RETHINKING DEMOCRATIC STATE IN ONTOLOGICAL SECURITY STUDIES

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Abstract

Since the Ontological Security Studies began to contribute to the discipline of International Relations, the dichotomy between state and individual as the unit of analysis searching for ontological security has dominated the literature with an emphasis on conflicts as the empirical objects. Given the terminology offered by the Ontological Security Studies, this paper aims firstly to rethink the state as the provider of anxiety and uncertainty and secondly to underline the role of democratic mechanisms under state's control in the emergence of potential critical moments. The arguments presented in this direction are examined in the light of Brexit referendum and ontological insecurity of Remain voters in Britain.

Keywords: *Ontological Security, Anxiety, State, Brexit Referendum, Democracy.*

DEMOKRATİK DEVLETİ VARLIKSAL GÜVENLİK ÇALIŞMALARINDA YENİDEN DÜŞÜNMEK

Öz

Varlıksal Güvenlik Çalışmaları, Uluslararası İlişkiler disiplinine katkı sağlamaya başladığından beri devlet ve birey arasındaki kimin varlıksal güvenlik arayışı içinde olduğuna dair analiz birimi ikilemi ilgili yazında önemli bir yer tutmaktadır. Varlıksal Güvenlik Çalışmaları'nın sunduğu terminoloji temel alınarak, bu çalışma ilk olarak devleti kaygı ve belirsizliği sağlayan aktör olarak yeniden düşünmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Devletin, bireyin varlıksal güvensizliğini demokratik mekanizmaları kullanarak gerçekleştirdiğini vurgulamak ise makalenin bir diğer amacıdır. Bu doğrultuda ortaya koyulmuş argümanlar, Brexit referandumu ve bu referandumda AB'de kalma yönünde oy kullanmış seçmenin varlıksal güvensizliğinin analizi çerçevesinde sunulacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Varlıksal Güvenlik, Kaygı, Devlet, Brexit Referandumu, Demokrasi.*

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Introduction

Ontological Security Studies (OSS) "travelled" from sociology to International Relations (IR) in the last two decades (Narozhna, 2020: 562). Although it brings various debates to the field, it could transcend the recognition of states and individuals as only physical security seeking actors and provide a terminology on the concepts such as anxiety, uncertainty, and change. Therefore, it has received a significant support from IR literature owing to its capability to explain world politics.

This study aims to contribute to the existing literature by questioning explicit or sometimes implicit assumptions of it. First, OSS pays insufficient attention to the source of ontological insecurity especially in polarized societies given the nature of state/individual dichotomy on the unit of analysis debate dominating the existing studies. Second, the literature defines and limits the critical moments or changes related to the concept of ontological insecurity by the conflict and physical insecurity and their foreign policy implications. In other words, it mostly avoids the peaceful, constitutional domestic changes within a state as a source of ontological insecurity. Therefore, a possible polarized structure emerged out of a "peaceful" development within a state might necessitate to bring the state to the research as an ontological security threat.

Considering the above mentioned aims of the study, empirical object of investigation is chosen as Brexit. Although, previously, Christopher Browning has brought Brexit to the forefront of OSS and challenged the research focusing on the impact of foreign policy changes or conflictual developments on ontological security of states or individuals (Browning, 2018), his study serves for an individual level analysis by focussing on the social media reflections of Remainers as ontological security seeking actors and can not provide an answer for the role of state in the constitution of ontological insecurity. Moreover, a critical and historical approach to referendum in Britain as a democratic and legitimate mechanism of decision making which fuels the uncertainty and anxiety among the Remain voters needs to be developed.

In the first part, instead of a literature review summarizing what has been written on the subject[1], this study will focus on the key concepts of OSS namely anxiety, uncertainty, change and critical moments that would be helpful for further discussions in the following parts. In the second part, the limitations of unit of analysis debate in the literature will be analysed and how the states as the ontological insecurity provider need to be reconsidered in the light of Brexit referendum on 23rd June, 2016[2] and its afterwards. In the third part, this study will be questioning the critical moments defined by literature leading to the ontological insecurity of states/individuals on the basis of conflicts. Brexit as the empirical object of the study will help to understand how democratic mechanisms initiated by the state[3], other than the conflicts, can contribute to the ontological insecurity of the people living in that state. Instead, it will be argued in the conclusion that states should also be re-examined as a threat to ontological security of the individuals and societies within OSS literature. Moreover, they do not construct the ontological insecurity only by the conflicts that they are part of but also the democratic mechanisms that they have control over.

