. After all the pains, their words expressing willingness for co-existence will solve a lot of problems. I see this [willingness] among many [Kurdish] friends here, but the issue is to express this outside as well.

(*Ekopolitik* 2009)

The above quotations point out several important aspects of the conflict that touch upon ontological and physical (in)security: 1) the issues problematized by the parties in asymmetrical relations are different; 2) the minority is more concerned about the acceptance of their existence as a group by the dominant party, whereas the dominant group is afraid of its territorial integrity to be challenged (thus, while one pays more attention to its ontological security, the other is more concerned with its physical security when its ontological security is safe); 3) both physical and ontological securities are relationally constructed; 4) peace can only be achieved by mutually acknowledging these insecurities and

working on overcoming them, especially through civic initiatives; 5) parties need structural interventions, such as linguistic/constitutional reforms (or negotiations between the leaders in order to shape these outcomes), but these can fall short if the dominant groups do not acknowledge the minorities as legitimate Other, and 6) even these would only partially address ontological security concerns.

If and when Turkish fears would be addressed by some interventions, this could possibly challenge their ontological security. Peace processes induce a general anxiety, disrupting established habits and narratives (Rumelili Chapter 1). In Turkey, while there were discussions about the issues raised by Kurds, there were no societal processes to talk about the emerging inconsistency, ambiguity and dissonance in narratives about Kurds. For example, the majority of Turks had hard times accepting that they no longer should treat the PKK members as ‘terrorists’, and the fact that their ‘sacred’ Turkish state needs to talk to the ‘enemy’. A fertile environment to answer these questions was not provided by any actor during the first phase of the peace process.

Phase 5 (Failure of the Opening 2011–2013): Following the general elections in June 2011, a sound recording was leaked over the Internet, revealing to the public that the PKK and the then-deputy undersecretary of the Prime Ministry, Hakan Fidan (who later became the head of the National Intelligence Organization), the deputy undersecretary of the National Intelligence Organization Afet Güneş, and three members of the European wing of the PKK, Mustafa Karasu, Sabri Ok and Zübeyir Aydar, attended several meetings in Oslo, Norway. This created public discontent because many considered that the state should not be negotiating with the ‘terrorists’. Around the same time of the public revelation of the failure of the Oslo negotiations, in July 2011, the PKK killed 13 Turkish soldiers and the very same day the Democratic Society Congress (DTK), a platform that brought together the majority of Kurdish non-government organizations in Diyarbakır, declared ‘democratic autonomy’ within Turkey’s territorial integrity. All these events led to the freezing of the PKK-state talks and public discussions of reforms to address various aspects of the issue.

Although it seems like the above events paved the way for the failure of the Kurdish Opening, it could not bring peace for other reasons as well. Although first initiated by the government by making contacts with several civil society and political actors dealing with the Kurdish Issue, at the end the project turned out to be a one-player game, that is the Justice and Development (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi – AKP) government, who appeared not to have thought it out well before its initiation. It also was not successful in initiating a dialogue between the opposition parties, CHP (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi – Republican People’s Party) and MHP (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi – Nationalist Action Party), and refused to talk to the pro-Kurdish party BDP⁴ (Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi – Peace and Democracy Party) because it did not declare the PKK a ‘terrorist’ organization. Consequently, the Kurdish Opening soon turned out to be something *uncertain and vague*. Lastly, Prime Minister Erdoğan ‘began to fear that any perceived concessions to the Kurds would hurt his Turkish nationalist base and future presidential hopes’ (Gunter 2012). These fears led themselves to the closure of

the pro-Kurdish Demokratik Toplum Partisi (Democratic Society Party) and the arrest of many Kurdish politicians later on.

But more importantly, there was something unexpected that hampered the Kurdish Opening the most since the beginning. The 34 PKK members, which were called the 'peace group' by Kurds crossed over the Habur Border Crossing in October 2009 in their PKK combat uniforms. They were welcomed by a huge crowd of Kurds, and quickly released by the Turkish authorities, who arrested them shortly after their entry to the country (*Al Jazeera* 2009). However, the chantings of the welcoming Kurds: 'Welcome, peace ambassadors! Kurdistan is proud of you!' were mostly perceived by the Turkish public as victory parades rather than joyful appreciation of peace. Even though this event did not seem to be an important event to challenge the peace process immediately, the quick release of the PKK members by the Turkish courts, later triggered an anger among Turks with a belief that the state is 'forgiving the terrorists'. Such a harsh public reaction caused the government to make a U-turn and decide to sentence 17 of them to prison in 2011 for 20 months for spreading 'terrorist propaganda' (*Today's Zaman* 2011).

