

Human Rights from the Perspective of Ontological Security: The Individual's Perception of Security on the Edge of Existence

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Abstract

This study examines the ontological security of the individuals in relation to the realization of human rights and analyzes the impact of violations of rights on individuals' perceptions of ontological security. After outlining the historical and conceptual foundations of security, the study explores how ontological security is constructed at both the individual and societal levels. Focusing on the relationship between ontological security and human rights, the research demonstrates that access to fundamental rights and freedoms plays a decisive role in individuals' psychological and social security. In this context, the study emphasizes that feeling secure is not limited to protection from physical threats, but must also be supported by social, economic, and legal guarantees. The findings reveal that modern security policies particularly in the areas of counterterrorism, refugee policies, ethnic and religious discrimination, and global pandemics can undermine individuals' senses of identity and belonging, thereby producing conditions of ontological insecurity. Ultimately, the study highlights the crucial role of human rights based security policies in protecting individuals' ontological security and fostering social stability and peace.

Keywords: Security, Ontological Security, Human Rights, Identity, Belonging.

Ontolojik Güvenlik Perspektifinde İnsan Hakları: Varoluşun Kıyısında Bireyin Güvenlik Algısı

Öz

Bu çalışma, ontolojik güvenlik kavramının insan hakları bağlamında nasıl şekillendiğini ve hak ihlallerinin bireylerin ontolojik güvenlik algıları üzerindeki etkilerini incelemektedir. Güvenlik kavramının tarihsel ve kavramsal çerçevesi ele alındıktan sonra, ontolojik güvenliğin bireysel ve toplumsal düzeyde nasıl inşa edildiği analiz edilmiştir. Araştırma, ontolojik güvenlik ile insan hakları arasındaki ilişkiye odaklanarak, temel hak ve özgürlüklere erişimin bireylerin psikolojik ve sosyal güvenliği üzerindeki belirleyici rolünü ortaya koymaktadır. Bu çerçevede, bireyin kendini güvende hissetmesinin yalnızca fiziksel tehditlerden korunmayla sınırlı olmadığı ortaya konmuş ve sosyal, ekonomik ve hukuki güvencelerle desteklenmesi gerektiği vurgulanmıştır. Bulgular, modern güvenlik politikalarının özellikle terörle mücadele, mülteci politikaları, etnik ve dini ayrımcılıklar ile küresel salgınlar bağlamında bireylerin kimlik ve aidiyet algılarını zedeleyerek ontolojik güvenliği ürettiğini göstermiştir. Sonuç olarak çalışma, insan hakları temelli güvenlik politikalarının, bireyin ontolojik güvenliğini koruma ve toplumsal istikrar ile barışı sağlama açısından merkezi bir öneme sahip olduğunu vurgulamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Güvenlik, Ontolojik Güvenlik, İnsan Hakları, Kimlik, Aidiyet.

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Introduction

Throughout human history, security has remained one of the most fundamental needs for individuals, societies, and states. The innate human need for protection and safety has necessitated both psychological and physical security at the individual level, as well as the preservation of social order and the state's survival at the societal level. For many years, the traditional understanding of security was shaped around military threats and state-centric policies. However, toward the end of the 20th century, globalization, human rights movements, and the strengthening of individual-centered security approaches led to a transformation in the understanding of security. In this context, discussions suggesting that security encompasses not only protection from physical threats but also the individual's identity, belonging, and existential stability have brought the concept of "ontological security" to the forefront.

Ontological security refers to a condition in which individuals feel psychologically, socially, and existentially secure. This concept is based on the need for individuals and states to preserve their identities, maintain their routines, and have a predictable future. The concept of ontological security, introduced by Ronald D. Laing in the context of individual psychology, was later adopted to social theory by Anthony Giddens, who argued that individuals' sense of safety is directly related to their identities and social orders. Giddens stated that for individuals to sustain their self-identities, they must have predictable routines, emphasizing that the disruption of these routines creates ontological insecurity.

Human rights, on the other hand, express the fundamental rights and freedoms that individuals possess by birth. The universal understanding of human rights aims to protect the individual's right to life, liberty, property, and security. However, in today's world, certain security policies implemented by states restrict individuals' rights and freedoms and damage their perceptions of ontological security. Harsh security measures, surveillance mechanisms, forced migrations, and social discrimination—applied under justifications such as national security and public order—make it difficult for individuals to feel safe and lead to human rights violations. Therefore, examining the relationship between ontological security and human rights is of great importance for protecting the individual's perception of security.