Anxiety, uncertainty and change: an overview

The literature on ontological security has a great debt to Anthony Giddens who derived the term from Laing's work (1990: 39) to elaborate more on the "security of being". While Laing argues that ontological security is a condition of individual in which s/he has "a sense of his presence in the world as real, alive, whole", Giddens adds that the individual who feels ontologically secure does not have concerns about the meaning of life or its purpose

1 Detailed literature reviews of OSS can be found in the introduction articles of special issues on the topic published by prominent academic journals. See Kinnvall, and Mitzen, 2017; Kinnvall, et al., 2018;   Kinnvall and Mitzen., 2018
2 Britain preferred to leave the EU by 52% to 48 % in the referendum (BBC, 2016)
3 In this study, the British "state", instead of the British "government" is under consideration because of three reasons. First, in order to connect the relevant debate on unit of analysis issue and ontological (in) security provision to the empirical object of Brexit, the referendum and its aftermath needs to be studied as state level decisions. Secondly, the decision to hold a referendum on the issue of the EU membership is not specific to the Conservative Government. As it can be understood from the following parts of the study, it is the "problem" of British state to follow ambivalent relations with the EU. At the end of the day, the decision to leave the EU would bind the member "state" i.e. The UK. Finally, the establishment of Britain in the context of class relations can be better explained at the level of "state". This study will stick to Bob Jessop's conceptualization of state arguing that the state is "strategically selective" landscape necessitating political actors' negotiation. It is more tending to certain actors' inclinations and strategies. This landscape also suits for "political conflict, contestation and change" (Jessop, 2005).

Given the world of existential anxieties, ontological security is considered to be achieved when individual or collectives are able to cope with and continue their everyday life (Giddens, 1991). Actors prefer stability and certitude which could be found in their routine life, because change might produce anxiety which is one of the main concepts in ontological security terminology.

OSS highly focus on the concept of anxiety as it is considered an embedded feature of human existence. The authentic individual in Heidegger's thought tends to ask questions and is aware that the anxiety is inevitable. There is a struggle to be adapted for the change creating it (*cited in* Browning and Joenniemi, 2017). From the political psychology perspective, Hughes mentions that 'anxiety' is related to an emotional state where an individual becomes "chronically apprehensive". People worry about their lives in a stressful environment and anxiety can be a result of this stress, yet often emerges as independent from it. Moreover, it can be the part of the challenges in life (Hughes, 2019: 102).

Zevnik gives different conceptualizations of anxiety in various realms. Considering security, it is an "unexplainable or unpredictable" threat with unexpected outcomes. When it comes to domestic politics, the author refers to the elections in Western World as a source of anxiety and in the personal realm, it can be defined as the "unease or uncertainty" leading to the inability of the individual to deal with the pressures of everyday life. Despite these attempts to define, for Zevnik, it is hard to locate anxiety as it is mostly a reference to an absence instead of a presence (Zevnik, 2017: 238).

Another concept is the change which creates the instability of being. Continuity in relations and experiences is something that ontologically secure individual looks for. Giddens emphasizes the need for protective cocoon as we are living in an uncertain and controversial world (Giddens, 1991). Continuity is necessary both in the social and physical environments of individual to establish the sense of trust. In addition to continuity, predictability for social order would be gained under the framework of ontological security (Ejdus, 2018). Aradau (2014) argues that we live in an era of "un-ness", which leads people to "uncertainty, unpredictability and unknowability". In this environment, the concept of hope also emerges as a reassuring mechanism of the individual because the environmental, social, and economic aspects of insecurity and instability is also related to hopelessness. However, Lindroth and Sinevaara-Niskanen (2019) emphasizes that "not only on the bases and reasons for hope and hopefulness but, more critically, on how politics operates by calling for and drawing on the basic human desire for hope" is essential to be studied, that is also valid all related concepts of OSS.