Things went sour between mid-2009 and 2011, when thousands of politicians, activists, journalists and even academics were captured in the infamous KCK⁵ trials, for trying to silence the Kurdish dissidents in public. Moreover, for the first time since its removal in late 2002, OHAL was called for in southeastern Anatolia by the leader of the ultra-nationalist party, MHP (*Hürriyet* 2010).

What has set high hopes for the society, at the end, brought the long-lasting conflict to a worse end. Many claimed that the conflict 'has taken a vicious new turn ... as ordinary Kurds and Turks have started fighting in the streets' (Çağaptay 2010). However, this was not a result of the failure of the Opening, in fact, the Opening failed because it did not address this social polarization. Rather than bridging the polarized society, the Opening increased the fears of Turks who acted on ossified fears and prejudices. In society, there were numerous stereotypes about Kurds and discrimination against them at societal and political levels. After the failure of the Opening, these also became more visible. Kurdish Opening increased Turks' fears to the extent that there are some scholars who argued that because of the failure of the Opening, 'episodes of ethnic mobs' began to be witnessed for the first time in the Republic's history (Çağaptay 2010).

The Kurdish Opening could not address the physical security of Kurds at the individual and group level since frightened by fears of division, some Turks started attacking Kurds sporadically in western cities. As for Turks, it increased their fear rather than creating anxiety about peace to bring them to an ontological insecurity, especially just after the Habur incident. Increased nationalism followed by the Habur incident increased these fears on each side, but resulting in rather different directions. For Turks, the fear of the country being divided by the 'terrorist PKK' enhanced by the long-lasting Turkish nationalist teachings was so high that they rejected seeing the Habur incident the way Kurds saw it: a first-time event when Kurds could enter alive from the Iraqi border to Turkey; something to be celebrated. Following increasing fears of Turks and a U-turn to national security

discourses at the state level, the Kurds had an ‘emotional break through’ with Turks, feeling anger and frustration that they could not escape being labelled as potential terrorists.

This anger and frustration in the following months gave way to a feeling of strength as a nation. It was as if ‘Pandora’s box’ was opened and that there was no going back to the days, where Kurds felt humiliated. The feeling that Kurds no longer needed to prove to Turks that they were a nation started to prevail among Kurds. Such a feeling was a result of historical accumulation of pain, anger and frustration, but also of recent traumas experienced by Kurds in 2011 and 2012, after the failure of the Opening. In Roboski (or in Turkish, Gülyazı/Uludere), acting on information that PKK militants were crossing the border, the Turkish air forces mistakenly fired on 34 Kurds crossing the border smuggling cigarettes and gasoline. In Pozantı prison, Kurdish minors jailed for ‘throwing stones’ at security forces were allegedly exposed to sexual violence and beatings (*Bianet* 27 February 2012). Following the increase in violence in 2011 and 2012, Diyarbakır, the undeclared capital of the Kurdish region, started to witness clashes between civilians and police again, especially during the funerals of the PKK members. As expressed by the Member of Parliament, Sırrı Süreyya Önder, following these events, Kurds started to gain ontological security:

Kurds had [another] disappointment with the state in Roboski; they lost their hope in Pozantı and had given away their feelings of brotherhood [with Turks] by the last incident in Diyarbakır. We, the BDP [the pro-Kurdish political party] MPs, sat down and calculated. Altogether, we were imprisoned for 118 years. In other words, there is no ‘clean’ one among us. Thus, removal of our parliamentary immunity means nothing to us. Kurds got themselves out of the system, because a) they are no longer afraid of anything; b) they gave up hoping ... They are free now.

(Önder 2012)

All the traumas Önder talks about added to the historically accumulated anger and pain, resulting in the belief that there is nothing to lose anymore. Interestingly, this belief increased self-confidence and trust in the group’s power for the first time for Kurds while maintaining the danger of physical insecurity. Yet, this started to undermine the emotional link between Turks and Kurds, which survived even in the hardest days in the past.