The primary objective of this study is to analyze the relationship between the concept of ontological security and human rights violations. Specifically, it investigates how state security policies affect individuals' perceptions of ontological security and what kinds of problems they create in the context

of human rights. Accordingly, the study aims to show that the security perception of individuals and societies is directly related to concepts such as identity and belonging, alongside physical threats. The significance of the research stems from evaluating the effects of contemporary security policies on individuals' rights and freedoms. Modern states' security understandings increasingly tend to restrict individual freedoms. Therefore, it is imperative to understand the risks posed by practices that threaten individuals' psychological security as well as their physical security.

In this research, the qualitative research method is used to address the relationship between the concept of ontological security and human rights within a theoretical framework. Through content analysis, academic studies in the literature are examined. This study hypothesizes that the state's harsh security policies negatively affect the individual's ontological security perception, leading to human rights violations; that ontological insecurity increases when individuals' perceptions of identity and belonging are damaged; and that harsh security policies deepen social polarization by restricting individuals' freedoms. Within the framework of these hypotheses, answers are sought to questions such as why ontological security is significant for the protection of human rights, how state security policies affect individuals' perception of identity and belonging, how a balance should be established between security and human rights, and how global crises and migration movements threaten individuals' ontological security.

The principal contribution of this research is to reveal the individual and societal effects of security policies by deeply analyzing the relationship between ontological security and human rights. The study aims to offer suggestions on how security policies can be structured without violating individuals' rights. Furthermore, by emphasizing that states should re-evaluate their security policies with an individual-centered approach, it aims to contribute to the development of alternative security models for the prevention of human rights violations.

The Evolution of the Concept of Security

According to the *Misalli Dictionary*, security means “the state of being free from danger, being sure, trust, safety, public order: Security forces” (Ayverdi, 2010: 449). When examining the epistemological root of the concept, it is evident that it is derived from the Turkish root “güven” (meaning trust), which refers to reliance or belief (Ministry of Interior, 2017: 256). Essentially, the concept consists of two words with Latin roots. “Secura,” meaning security,

emerges from the combination of the syllables “se” (without) and “cura” (worry/trouble), meaning worry-free or without trouble (Gül, 2016: 304). Defined lexically as the feeling of being away from fear and dangers, security can be expressed as having both physical and psychological dimensions (Yorulmaz, 2014: 106). Derived from the Latin term “Securitas,” security, in Cicero’s words, expresses “the absence of anxiety upon which a fulfilled life depends” (Liotta & Owen, 2006: 40).

Security is the condition where an individual or group has a stable, relatively predictable environment to achieve their goals without the fear of suffering any harm (Çıtak, 2017: 33). It is noteworthy that numerous government and international reports highlight a pluralistic understanding that emphasizes security as a fundamental and essential need (Liotta & Owen, 2006: 40). Today, it can be said that the perception and need for security maintain their priority as the most important element (Ministry of Interior, 2017: 257).

According to Saetnan, the concept of security has four basic meanings. Security encompasses, on the one hand, an objective state of freedom expressing being away from danger, and on the other hand, a subjective state of freedom expressing being free from fear and anxiety. Additionally, it has an ontological dimension as the need to preserve the continuity of the individual’s own self and identity, and finally, a collective dimension in the direction of securing the stability of the social order (Saetnan, 2018: 891). It is quite problematic to define a universal definition of security; a concept used in every language and every society. However, security can be described as the state where there is no threat to possessed values and no possibility of suffering harm in unexpected situations (Ministry of Interior, 2017: 257). This is because the possibility of individuals or society facing an unexpected situation can create a negative perception, leading to a state of unrest.

It is almost impossible to understand world politics without touching upon security. In many parts of the world, people are dying, condemned to hunger and misery, displaced, punished, and faced with oppression (Çıtak, 2017: 25). The traditional security understanding, based on the protection of territories as the most important value, relied on the concept of the sovereign state. With the end of the Cold War, the changing of traditional security strategies enabled a better perception of new threats and dangers (Acar & Urhal, 2007: 70-73). Historically, when interrogating security, it is seen that there are not only wars and armed struggles but also different security perceptions (Çıtak, 2017: 28). Therefore, it is stated that the concept of security should be

redefined to reflect both empirical and normative changes and expanded to include non-military threats (Ağır, 2015: 105).