The concept of change in OSS takes us to one of the key elements of literature which is the critical moments. According to Giddens, critical moments refer to "circumstances of radical disjuncture of an unpredictable kind which affect substantial numbers of individuals, situations that threaten or destroy the certitudes of institutionalized routines." As a result of them, ontological insecurity emerges and those routines and protective cocoon created by them are threatened (Giddens, 1991: 60-61). This prevents the individual to go on in a world of uncertainty.

Adısönmez and Onursal (2020: 296) use the concept of dislocatory moments which can be considered as an equivalent for critical moments. For the authors, it is the moment "when the actors do not know how to go on". In a similar vein, Flockhart (2016: 786) uses the term dislocatory events as she basically argues that "ontological security is always a fragile and contingent condition that is constantly in danger of being destabilised by dislocatory events". Rumelili (2015: 11), on the other hand, by calling these events as "faithful moments", emphasizes the impossibility of control over the anxiety and "immediate strain" over the ontological security.

As a combination of different realms such as security and domestic politics, IR scholarship has also benefited from the insights of the above mentioned concepts. For sure, it is not possible to limit the concepts that help the reader to be involved in OSS with the ones mentioned in this study. However, what is focussed mainly here the ones providing the framework to explain the main arguments that can be found in the following parts. In line with this, it can be argued that anxiety, uncertainty and instability have been considered highly relevant to understand and explain the contemporary world politics. As a result, OSS provide the necessary framework for research and has become a popular tool in the field of IR. However, adaptation of OSS to IR has put the state to the centre of analysis. Since psychology and sociology deal with the ontological security of individual, IR had to

face a unit of analysis debate on the question of who is actually seeking the ontological security. In the following part, this study will analyse this debate critically and rethink the role of state in the literature.

Unit of analysis debate and rethinking the state in Ontological Security Studies

One of the important debates within the OSS literature in IR is whether the concept of ontological security can be applied to states despite its original usage to understand the individual. State-centric nature of the discipline paves the ground for the conceptualisation of state as security seeking actor. Some scholars have argued that the state is the ontological security seeker in its interaction with the other states thanks to its self-conceptions (Mitzen, 2006; Steele, 2008; Zarakol, 2010; Subotic, 2016). Mitzen is one of the important names in the field that successfully extrapolates the concept from individual to state level. According to her, IR literature is based on the assumption that the characteristics of individual can be attributed to the state. Moreover, it is the states that provide the ontological security for its members (Mitzen, 2006: 351-353). Steele (2008: 18-19) contributes this debate from the perspective of state representatives because they are constructed as the state itself.

Several arguments from various ideological standpoints help to explain why the individual invests in their states when it comes to the provision of security, the ontological one as well. First, from the social contract perspective, state is a stable mechanism as opposed to the chaos in the state of nature and represents "the lesser of two evils". Its absence, in the eyes of citizens, would be a more serious threat than the results of its existence. Moreover, as the historical distance between the state of nature and state grows, "irreversibility" of the state seems to convince the individual that his/her security can not be separated from what the state offers (Buzan, 1983: 20-21). Second, the state imagined as a collective identity stimulates the production of national and social identities enabling the sense of belonging (Loader and Walker, 2006) "that resides uneasily with the social anxieties" (Marlow, 2002). One form of identity that can explain citizens' trust on the state is the vicarious one as they live through the experience and achievement of the main collective actor in their lives, i.e the state. Vicarious identification encourages the self to be embedded within a larger collective entity providing not just security but also "status, standing, and recognition" (Brassett, 2021).[4] Finally, emphasizing the formation of modern state, historical sociology reminds the "specific arrangement between state and society" in which the former functions as an "insurance" protecting its citizens against external threats and maintaining domestic well-being (Mabee, 2003).

On the other hand, this state-centric approach has been challenged by various scholars on the basis of different arguments. They emphasize that states can not be treated like individuals seeking their ontological security (Krolikowski, 2008; Lebow, 2016). While Lebow argues that states can not have psychological necessities and emotions, Krolikowski has contributed the debate by emphasizing states as an institution affect ontological security that its citizens need and only by applying it to the individuals we can understand Giddens' attempt to analyse modernity's role on human condition.