For peace processes to succeed, they require a plan of certainty of commitment and establishment of trust among the conflicting parties. Peace processes by definition do not have this certainty if not planned well and do not address the concerns of the parties. They also require redefinition of identities so that groups recognize each other and build new relations. Recent polls and research show that Turks and Kurds consider each other as threats to their cultural and even physical beings. Ekin Ok’s study in Izmir, one of the western cities which received a high number of internally displaced people (IDPs), for example, found out that the inhabitants of two isolated neighbourhoods in the city (one an affluent Turkish

neighbourhood and the other a poorer neighbourhood mostly populated Kurdish IDPs and migrants) had negative perceptions of each other, with Turks holding a contextually slightly stronger negative view of Kurds than vice versa (Ok 2011).

International Crisis Group (ICG) a similar analysis. In its recent report, it argued that

most Turks associate Diyarbakır [the biggest Kurdish city in southeastern Turkey, the undeclared capital for many Kurds] and its residents with the war between the PKK insurgents and the army. The stigma is such that few local drivers get Diyarbakır license plates, because the police stop such cars so often elsewhere in the country.

(ICG 2012, p.2)

Such discrimination and negative stereotypes are also the outcomes of negative representations of Kurds and critical events in the Turkish media. Even though the partial release of the PKK leader, Abdullah Öcalan and gradual autonomy of southeastern Anatolia were discussed somewhat peacefully in the summer of 2009, the positive representation of the Opening radically gave way to the nationalistic discourses as early as 2011. As stated above, this has partially been the result of the media's representation of the Habur incident as a victory of the PKK, indirectly representing all Kurds as supporters of violence. In return, there was an increasing support among Turks to legitimize military measures in the southeast, and delegitimize contact and negotiation with the PKK. A survey in 2012, for example, showed that only 14 per cent of Turks supported the negotiations with the PKK and Öcalan while this number was around 53 per cent among Kurds⁶ (BILGESAM 2012).

When the Opening failed, on the Turkish side, similar to the Turkish state's arguments, the belief that it is the PKK and its potential Kurdish supporters who threaten not only the security of the state, but also all citizens in Turkey strengthened Turks' 'morally superior' position that legitimizes the support for more militaristic and nationalistic attitude of the state. Such changes indicate a regaining of ontological security for Turks as they went back to their stable and indisputable positions about the superiority and righteousness of 'Turkishness'. In the absence of interventions to reconstruct a mutually recognized 'Us' and feelings of solidarity and understanding, there erupts a disturbing inconsistency between the conflict parties' self-narratives and how they are called on to relate to the other. With the structural interventions and Track 1 processes,⁷ we can only achieve physical security and ontological security to a minor degree. To have a deeper and sustainable ontological security, there is a need for Track 2 approaches as supplementing the changes initiated from above. More importantly, these approaches need to first challenge the dominant ontological security of Turks that still see Kurds as threats, or as Yeğen (2006) puts it, as 'so-called' citizens in a peaceful way.⁸

The Kurdish Opening of 2009, unable to address 'Turks' fears' and 'Kurds' dignity', failed to create a sense of security, stability and simple answers to 'what

next' questions. What followed next was an increased level of nationalism on both sides that answered these questions for the Self. Turkish nationalism was a safe haven for Turks to answer what needs to be done to resolve the conflict: protecting national integrity by whatever measures were needed. Kinnval (2004, p.742) argues that:

As individuals feel vulnerable and experience existential anxiety, it is not uncommon for them to wish to reaffirm a threatened self-identity. Any collective identity that can provide such security is a potential pole of attraction. It is a war of emotions, where world leaders and other paramount figures are seeking to rally people around simple rather than complex causes. As rallying points, some of these causes seem to have more powerful appeal than others. Nationalism and religion are two such causes or "identity-signifiers" that are more likely than other identity constructions to provide answers to those in need ... nationalism and religion supply particularly powerful stories and beliefs because of their ability to convey a picture of security, stability, and simple answers. They do this by being portrayed as resting on solid ground, as being *true*, thus creating a sense that the world really is what it appears to be.

Even though the Kurdish Opening paved the way for Turks to face their existential anxiety vis-à-vis Kurdish national identity, due to the incidences discussed above, it led to an increase in fears (of being divided, for example); while it increased Kurds' self-confidence, but still leaving them with physical insecurities due to an increase in violence in southeast Anatolia.