According to the critique of the traditional security approach, due to the change in the perception of security problems, civil solutions such as economic development, democratization, conflict resolution, promotion of interdependence, support of civil society, and protection of individual rights and freedoms are the most valid methods for eliminating security problems (Ağır, 2015: 108). The phenomenon of security is dependent on many concepts, and it is known that in some cases, these concepts are wrecked on the grounds of security. This situation can be advanced to a level that damages social dynamics. Therefore, issues that are important for society should not be ignored at the point of establishing security. Otherwise, this situation may give rise to consequences that are difficult to compensate for.

When individuals are not safe and do not feel secure, the security of the state or regime inevitably remains incomplete. Security should be addressed from the bottom up, beginning with the individual, followed by society, and ultimately the state. Establishing security on such foundations makes it easier to prevent conditions that generate insecurity and reduce their likelihood. Prioritizing the individual introduces the concept of ontological security, which strengthens the sense of belonging by ensuring that individuals, who are the fundamental components of the state, feel secure.

Ontological Security as the Individual's Existential Assurance

According to Maslow, there are at least five basic groups of needs that direct human behavior. These are physiological needs, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. These groups form a hierarchical order starting from the most basic human requirements towards higher-level motivations (Maslow, 1943: 374). When a person's physiological requirements are met to a certain extent, safety needs, which are a higher-level motivation area, come into play. Maslow states that at this stage, needs such as the individual feeling protected from dangers and the search for stability and order come to the fore (Maslow, 1943: 376).

Ontology is derived from the Greek words "ontos," meaning being, and "logos," meaning science, word, or reason, and can generally be expressed as the "science of being." Ontology stands out as a field that questions the nature of existence, what existing things are, and their fundamental characteristics (Nutku, 1998). According to Laing, biological life, which begins with physical

birth, is completed by the individual emerging as a “real and alive being” in an existential sense. This situation is mostly accepted without questioning and forms the basis of the person experiencing the world with confidence (Laing, 1990: 41). In this framework, the individual feels their own existence as a real and whole identity; their autonomy and identity are distinct to a degree that is not questioned under normal conditions. Over time, they develop a sense of continuity, internal consistency, solidity, authenticity, and worth. They know that they live as a spatial entity compatible with their own body and that their life begins with birth and is limited by death, and this situation creates a strong core of ontological security in the individual (Laing, 1990: 42).

According to Giddens, ontological security refers to the confidence individuals have in the continuity of their self-identity and the stability of the social and material environments of action surrounding them. The belief that persons and things are reliable, which lies at the center of the sense of trust, forms the basis of the feeling of ontological security. Therefore, psychologically, these two elements are closely related (Giddens, 1994: 85). Giddens also emphasizes the distinction between anxiety and fear, and for him, anxiety can carry both ordinary and neurotic characteristics. It is natural for anxiety to be seen in daily life, because the individual’s basic security system is always inclined to produce a certain level of anxiety. Its neurotic aspect is related to Freud’s definition, and the individual experiences anxiety when faced with the concrete “absence of an object.” Therefore, there is always a fear at the basis of anxiety, and fear becomes an element that threatens the developing self and its existential security (Giddens, 1991: 85).

It is argued that fears stemming from uncertainty are suppressed through routines or that individuals provide stability by constructing their own self-narratives (Kinnvall, 2019: 285). Since our individual routines and continuous self-narratives are critical for our well-being, we attach to them and invest emotionally. Therefore, even the thought of their destabilization can create deep anxiety. We only become aware of ontological security at moments when self-stability is under threat. When the elements of the physical or social world we rely on are destabilized or threatened, and when we can no longer maintain our routines, we may feel as if we no longer know who we are. In such cases, we try to re-establish ontological security (Mitzen & Larson, 2017: 3).

Tillich argues that existential anxieties emerge in three forms. These are the anxiety of fate and death, the anxiety of emptiness and loss of meaning, and the anxiety of guilt and condemnation. In all three of these forms, anxiety is existential in that it is intrinsic to existence (Tillich, 1980: 41). The anxiety

regarding fate and death stems from the human need to perceive oneself as a subject carrying continuity within the structural relationship established with the world, as an ontological element threatening the individual's most basic existential self-affirmation. Although ontology explains this structure conceptually, the human mind intuitively feels that the self would also disappear in the absence of the world (Tillich, 1980: 42-43).