 According to Narozhna (2020), it is a matter of referent object disagreement and by adopting a historical sociological perspective on the state, a different conceptualisation of ontological security bringing together individuals, groups and states would be possible. This disagreement in the literature has produced three different fields of research according to Rumelili and Adısönmez (2020). The relationship between the self-image of the state and foreign policy, recognition/misrecognition and nation branding, and finally the ones dealing with the emotions collective memory and anxiety in which the unit of analysis for research reflect the individual's ontological security issues. They further argue that a dialectic reading of elite-society/individual relations is essential to overcome the dichotomous nature of the debate.

Given the different perspectives on unit of analysis issue, various number of studies have contributed to the development of the field. As one of the most significant events of contemporary international politics, Brexit referendum ending 43 years of Britain's membership in the EU has also become the referent object in these studies. The main contribution can be considered as Browning's article (2018) titled "*Brexit, existential anxiety and ontological insecurity*". His study on the topic is an attempt to explore the issue based on first-person pronouncements by looking at social media and mainstream media articles. He basically argues that Brexit is a

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4 For a detailed discussion of vicarious identification please see Christopher Browning et. al. 2021

source of destabilisation and ontological anxiety for the ones having voted for Remain, in other words for the individuals, the unit of Browning's analysis.

Although the unit of analysis debate is the extension of OSS towards new fields and stimulating to some extent, this debate would be ignoring the fact that states can be the threat to the ontological security of individuals as much as its role to provide it. In addition to the question asking who is in need of ontological security, the literature has not been digging who creates the ontological insecurity. Despite Krolikowski's attempt (2008: 111) to question the effect of state on individuals' sense of ontological security, there is no explicit treatment of the state as the provider of ontological insecurity. Either as an actor or a structure, states can construct the environment for critical moments by their political or economic decisions. Moreover, these critical movements might have both domestic and foreign policy aspects. While the states claim to seek ontological security in international relations or provide it to the individuals within the borders, these claims might end up with the ontological insecurity of the people. Actions of state, not just after the critical event as Steele (2008) argues, but also in the emergence of that event can undermine the maintenance of self. This criticism to literature might take the students of the field to the broader perspective of critical theory on the concept of security. Hegemonic discourse in the security realm has been challenged by the three questions posed by the critical security approach: What is security?, who is being secured and what are they being secured against? (Jones, 2018).

The concept has been broadened by asking firstly what security is. OSS is a part of this attempt to transcend the perception of security only in military and physical violence. OSS has also contributed to the field with its answers to the second question of who is being secured because as mentioned above some scholars have emphasized the individual as the referent object. Although critical security approach, in general, questions the state as the referent and agent of security studies mainly, some scholars in the field also touches upon the cases where states produce insecurities for the citizens (Jones, 2018: 310; Messari, 2002) as an attempt to respond the third question. From the ontological security perspective, on the other hand, very few works deal with insecurity provided by the state because the focus has stayed mostly on the second question.

At this point, it needs to be emphasized that this study aims to question the OSS literature's state-centric view on the basis of its limited or inadequate questions to be offered to understand the "reality" out there. It is argued that "Whose security" or even "security by whom" debate make the students of the field ignore the question of "insecurity by whom". This state-centric approach might easily find its theoretical roots in historical realist background of IR literature, however a challenge to it does not have to embrace a critical security perspective. While Barry Buzan (1983) acknowledges the paradox of state claiming to be a mechanism to provide security for the individual against the social threats, but also producing them against the individual; he is widely considered as a scholar of neo-realism due to his continuing adherence to state as the referent object (Booth, 1991; Bilgin, 2002). Therefore, this study only focusses on the limitations of unit of analysis debate in the related literature regardless of the theoretical stance of previous works.

Brexit referendum as the empirical object of the investigation in this study can be given as an example of state decision to create a critical moment of referendum and therefore ontological insecurity of individuals living in that state. Browning's study is a good attempt to challenge state-centric approach of the literature, however the author does not open the pandora's box as he did not question the source of ontological insecurity of the individuals. On the other hand, the role of the British state in the creation of a highly uncertain environment has been discussed in different theoretical contexts. Bob Jessop who analyses the neo-liberal British state borrows Gramscian terminology and argues that the government of the time has carried the country to "an uncertain future" thanks to demagogic promises (Gramsci 1971, cited in Jessop, 2018). The decision of referendum taken by the British state is the indications of its organic crisis and Brexit is not a solution but a reproduction of it in new aspects. In addition to the misjudgement and underestimation of the situation by British government, short term interests of the state surpass the long-term interests of society and they have led to chaotic environment (Dunt, 2016), mostly in the form of polarization of society. Jessop also claims that "the trade effects of Brexit, the loss of EU structural funds and other regional support, and the regional economic impact of likely economic regress and falling government revenues" constitute a bigger threat for pro-Brexit regions than the regions of remain supporters (Jessop, 2018: 1741).