Phase 6 (The Dialogue Phase 2013-?): Although the Opening failed shortly after its initiation, in a surprising attempt to revive its efforts to peacefully resolve the issue, the AKP government started a new wave of talks with the PKK and its leader Öcalan in early 2013,⁹ this time through the help of the pro-Kurdish BDP. Several BDP MPs were asked to shuttle between the imprisoned Öcalan, the PKK in the Kandil mountains and MIT. However, interestingly, to refuse legitimizing Öcalan and the PKK through these visits, the government and Prime Minister chose to refer to them as 'İmralı' (referring to the name of the prison where Öcalan is kept) and Kandil visits, rather than their own names. Such was a deliberate choice to mention that the government was not 'negotiating' but 'fighting with terrorism' through peaceful means (*Milliyet* 2013).

The second difference in 2013 as compared to the peace attempt in 2009 was that in an effort to increase public support for the peace process, the government formed what is known as the 'Wise People Committees' (WPCs) to serve in the seven official regions of the country. Although some criticisms were directed to the people and the idea itself, the 63 members of the committees, mostly from the media, academia and the civil society played a significant role in listening to the demands of the 'ordinary people' and explaining the need for such a peace process. This was the first of its type in some aspects in Turkey. These committees for the first time facilitated a channel to discuss people's beliefs, fears and

needs and people felt 'being listened to'. It was the first time, people officially assigned by the government, came to their places to hear their concerns about the way the state has historically dealt with and is now addressing the Kurdish Issue. However, as committee members also expressed in their reports to the government, both Kurds and Turks have experienced years of anger, frustration and fear, expressed sometimes in very hostile and threatening ways, but were not taught to constructively channel these feelings.

Committee members detected the existence of polarized language among society. Usages of such words like 'terrorist' vs. 'guerrilla' or 'our leader Öcalan', in reference to the PKK members and their leader demonstrated the polarization in the society (Report of the *Academician for Peace* 2013). Moreover, what the committees detected especially in the western parts of the country was that certain regions of Turkey have absolutely no idea of what Kurds have been through. This is an important social barrier for the continuation of the process and signals the need to put different groups in touch with each other and inform them responsibly about the history of the conflict as well as the Kurdish demands. Those who came to argue against the committees and the peace process, mostly used the same clichés (such as defining the Kurdish Issue as manipulation by foreign powers, reflecting fear of being divided (discourses mostly of the Kemalist nationalists) in Turkey) but also because they thought this process would lead to authoritarianism (through adopting the presidential system in Turkey).

Despite these shortcomings, however, according to KONDA, a public-opinion poll firm, which surveyed public opinion about the negotiations since the public announcement of the talks between the PKK, Öcalan and the government, over the first five months, there was a steady increase in the societal support for the peace process. From January to June 2013, they asked the following question to a randomized sample of people: 'What do you think about the process which started with BDP MPs' visit to Öcalan?' Those who believed that this process was an important contribution to the overall peace process increased from 38 per cent to 53 per cent. Similarly, from January to May 2013, the number of those, who thought that these talks should be seen as the failure of the Turkish state, dropped from 52 per cent to 41 per cent (undecided reduced from 10 per cent to 6 per cent). Interestingly, while the Kurdish population's support stayed steadily high, the Turkish population's support increased from 31 per cent to 46 per cent. The biggest change, it seems came from the AKP voters (support jumping from 48 per cent to 74 per cent). However, one should not neglect the increasing support coming from the non-partisans and the undecided. The percentage of support of these two categories rose from 27 per cent to 39 per cent, and from 13 per cent to 46 per cent, respectively (KONDA 2013).

What all these show is that there was a slow but increasing support for the talks, thus, the 'wise people' did a very important job in trying to create the societal support for peace. However, peace processes are complex, multi-dimensional and should include various issues and various actors. Negotiations are only one aspect of the process. It is more important in establishing a durable peace process to rebuild the trust that has been lost during the conflict. According to a recent study

among Kurds, although almost half of the Kurdish population was happy with the recent political environment and maintained the hope for peace, around 76 per cent stated that they would feel extremely disappointed if the state did not do what it is supposed to do (such as changing laws to accommodate the Kurdish political demands) in the peace process (UKAM 2013).