Spiritual self-affirmation is the person confirming themselves through participation in the meaningful contents of spiritual life and is shaken by two basic threats of non-being. This deprivation is emptiness and meaninglessness. The anxiety of meaninglessness arises when a person loses an ultimate meaning, a fundamental value that guides all other meanings. The anxiety of emptiness is a more relative threat and emerges with the disintegration of the person's beliefs or when the objects they attribute meaning to lose their importance one after another. Both forms of anxiety cause deep fractures in the person's spiritual life, threatening the relationship the self has established with meaning (Tillich, 1980: 47). When Tillich's classification is viewed from the perspective of ontological security, it speaks of a security need aimed at protecting the meaning relationship established with the world alongside physical threats for the individual to sustain their existence. Although daily life routines, predictable social relationships, and identity narratives play a critical role in suppressing these anxieties, social ruptures, accelerating change processes, or individual traumas can easily disrupt this delicate balance. Therefore, Tillich's forms of existential anxiety provide an important conceptual framework for understanding the fragile structure of ontological security and how sensitive the ground is on which the individual's relationship with both themselves and their social environment rests.

Individuals, as social beings, adopt routine behavior patterns alongside their physical security needs to move away from their anxieties and thus try to protect phenomena covering all self-elements regarding their existence. In this context, ontological security increases the emphasis on self-identity by revealing the difference between physical security and self-security (Sarı-Ertem & Düzgün, 2021: 49). For ontological security is the security of the self, not the body; it is the security of the subjective sense of who the person is, and this feeling makes action and choice possible and motivates them. To say that individuals need the security of this self is the same as saying that their understanding of their self must be relatively stable. The need for stability does not mean that these understandings must remain unchanged; indeed, change is mandatory for learning and personal development. However, the basic idea is that individuals value the sense of personal continuity, because

this sense forms the basis of their capacity to act (Mitzen, 2006: 344). The basic condition of a stable self-understanding is the individual's ability to sustain this understanding over time through their actions. For the results of action, continually either reproduce identities or contradict them. Since identity also directs action, the stability of identity over time is only possible if it is supported in practice (Mitzen, 2006: 344).

The claim that ontological security is a basic need rests on the premise that actors perceive deep uncertainty as an identity threat. Such uncertainty makes acting difficult and makes sustaining the self-design difficult. Ontological insecurity expresses the deep and paralyzing state where the actor does not know which dangers to face and which to ignore, that is, how to proceed in the world. Within ontological insecurity, the individual's energy is directed only toward meeting immediate needs. Thanks to ontological security, the individual knows how to act, and therefore how to be "themselves" (Mitzen, 2006: 344-345). According to Mitzen and Larson, ontological security points not to the physical body, but to the security of the subject's self or identity that makes action and choice possible; this internal stability, which allows the individual to subjectively experience "who they are," forms the basis of ontological security (Mitzen & Larson, 2017: 2).

Since our individual routines and continuous self-narratives are critical for our well-being, we attach to them and invest emotionally; therefore, even the thought of their destabilization can create deep anxiety. When the elements of the physical or social world we rely on are destabilized or threatened, and when we can no longer maintain our routines or our self-narratives become questionable, we may feel as if we no longer know who we are. In such situations, we try to re-establish ontological security (Mitzen & Larson, 2017: 3).

Security, as a social value, is used as certainty, reliability, and absence of risk, contrary to risk, disorder, fear, and danger (Çınar, 2022: 312). Ontological security is more fragile in globalized modern societies due to the transformed nature of trust mechanisms that help individuals struggle with the pressure and rapid changes created by modernity (Şahin, 2022: 90). Therefore, one of the issues that need to be dwelt upon is whose ontological security will be preferred in situations conflicting with each other in the search for ontological security at the societal level (Rumelili & Adisönmez, 2020: 39). The need for security, which is an individual-based phenomenon and takes place in every area of life, emerges in different dimensions and forms. The concept of security, which possesses actors and variables at the human, society, system, and state levels, consists of dimensions with multi-variable, flexible tran-

sitions. Historically, generally, the physical dimension of security has been emphasized (Yorulmaz, 2014: 106-107). This situation can cause a deficiency in fully characterizing security. Because the individual feeling safe has the quality of permeating the society, and the society feeling safe permeates the state. Therefore, with a human rights-based approach, it is important for the individual to be safe in an ontological sense first.

The Concept of Human Rights within the Axis of State Obligation

According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights; this principle expresses that human rights stem solely from being human and are innate. Article 2 of the Declaration explicitly states that everyone is entitled to the rights and freedoms set forth in the Declaration, without distinction of any kind. Accordingly, individuals cannot be deprived of rights for reasons such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, or other status (United Nations, 1948).