Innes further argues that government of the time took the risk of leaving the largest trading block in the world and a champion of neoliberal policies thanks to Britain's guidance, because the EU acting as a brake on the more extreme preferences was not welcomed by supply-sider governments of Britain and the solution offered by the British state became Brexit although the reason of its crisis could be found in "homegrown neoliberal policies and their dire implications" (Innes, 2018).

State-individual dichotomy on unit of analysis debate legitimizes the claim that the state acts as ontological security provider for its citizens and blinds us when the state creates and prefers polarized societies where homogenous ontological security is not possible. Although it seems to be providing the necessary environment for some ontologically secure citizens, it could be the source of ontological insecurity for some others within its borders. For Narozhna (2020), this is a matter of black-boxing the state and it helps for the assumption of homogenous stable societies. In this context, Brexit referendum inherited a polarized society and paved the ground for "a divided rather than United Kingdom" (Hobolt, 2016). Therefore, the role of the British state with its jurisdiction to initiate democratic mechanisms such as referendum needs to be under scrutiny when it comes to the ontological insecurity of British citizens.

Referendum as a critical moment: the case of Brexit

Another issue that comes to forefront when the literature is analysed is the emphasis on the conflict in the emergence of critical moments. Those moments leading to foreign policy changes are considered a part of a conflictual or physical insecurity environment. Despite the explicit claims of separating the ontological security and physical security fields[5], in chosen case studies, the students of the field mostly encounter the situation of conflict or a physical security threat to a state/society/individual. These threats are also external ones essentially relating to an "outsider".[6] Therefore there is less emphasis on what is "peacefully" going on inside the state and by the state. On the other hand, it is also argued that conflicts might have a role in achieving ontological security. According to this view, states might choose to be involved in conflictual practises as they are believed to be routinized and offer the stability (Mitzen, 2006: 346).

Despite the literature's emphasis on conflicts and physical (in)security environment, critical moment may refer a political or constitutional change. Especially the ones emerging as a result of referenda which are accepted as a natural mechanism for direct democracy, pave the ground for fierce and drastic changes at the political, economic and social level.

The role of referendum as a democratic mechanism in the decision-making system is highly debatable. Despite the design of political community influencing the referendum result, Shaw argues that it is the "purest expression of a democratic will" (Shaw, 2017). This is a factor legitimizing the decision of state on the basis of democracy although the implications of referendum are polarizing. Shaw further mentions that;

"Political actors speaking out regarding a referendum vote will have particular party, sectional, national or regional interests in mind. But they may also be influenced in what they say by conceptions of democracy. So when a politician responds to a relatively narrow referendum result with the headline statement of 'the people have spoken', this suggests the dominance in her mind of a singular *national* level authentic voice which ought to control the process of implementing the referendum result, with minimal regard to other voices (e.g. societal or territorial minorities)" (Shaw, 2017)

At this point it is significant to underline that referendum is mostly favoured by the populist politics that looks for simple solutions to complicated political issues so that the existing representative and institutional structure can be changed rapidly (Abts and Rummens, 2007: 404-408). The relationship between the anxiety and populism has been examined by various studies and the critical situations as the source of the former might be "created and performed by populist politics" (Steele and Homolar, 2019). Lacey (2018) argues that fear can be spread among citizens as a result of populism which could negatively affect a sustainable livelihood.

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5 For an exception please see Nina C. Krickel-Choi, 2022
6 For a detailed literature, please see Behravesh, 2018; Croft, 2012; Ejdus, 2020; Gustafsson, 2015; Hansen, 2016; Mitzen, 2018;Rumelili, 2015; Suzuki, 2019.