What the reports of the WPCs and the public opinion surveys show is that while the political openness since 2009 moved Kurds away from ontological insecurity and recently to a state of physical security due to the ceasefire since January 2013, Kurds in general are in a state of ontological anxiety. According to Can Paker, a member of the WPC in Eastern Anatolia, this largely stems from the fact that they feel that they have always been ‘cheated’ by various Ottoman and Turkish officials over their rights and that this could yet have been another attempt to cheat them (*Milliyet* 2013).

Turks, on the other hand, do not have such anxieties, but hold fears that the government is secretly ‘giving’ some concessions, especially sovereignty over territory, to the PKK. Interestingly, those who support the peace process are those who suffered physically in the conflict the most (Arıboğan 2013). Fears that prevent Turks from trying to understand Kurds are a result of the long-lasting conflict that cut off communication between the groups.

From peace anxieties to stable peace

As discussed above, peace requires mutual recognition of identities and their re-definitions in a process supplemented by macro-level interventions (Track 1). For this, certain interventions should be carried out at various levels simultaneously and reinforcing each other.

As the Kurdish Issue is a multiple-level and complex conflict, it requires addressing various needs at various levels. Most political initiatives are stuck at the institutional and leaders’ level. Issues and needs at the individual and group levels have not yet become focus of much discussion in Turkey. However, studies in recent years indicate that Kurds see public acknowledgement of wrongs and political apology as a means to secure their ontological Self and a requirement for the establishment of a new relationship with the state. For example, Çelik (2013) and Çelik *et al.* (2008) found out that the Kurdish IDPs¹⁰ especially asked the state to apologize and acknowledge past mistakes to make peace. Zarakol argues that if the state is unable to apologize, it is both because of internally generated obstacles to self-reflection, and because the state is insecure in its relationships with other states (2010). When it comes to accepting its past mistakes, both those inherited through its Ottoman heritage (e.g. the Armenian Issue) or those dating from the Republican period (e.g. the Dersim massacre and the Kurdish Issue), the Turkish state’s position at best has been to argue that the state might have made mistakes, but these stem from its reflexive reaction to protect its existence, either challenged from within or from without.¹¹ Since ‘having to admit to past crimes against humanity would definitely require the state to reconsider its sense of self’ (Zarakol 2010, p. 7) and that

an apology requires two major transfigurations in state identity: from “peaceful” or “peaceful when unprovoked” to “one that is capable of unjustifiable violence”, and also from “righteous” to “apologetic”, both of these trans-figurations would challenge the integrity of the narrative of state identity.

(Zarakol 2010, p.7)

The need to address past mistakes is an ontological security need both at the individual and nationwide socio-political level. As argued by Rumelili in the first chapter of this book, long-lasting conflicts produce narratives that see, especially the dominant ‘Self’ as righteous, preventing alternative past stories to be heard and encouraging ontological security of the group that has been harmed during the conflict. In fact, literature on confronting the past points out the all-embracing power of acknowledging past mistakes and asking for closure to not only establish a new relationship between different entities, but also never letting injustices happen again (Lederach 1998; Assefa 2001; Sancar 2010). That is why there are needs for such mechanisms for confronting the past (e.g. truth and reconciliation commissions) as well as structural changes (e.g. reforms) and direct talks between the adversaries to establish ontological and physical security at the group level and nationwide.

War and/or violence addressed at a particular group does not only harm the group physically, but also leads to trauma and feelings of powerlessness for the individual and the collective. While at an individual level, healing requires finding the perpetrators and having closure with them, at the collective level it also requires eliminating sources of overt and structural violence while acknowledging the past mistakes by an authority. If these are done, individuals and collectives would be left to function in an environment of ongoing dysfunction and chaos; being exposed to collective social and communal narratives that are deeply ingrained, and feeling perceived lack of choice/control of their lives. Such feelings were also present especially for Kurds who have been exposed to direct violence in southeastern Turkey in various forms. The most traumatic events were torture, forced disappearances, killings and village evacuations. People who have been exposed to such traumas need to receive healing to overcome the pain and repossess a feeling of control and power in their lives. A requirement for this is a direct or an indirect acknowledgement of the mistake through some sort of confrontation between the perpetrator and the victim.