In this framework, human rights refer to the most fundamental rights inherent to being defined as human. Human rights are intrinsic; they constitute an inseparable unity with human nature and derive their existence from the very fact of being human. Accordingly, a human right functions as a conceptual instrument that prioritizes certain fundamental human and social qualities deemed essential to the material and moral development of the individual. The concept of human rights thus serves as a normative safeguard aimed at protecting these qualities, thereby transferring the preservation of values related to human dignity and existential integrity into a consciously and systematically constructed legal framework (Yayla, 2011: 32).

Human rights are political norms that are handled at the highest level in terms of moral values and determine how the state and institutions should treat individuals. When evaluated from an analytical perspective, human rights are seen as superior independent claim rights that stem from the individual's mere quality of being human and guarantee minimum treatment. Buchanan defines human rights as normative or demand rights that make it possible for individuals to lead a humane life (Erdoğan, 2019: 28). Human rights aim to secure elements supporting the human's ability to sustain their existence and development by centering the human. In this context, human rights aim to ensure that individuals develop freely and receive humane treatment. The fulfillment of this function is a vital prerequisite for individu-

als to lead a dignified life. A dignified life expresses a life where the individual is not exposed to threats, oppression, or ill-treatment. At the same time, it means a life free from fear, where there is no injustice and cruelty (Sunay, 2013: 23). The basic aim of human rights is to secure individuals living under these conditions.

Freedom, as one of the basic sources of human rights, can be defined as the effort of the individual to shape their life in the direction of their own preferences not being prevented arbitrarily, especially by the political authority. In this framework, freedom is primarily seen as a negative concept (Erdoğan, 2019: 34). However, this classical (negative) understanding of freedom has been questioned by some modern thinkers for more than a century. These discussions are based on two basic approaches. The first approach argues that freedom cannot be explained only by the absence of restrictions but also carries a positive value. Those who adopt the positive understanding of freedom suggest that freedom means not only the absence of external obstacles but also the individual having the power to perform a certain action (Erdoğan, 2019: 34).

Worldwide, the primary addressee of the human rights principle is the state, and for this reason, demands and thoughts regarding human rights are primarily directed to the state (Erdoğan, 2010: 149). Human rights impose four basic duties on the state due to their feature of being asserted against the state. These are to recognize, to protect, not to touch (non-interference), and to fulfill (provide) (Nohutçu & Kaya, 2021: 6). In this framework, the state's obligations regarding human rights play a critical role in ensuring the guarantee of individuals' rights and freedoms. The state is responsible not only for recognizing rights but also for providing protection against violations, not interfering with individuals' use of rights, and creating the necessary conditions for rights to be used effectively. These obligations appear as the basic principles determining the state's approach to human rights. Especially in contemporary democratic societies, the way the state fulfills these duties is decisive for the protection and development of human rights. The occurrence of hesitation at the point of the state fulfilling obligations regarding human rights will negatively permeate the ontological security of individuals.

The Relationship Between Ontological Security and Human Rights

The human rights doctrine has been built upon two basic assumptions since the 17th century: the state of nature and the social contract. While the state

of nature expresses the state where an organized social order and state do not exist, the social contract, besides offering an explanation regarding the origin of the state and society, is seen as the basic basis of human rights (Aslan, 2023: 106).

Locke was the thinker who first voiced the concept of human rights under the name of “natural rights.” However, the idea of natural rights is a deep-rooted phenomenon with a historical background. Locke, like the social contract theorists before and after him, bases the contract on the state of nature (Aslan, 2023: 108-109). According to Locke, humans possess complete freedom by nature and benefit equally from all rights and privileges provided by natural law. Therefore, every individual has the authority to evaluate behaviors contrary to natural law and punish them in a manner suitable to the nature of the crime, when necessary, in addition to the right to protect their property and freedom against violations. However, according to Locke, any political society cannot be sustained without a common authority to use the protection and punishment authority. The emergence of political society in the actual sense becomes possible with individuals transferring their natural punishment authorities and uniting the social protection and judgment power in a common authority (Locke, 1960: 259-260).

According to Locke, the “sword” used by the ruler is not for his interest, but to ensure compliance with the order required by positive laws and natural law by deterring those who do evil. In this respect, government authority serves not the personal benefit of the ruler, but the securing of the rights and freedoms of the entire society (Locke, 1960: 105). Therefore, the legitimacy of power relies on the obligation to observe the common good of the governed (Locke, 1960: 189).