As mentioned in the previous part, states might create the anxiety and uncertainty for individuals by their application not only to conflicts but also to the domestic constitutional changes which can be used as tool for populist politics. They can be legitimately realized due to the democratic mechanisms states have the control over. Britain has preferred to use this mechanism twice on the issue of EEC/EU membership in 1975 and 2016, out of the three nation-wide referendums held in its whole political history. The UK-EU relationship has never been an unruffled one, but ambivalent. The appeal to referendum by both Labour and Conservative governments was one of the indicators of how difficult it was to manage considering the divided public opinion. Even in the days of declining hegemonic position after the Second World War, Britain chose not to be involved in foundation of EEC. Membership in 1973 was pretty much seen as a solution for the failure in domestic and international economy and an "escape from the claustrophobic sense of 'frustration and littleness'", but it came with uncertainties especially on the matter of parliamentary sovereignty (Watkins, 2016:8). Each and every change in the process of European integration and structure of EU was turning into a feeling of anxiety at the political and public level and this was intensified by the calls for referendums. Following the approval of membership by the British public in the 1975 referendum, since the Maastricht Treaty of 1992, the referendum has always been an alternative and become a part of formal policy agenda after 2004 concerning the ratification of European Constitution Treaty (Jennings and Lodge, 2019: 781). When the Conservatives came to power in 2010, despite their coalition with Liberal Democrats, The European Union Act in 2011 was passed necessitating a referendum for all the amendments on the EU treaties.

Finally, on 23rd of January, 2013, British Prime Minister of the time, David Cameron, promised a referendum on Britain's membership in the EU following a renegotiation process and reform within the institution to prevent populist challenge to his position in the Downing Street and also within the Conservative Party that had the risk of losing its control over the electorate of centre-right (Shipman, 2017). Grainger-Brown points out the contradiction of British state that a populist tool was used by the political elite representing anti-populist politics. Within this contradiction, remain discourse was constructed over the latter. There was a consensus among metropolitan elite and economic experts on the issue of staying in the EU that meant remain voters were backed by the establishment of Britain and international realm such as the IMF, the OECD and the transnational capital (Watkins, 2016).

As mentioned above, rising appeal to a binary and direct decision making mechanism of referendum was reflecting the "exhaustion of 'normal' politics and in the case of Brexit voting for Remain was standing as the normal and norm of Western politics (Jennings and Lodge, 2019: 781). From this point of view, it can be argued that anti-populist politics is the one claiming to know "how politics is properly, rationally, professionally done" as opposed to populism which is introduced as the violator of the natural order (Stavrakakis, 2018) and it is impossible to understand any populist movement without looking at the dynamics of anti-populism in the relevant society (Stavrakakis, et al. 2018).

In the beginning of the referendum campaign, polls were making the Remain voter feel secure as they were predicting that majority would embrace the status-quo because Britain had never tried to "undermine an organization within which it was already member" (Granieri, 2016). Moreover, Cameron had won two referendums by rebuffing the alternative vote defenders in 2011 and Scottish independence supporters in 2014. Therefore, he seemed to be the one who knew "how politics is done properly". Renegotiation also created hope to some extent among the voters and received some support in the polls. Historically, Britain had been favoured by the opt-outs and special treatment in various policy areas of European integration and this could make the pro-EU camp confident and provide the necessary comfort for the outcome of renegotiation process (Glencross, 2016: 24). Remain camp was offering its position as "the only credible perspective on the issue" and according to Glencross, it was a "Project Trust", not a Project Fear as the Leave side had named it (Glencross, 2016: 3).

However, on 23rd of June 2016, the result was a surprise for many because 52% of the voters preferred Britain to leave the EU. Confident Remain camp's "pragmatic" and "bean-counting" assessment resulted in disappointment. For pro-EU side, the expectation was a "comfortable victory" following a "smooth and successful" campaign (Glencross, 2016: 2 and 32) but it was perceived by the 48 % as "probably the most disastrous single event in the British history since the Second World War" (Freedland, 2016). It was a radical change and a turning point for

the domestic realm. Moreover, the domestic changes would have foreign policy implications. Unprecedentedly, Brexit vote has dragged the country "a new foreign policy course against the wishes of its ruling class" (Watkins, 2016: 5). Knight argues that "the uncertainty caused by referendum has obliged some sections of the British population to critically contemplate everyday activities and rights that they had formerly taken for granted" (Knight, 2017). This situation was a negative and partisan uncertainty as Grainger-Brown argues, not a neutral one (Grainger-Brown, 2021: 11). Hay, on the other hand, emphasizes that even Cameron's Bloomberg speech announcing the decision of referendum was enough for emerging of a crisis and to be a critical moment. It created a "socially constructed highly political period of instability" (Hay, 2020). The Brexit campaign revealed anxieties about national identity, immigration, and sovereignty of the Britain, whereas post-Brexit discussions constitute anxiety about the institution of the referendum and its legitimacy (Zevnik, 2017).