As discussed above, most Turks do not know about or listen to the Kurdish side of the conflict. Socialized and educated with state discourses denying any harm done to Kurds and seeing Kurds as potential terrorists, many Turks believe in the state’s discursive position and a need for the Turkish state to ‘protect’ itself violently if needed. Rather than approaching Turkish history critically and understanding the needs of the Kurds, blaming the Kurdish Issue on ‘Kurdish terrorism’ or ‘foreign powers’ manipulation’ (Ok 2011) makes it easy for many Turks to escape this transfiguration. Moreover, such a belief also dehumanizes Kurds as people who deserve such violent responses of the state. As discussed in

depth above, for the peace process to succeed, there is a need for interventions such as trust-building workshops to make a bridge between Kurds and Turks and enforcing Kurdish ontological security.

Conclusion

Kinnval (2004, p.745) argues that:

Security as a thick signifier ... places an individual or a group inside the wider discursive and institutional continuities within which they are embedded, ... unmasking those structural relations through which security discourses are framed. These structural relations reflect the division and inequality of power between those involved and affected by the discourse. This means that those who produce the discourse also have the power to make it “true” – that is, to enforce a particular reading of a threat according to which people and groups are defined. This power to make a discourse “true” is particularly evident in cases where one group holds more privileges and resources and when it uses the language of “difference” as a way to legitimize its own dominance and marginalize others. Security as a thick signifier thus highlights the dynamics behind people’s and groups’ different senses of security by clarifying how societies institutionally and discursively position people into structures of marginalization. It provides the means with which to discuss real economic and social asymmetries, both between and within societies.

Kinnval, pointing out the insufficiencies of social identity and self-categorization theories in understanding the context within which certain identities become marginalized and treating them as essential, warns us that we need to study these identities by ‘comprehending why feelings of fear, loathing, and even hatred creep into “our” perceptions of “them,” and how these feelings act as common denominators in times of uncertainty’ (2004, p.751). To understand these feelings, we need to study interactions of groups, individuals and individual/groups with the state and with each other, since insecurities at different levels are interlinked and reinforce each other. In doing so, we need to focus on the asymmetry that exists among the actors. To overcome these insecurities we need complementary mechanisms addressing both structural inequalities and emotions not only to understand the reasons of fears and threats that feed these insecurities, but also to be able to challenge them and establish security between and among different strata of the society. Peace in the Kurdish Issue can only come about through these linkages.

According to Ole Wæver (2009), an integrative approach that would bring together the political processes of securitization with identity formation dynamics at the individual and collective level would greatly facilitate the development of securitization theory as a tool for conflict analysis and resolution. Individuals’ and groups’ understanding of security and threat are socially constructed and linked to their understanding of how their identities are accepted by the others in

the society in which they live. Therefore, understanding individuals' and groups' understanding of the nature of the conflict, everyday violence, and how they are perceived by the Other are all important in understanding individual and group level ontological security.

Critical incidences in the Kurdish Issue, media representation of Kurds and the actions/inactions of Turks have contributed in turning passive bystanders – ordinary Turks – into rather indirect but active bystanders, but, however, not necessarily recruiting them to the side of the peace. What Kurds want from Turks for a peaceful resolution of the conflict and vice versa are still different due to the asymmetric nature of the conflict. As argued by Kinnval 'the intersubjective ordering of relations – that is, how individuals [or groups in this context] define themselves in relation to others according to their structural basis of power' (cited in Zarakol 2010, p.7) matters a lot in terms of how they see their securities. Different from an international conflict, where there is an Other whose legitimacy is rarely questioned, but is loaded with negative adjectives, in inter-state conflicts ontological security of the dominant Self rests on the assumption that the minority Other is not legitimate. There is also a difference in terms of how the parties see their own physical securities and recognition of their identities by the others. In the Kurdish Issue, Turks were for a long time at the stage of ontological security and physical security, whereas Kurds were at the stage of ontological and physical insecurity. To establish ontological and physical security for both Kurds and Turks, there is perhaps a need to, first, non-violently challenge Turks' stable ontological security that sees Kurds as a potential enemy Other to open up a dialogue with it. Such a process, supported by negotiations and reforms at the macro level, only then, can lead to a durable and successful peace process by bringing a new understanding of ontological security. These two processes should be synchronized and complement each other to bring the parties to this re-constructed ontological and physical security level.