While political power is fictionalized as a limited and instrumental authority to protect natural rights in Locke’s approach, this framework also raises the question of under what conditions the order can be disrupted. For a power that does not observe the common good or goes outside the law is possible to gain a threatening quality rather than being protective. At this point, it becomes inevitable to discuss the presuppositions of the political order, that is, in which direction human relations will be shaped in the absence of authority. Hobbes’s radical depiction of the natural state focuses exactly on this question and tends to explain why political authority is seen as mandatory and inevitable.

The natural state depicted by Hobbes puts forward an inevitably threatening and insecure picture. In this situation, people are completely unprotected, and every individual tries to survive on their own in an environment where

a common authority does not exist, and no one can trust anyone. In this state where there are no social bonds, an order where humans constitute a constant threat to humans is valid (Hobbes, 1992: 11). According to Hobbes, everyone having an unlimited right over everything in the state of nature does not offer a safe life guarantee to anyone. The first step of exiting this vicious circle is the principle of “seeking peace and maintaining it,” which is the first of the natural laws commanded by reason. The second natural law following this principle states that the individual must “give up some of their natural rights” to reach peace. Thus, it emerges with people transferring a part of their natural rights to a common sovereign to end the conflict and ensure security (Hobbes, 1992: 97-99).

Hobbes expresses that in the state of nature, every individual fears from other people who can threaten their own life and labor, and therefore, tries to bring as many people as possible under their influence to ensure their security. This situation directs some to conquest, while leading others to resort to similar strategies just to survive. Unless there is a superior power, mutual insecurity and value struggle cause people to live in constant conflict (Hobbes, 1992: 93). Since there is no mechanism to ensure security in the state of nature where a common authority does not exist, every human can exist relying only on their own power and strategies. In such an environment, the constant fear of death reigns, and human life becomes “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short” (Hobbes, 1992: 94-95).

While Hobbes’s understanding of strong and indivisible sovereignty argues that the state must have absolute powers to ensure security, the development of the human rights concept in the modern period has made the protection of individual freedoms one of the basic responsibilities of the state. At this point, the search for balance between the power of the state and individual rights gained strength with discourses such as Roosevelt’s “Four Freedoms” speech, and the idea of securing human rights at the international level strengthened.

Roosevelt voiced the idea of bringing human rights to international assurance for the first time with his “Four Freedoms Speech” addressed to the congress on January 6, 1941. In this speech, Roosevelt included the following statements regarding human rights: “In the future days, which we seek to make secure, we look forward to a world founded upon four essential human freedoms. The first is freedom of speech and expression, everywhere in the world. The second is freedom of every person to worship God in his own way, everywhere in the world. The third is freedom from want. The fourth is free-

dom from fear which, translated into world terms, means a worldwide reduction of armaments to such a point and in such a thorough fashion that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbor anywhere in the world” (Roosevelt, 1941). While Roosevelt’s “Four Freedoms” speech emphasized the necessity of securing human rights internationally, it also revealed the insufficiency of handling the security phenomenon only with a state-centered understanding. The idea that security should be evaluated with an individual-focused approach for individuals to lead a life free from fear, oppression, and poverty prepared the ground for the birth of the “Human Security” concept in the following years.

Moving from the general understanding of security, the concept of human security directs the focus to the individual rather than the state and centers the individual’s right to access personal security, basic freedoms, and sustainable welfare. When viewed from an ethical angle, human security is seen as both a “system” and a systemic practice encouraging stability and security within the relationships of individuals with their states, societies, and regions (Liotta & Owen, 2006: 40). Human security is defined as individuals having the “right to live in freedom and dignity, free from poverty and despair” (Shani, 2017: 7). The concept of human security entered the agenda of policymakers with the Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Programme in 1994. This concept was largely influenced by the effort to struggle with “downside risks” caused by neoliberal globalization. Human Security has challenged not only the traditional “national security paradigm” dominant in International Relations theory but also questioned ontological insecurities. In this context, Human Security was shaped by the understanding of protecting individuals from “chronic threats such as hunger, disease, and repression” and “sudden and hurtful disruptions in daily life patterns” (Shani, 2017: 5).

Human preferences change over time, and these preferences can be infinite. These preferences can be described as leading a healthy and long life and acquiring a reasonable standard of living to access the resources necessary to sustain life. In the absence of these, many other opportunities cannot be reached either. However, the human development process does not end here. Besides these, economic, political, and social liberties, and guarantees provided by human rights are utilized (Kırdar, 1998: 6). The absence of these guarantees at a reasonable level is among the sources of ontological insecurity.