As mentioned above Browning argues that Brexit has created an environment of "destabilization and ontological anxiety for those who lost the referendum" by looking at the different mechanisms adopted by the people to preserve ontological security. For Remainers, it refers to a transformation of an "outward-oriented multicultural and cosmopolitan nation to an "insular, ignorant and unwelcoming" one (Browning, 2018).[7] From this perspective, in the morning of 24 June, 2016, a sense of shock and lack of belief were there in Britain. While one part of the society has become jubilant, the other faced a critical moment. The future of Britain and its place within it were uncertain paving the ground for a fundamental question having no answers. The people voting for Remain can describe their feelings as living in a bad dream or hopelessness. Spicer underlines also the way Remainers define the referendum event itself by their "visceral and disturbing terms" such as "a bloody blow", "a catastrophe" or "a death" (Spicer, 2016). Uncertainty and destabilisation could be observed at individual and collective level in addition to the sense of shock while people believe their future is under threat. This is more visible and emphasized when it comes to the future of youth who could consider being not a member of the EU as a barrier for their working, travelling and living opportunities (Freedland, 2016). Knight mentions that Remain voter did "not want to leave the comfort of the present" (Knight, 2017: 239) due to hopeless future that they are expecting. Moreover, Remainers could be easily described as the ones whose solid attachments "melted into thin air" following a period of depression, isolation and trauma in addition to a search for deeper meaning (Spicer, 2016). In addition to these political and social reflections of Remain camp, academic interpretation of Brexit referendum's result was another factor confirming the ontological insecurity felt by Remainers. They were the ones standing behind an "over-confident" (Jennings and Lodge, 2019) decision which could be named as "gamble" (Watkins, 2016; Smith, 2018) and their decisive power on the issue of EU was "overestimated" (Farrell and Newman, 2017) or "miscalculated" (Glencross, 2016) that could create a slippery ground for their ontological position. This might give the impression that they chose to support the wrong side independent from the result of defeat in the referendum.

As a democratic mechanism, referendum is not a part of traditional political culture in Britain. Since it is perceived as the "pre-eminence of the will of people", it has not been welcomed in the political neither practice nor thought. The supremacy of parliamentary sovereignty principle has been the guarantor of radical changes in the political system by eliminating the mechanisms of direct democracy. Referendum in this context is seen as only "counting of votes generally in a binary choice (out/in) (McDonald, 2017). While the context of a referendum might be unique in the sense that it generates definite losers having no hope to become winners in the next time (Nadeau et al, 2021), ontologically insecure Remainer finds no one and no political institution to blame or to give the responsibility. As happened in the Brexit case, the Prime Minister who had called the referendum could easily resign by keeping his followers in mayhem. Public voting procedure where the Remainer herself was in part seems to be the only responsible. Offe (2017) claims, by this way, the accountability is anonymized and state leaps its citizens into dark by creating irrevocable facts. Democracy, as a tool of the state, becomes a simple device to register the choices of the people (Weale, 2017). However, state presents democratic tools to those people with the claim of being the only ontological security provider. As Rousseau takes our attention to this illusion by the state "The people of England thinks itself free, but it is grossly mistaken; it is free only during the election of members of parliament" (Dryzek and Dunleavy, 2009).

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7 Some Remainers also used to name of "Ukipania"-a word play for "land of UKIP" (Freedland, 2016)

From this perspective Brexit can be considered as a critical moment as borrowed from Giddens. Moreover, it created the anxiety with the uncertainty for the many living in Britain. McDonald (2017) claims that;

"The referendum becomes the focus of anxiety, anxiety about leaving the EU and the possible consequences, but it also becomes a focus for an anxiety about the consequences of the EU's founding principles, most particularly the free movement of people."