Notes

- 1 According to Çelik and Blum (2007), the important actors in the Kurdish Issue are the ruling AKP (Justice and Development Party) government, the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan; and the Turkish security forces, including the military, the police, the village guards, and the gendarmerie (a hybrid police-military force responsible for rural security) along with the Turkish and Kurdish citizens of Turkey. In the latest phase, the pro-Kurdish party, BDP, also acquired an important position by shuttling between the PKK, its imprisoned leader and the Turkish state.
- 2 When first announced, this initiative was entitled the 'Kurdish Opening' indicating that it was designed to address solely the Kurdish Issue. Later, it came to be referred to as the 'Democratic Initiative', and, finally the 'National Union and Brotherhood Project', reflecting the loss of the focus on dealing with the causes and consequences of the Kurdish Issue.
- 3 In fact 'living together' became a cliché that most civil society organizations made use of in the positive environment created by the Opening, rather than a concept that has been discussed in depth.
- 4 The history of the Kurdish legal political organizations is full of closures and revivals with a new name. Following are the Kurdish political parties, closed and revived in order: HEP (Halkın Emek Partisi/People's Labor Party), DEP (Demokrasi Partisi/

- Democracy Party), ÖZDEP (Özgürlük ve Demokrasi Partisi/Freedom and Democracy Party), and HADEP (Halkın Demokrasi Partisi/People's Democracy Party), DEHAP (Demokratik Halk Partisi/Democratic People's Party), and DTP (Demokratik Toplum Partisi/Democratic Society Party). BDP (Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi/Peace and Democracy Party) is the seventh party founded, which is known to be close to the PKK ideology.
- 5 Koma Civakên Kurdistan (KCK) (*Union of Communities in Kurdistan*) is a Kurdish organization founded by Abdullah Öcalan, to put in practice his ideology of democratic confederalism.
 - 6 It is important to note that these kinds of surveys should be taken with a grain of salt since it is harder for Kurds to answer these questions with sincerity when there are numerous cases against Kurdish civil society activists. Moreover, the think-tanks that undertake such surveys, such as BILGESAM, are known to be closer to the AKP government. However, it is significant that even under such circumstances, we see a significant amount of difference among Kurds and Turks in how the government should resolve the conflict.
 - 7 Tracks 1 and 2 are terms first coined by Ambassador Joseph Montville (Davidson and Montville 1981). While Track 1 refers to formal contacts and negotiations at the leadership level, Track 2, also known as Citizens' Diplomacy is about the structural exchanges between those who do not have the ruling power but directly or indirectly affect policy-making or policy-makers, such as academics, civil society members, journalists, etc.
 - 8 This argument, known as labelling the conflict as the 'Turkish problem' rather than the 'Kurdish Issue' started to be put forward by some scholars (e.g. Ergil 2012) and journalists (e.g. Berkan 2013) (see *Perspectives* 2013 for the discussion of this issue) in the recent years.
 - 9 Because the talks between the PKK and Öcalan were not made public earlier, it is probable that the talks continued sporadically between 2011 and 2013 as well.
 - 10 Internal displacement of the Kurds in the 1990s resulted from the pressure of the PKK or the state on the villagers to take sides in the conflict or the insecurity that the villagers felt due to the war in the region. Under the strict measures imposed by the OHAL regime since 1987, many human rights abuses took place in the form of torture, killings and disappearances in the cities; whereas villages witnessed evacuations and burnings along with the individual human rights abuses. As a consequence, many people were forced to or felt that they should leave their homes in the 14 cities where OHAL was strong (Çelik 2013).
 - 11 This is commonly known as Sèvres Paranoia in Turkey. Sèvres Paranoia refers to fears that there are external powers who are trying to challenge the territorial integrity of the Turkish state and implement the provisions of the Sèvres Treaty of 1920 signed between the Allied and the Associated Powers. Article 62 of the treaty, in particular, calls for local autonomy for the predominantly Kurdish areas lying east of the Euphrates, south of the southern boundary of Armenia, and north of the frontier of Turkey with Syria and Mesopotamia. Even though this treaty was replaced by the Treaty of Lausanne, signed between Turkey and the Allied Powers on 24 July 1923, the fear that Turkey's borders are under the threat of such reconfigurations still exists among many Turkish citizens and officials. Although Sèvres Paranoia has always been present in Turkey, it waxes and wanes over time. As it has recently been the case, it normally becomes stronger in the presence of 'external threats', such as the formation of political entities outside Turkey that might have impact on the minorities within Turkey.

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