Ontological security, in its most basic form, expresses the psychological security of the self. Therefore, the argument is that the right of people to

live in freedom and dignity relies on the pre-existence of a stable self that can interact with others. If individuals lack ontological security, they cannot establish basic trust relationships with other individuals, and as a result, it is unlikely for them to live in freedom and dignity, free from fear and need. Therefore, Human Security requires ontological security (Shani, 2017: 3). At this point, the primary responsibility belongs to the state. For the assurance of basic rights and freedoms, laws are the state's mechanism. The state of individuals harboring anxiety at the point of using their rights and freedoms has the quality of causing many problems in the societal sense, besides harming the meaning of rights.

Process management is substantial at the point of the state fulfilling its basic functions in protecting human rights. The perception that rights in general, and rights such as immunity of residence, personal freedom, right to organize assembly-demonstration marches, freedom of religion, freedom of thought, freedom of settlement and travel, etc., in particular, can be violated may create a perception of ontological insecurity. This situation can also damage the sense of belonging and cause the alienation of the individual. For example, creating the perception that the main purpose of an identity check is to ensure the security of society and, accordingly, the security of the individual, or that the immunity of residence is done to prevent problems important for society in a way far from arbitrariness, can positively affect the individual remaining away from ontological insecurity. Thus, a contribution can be made to the establishment of peace and trust in all the dynamics of society.

Reflection of Human Rights Violations on Ontological Security: Threats and Individual Vulnerabilities

Following the Cold War, security has become a concept discussed with global-scale risks revealed by international terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, ethnic conflicts, global ecological problems, global economic crises, illegal migration, ethnic conflicts, and massive technological advancements, rather than being a national problem revealed only by military threats. Therefore, whether the state or individuals are safe is determined through various risks and risk scenarios that can damage stability in economic, ecological, and political fields besides the enemy concept (Yorulmaz, 2014: 131). There are many situations that are sources of insecurity in national and international dimensions, and this situation reveals the state of ontological insecurity because individuals do not feel safe.

Ontological security is a concept covering individuals' physical security as well as their identity integrity, social belongings, and predictabilities regarding the future. This concept, introduced to social science literature by Anthony Giddens, relies on individuals' need to feel existentially safe. Ontological security depends on the existence of an environment where individuals' self-identities are stable, and they can make sense of the world around them. However, phenomena such as wars, terror events, forced migrations, global pandemics, and ethnic and religious discrimination damage individuals' ontological securities and cause human rights violations.

While modern states adopt various policies to ensure security, some of these policies violate individuals' basic rights and freedoms. The way the state regulates individuals' lives should create a structure that will protect the individual's identity integrity and sustain the sense of social belonging, beyond ensuring physical security. However, security policies can cause human rights violations in some cases and prevent individuals from feeling safe. States develop policies restricting individual rights, expand surveillance mechanisms, and narrow individuals' freedom areas for reasons such as national security or public safety. Especially after the September 11, 2001 attacks, many states increased security measures within the scope of combating terrorism, and in this process, individuals' rights such as privacy of private life, freedom of expression, and freedom of travel were seriously violated. For instance, in Europe, measures taken in the name of combating terrorism, such as entry bans, deportations, and revocation of citizenship, have been observed to create a vicious cycle that leads to increased radicalization and results in human rights violations (Yazar, 2021: 186).

Security has historically been defined predominantly within a framework centered on safeguarding the existence of the state and maintaining public order, and for this reason it has at times been positioned in opposition to individual rights and freedoms (Aslan, 2025: 252). However, it is evident that security cannot be reduced solely to the preservation of authority. Otherwise, policies developed in the name of security risk undermining not only the individual's physical existence but also their existential integrity grounded in identity and belonging, thereby generating ontological insecurity.

Nationalism and security policies rising after acts of terrorism threaten the ontological securities of minority groups and immigrants in particular. This situation causes the spread of an atmosphere of insecurity and fear within society besides making individuals' access to basic rights difficult. Arbitrary detentions, tortures, and freedom of expression violations have been

experienced in many countries, and this situation has deepened individuals' perception of ontological insecurity.

Forced migration, statelessness or deprivation of citizenship and refugee crises are one of the most important global issues threatening individuals' ontological securities. People displaced due to war, internal conflict, economic crises, or environmental disasters can also lose their identities, belongings, and social connections. Host societies' threat perceptions towards refugees can often fuel racism, xenophobia, and social exclusion, causing refugees to live in ontological insecurity. Restricting refugees' access to basic rights such as education, health, and shelter prevents them from developing a long-term sense of security, deepening the environment of ontological insecurity.