According to Hughes, political instability and economic uncertainty might be the reasons of mental health problems and Brexit provides both of them without doubt. Unclear future of politics, foreign policy and economy led to the collapse of norms and fragmented social structure (Hughes, 2019). "Vicious circle of polarization", according to Stavrakakis (2018: 8), can be generated by a fusion of economic crisis, social dislocation, and political alienation from the establishment. In this context Brexit referendum produced a polarization between populism and anti-populism which has already become a structural feature of European politics. Especially in polarized societies emerged out a referendum, critical moments that lead to ontological insecurity need to be considered more extensively and independent from the variable of physical (in)security. In this sense, any domestic politics change and its foreign policy implication can be a potential critical moment. Demarcation lines between these realms are obscure and referendums on any of them with their status quo breaking results can be named as critical moments.

Brexit referendum was not only critical moment that has created ontological insecure environment but also a crisis that had led to period of instability (Coutto, 2020) which made "going on" impossible. As Spicer argues, this can even be an example of "collective existential crisis" (Spicer, 2016). Given this crisis environment, self-harm was a term that some politicians or intellectuals[8] preferred to describe Brexit. Having no reference to a physical harm, the concept underlines the irrationality of Brexit and the necessity of its inactivation. Because it would give Remainers a "collateral damage" on social, economic or political terms (Hughes, 2019).

Using a democratic mechanism as a tool also helps the state to de-securitize the issue. People might feel the anxiety after the referendum result and due to uncertain future that they are expecting, but all these are acceptable and to some extent medical. Despite the painful nature of the anxiety, Degerman (2019) criticizes framing anxiety of Remainers as a medical issue that the individual needs to take care of. First of all, he argues their anxiety has a political cause, in other words as it is argued throughout this study, it was created by the state. Secondly, having a medical problem like anxiety, the individual would be assumed as incapable of affecting the ongoing politics and they have to focus on their mental health before everything else. The reflection of Brexit anxiety in media also strengthens this medical perspective. People are warned against potential mental problems that emerged out of Brexit anxiety and only personal change can help them for their problems despite their political roots. Moreover, due to the negative connotations of the emotions underlying ontological insecurity, reactions of the Remainers were de-politicized and ontologically de-securitized on the basis of irrationality. In a speech following the referendum result, Boris Johnson, Foreign Secretary of the time and a prominent supporter of Brexit emphasized that they had to reach out the people having anxieties, i.e. the Remain voters. He added that they might have strategic, spiritual and economic concerns but this does not mean they can not be "disarmed". All the concerns coming by the changes can be dismissed because at the end of the day Brexit was the triumph of British democracy (Johnson, 2018).

Conclusion

In this paper, two main assumptions of the research on OSS are questioned. First, the dichotomy between state and individual as a unit of analysis prevents the students of the field from threating the state as the ontological insecurity provider. Instead, the literature blinds us by asking if the state can seek its own ontological security. Especially in the polarized societies, state is the source of anxiety and uncertainty for some of its citizens. However, the mainstream literature tends to imagine the state with a homogenous society and ignore the possible divided structures within the latter. Therefore, state can only be considered in a scale between the seeker and provider.

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8 Former Conservative Party chairman Chris Patten, Live Aid founder Bob Geldof, Former Liberal Democrats leader Paddy Ashdown can be named among them (Hughes, 2019:31).

Secondly, by also questioning the state in OSS, this study argues that not only state's involvement in conflicts creates ontological insecurity for the people, but also the democratic mechanisms that it has control over might lead to anxiety and uncertainty. Domestic changes framed as peaceful can be seen as legitimate yet they can easily fit for the definition of critical/dislocatory moments. In other words, it is not just the conflict that brings the change and uncertainty, even the referendum as democratic mechanism can constitute the necessary environment for the ontological insecurity of individuals.

Both of the arguments challenging the assumptions of literature are supported by the Brexit referendum as the empirical object. It is argued that the British state does not hesitate to call for an uncertain future for its people with a drastic change coming with a referendum result. By this way, it was expecting to solve its crisis either existential or neoliberal. Even if it means to go against its traditional political culture, Britain paved the ground for anxiety and destabilization for some parts of its society. Moreover, this anxiety with its political roots was medicalized helping to de-securitize the issue ontologically.

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