Religious and ethnic discrimination is one of the significant factors threatening individuals' identities and sense of belonging. Throughout history, ethnic minorities and religious groups have had difficulty preserving their identities due to discriminatory policies they were exposed to and were condemned to live in an environment of ontological insecurity. Ethnic-based discriminations emerge in various forms, such as denial of citizenship rights, assimilation policies, restriction of freedom of worship, and prevention of political representation of minorities. Religious minorities cannot live their beliefs freely, are exposed to attacks on places of worship, and are subjected to social exclusion due to their religious identities.

Xenophobia and Islamophobia are phenomena that damage society, have a deep-rooted history, and continue their effect today. Such approaches lead to serious violations by restricting human rights and freedom of religion. Considering the possibility of causing greater social tensions and pains in the future, it is essential to act with a consciousness of responsibility against this problem (Akdemir, 2017: 3036). Xenophobia and Islamophobia are global problems intertwined with migration, terror, and ethnic-religious-based discrimination. While xenophobia deepens with the increase in migration movements, these discriminatory approaches fuel social unrest and polarization. Especially discrimination made over ethnic and religious identities can increase radicalization by leading to the marginalization of individuals. States and societies that fail to develop inclusive policies in the struggle with these discriminatory dynamics both weakens social integration and prepares the ground for the birth of new crises threatening global security (Şakar, 2024: 11).

Global pandemics are also one of the reasons shaking individuals' ontological securities. Harsh measures taken by states in this process restricted individuals' freedom of movement, threatened their economic guarantees,

and weakened social solidarity. Social isolation, job losses, and the deepening of income inequalities have damaged individuals' long-term feelings of security (Wright et al., 2021: 174-175).

Ontological security is directly related to individuals' feelings of identity, belonging, and predictability regarding the future. Factors such as terror events, refugee crises, ethnic and religious discrimination, and global pandemics are among the most important elements threatening individuals' ontological securities. Human rights violations threaten individuals' existential integrity besides their physical security. Therefore, states and international actors are obliged to develop policies that will protect individuals' feelings of identity and belonging besides, their physical security.

In an international system where the priority is to ensure the security of the individual and society, the most logical answer to the question of who will provide this security is inevitably the state. The state is the basic actor determining and implementing security policies due to its sovereign authority (Kılıoğlu, 2022: 66). States need to display a human rights-based approach while creating security policies. Otherwise, created policies may cause alienation and lead to problems difficult to compensate for in individual and societal senses. Therefore, an optimal consensus ground should be established by creating policies that will ensure the individual's ontological security and be for the benefit of society.

Conclusion

Ontological security is a multidimensional phenomenon covering individuals' identity integrity, feelings of belonging, and predictability regarding the future. For the individual to feel safe, besides the elimination of physical threats, they need to live in a social order where the individual can sustain their self-identity, continue their routines, and feel they belong.

Ontological security is directly related to the effective protection of human rights. An environment where individuals are protected by legal guarantees, freedom of expression is provided, and social inequalities are minimized is the basic element supporting them to feel safe. However, some security policies implemented by modern states increase the feeling of ontological insecurity by violating individuals' basic rights. Especially the state restricting individual rights and freedoms in the name of ensuring security shakes individuals' trust in the system and causes social unrest in the long run.

Security policies directly affect the individual's perception of ontological security. States tighten security policies with justifications such as national security, protection of social peace, and ensuring public order, but can put individual rights and freedoms on the back burner in this process. Security policies are increasing in the USA and Europe after the September 11 attacks threatened individuals' rights such as privacy of private life, freedom of travel, and freedom of expression, creating ontological insecurity for many individuals. Similarly, discriminatory policies implemented against immigrants and minority groups damaged these groups' sense of belonging, damaging social integration.

Refugee crises stand out as one of the most important phenomena threatening individuals' ontological securities. Immigrants have been forced to take refuge in other countries to protect their physical security due to war and political pressures in their own countries. These individuals face problems such as social exclusion, discrimination, and lack of a legal assurance in the countries they go to. This situation leads to refugees living in ontological insecurity and experiencing loss of identity, belonging, and status. The threat perception and hate speech developed by host societies against refugees prepare the ground for the spread of policies not suitable for human rights, increasing social polarization.

Discriminatory policies towards ethnic and religious groups also emerge as an important factor threatening individuals' ontological security. Throughout history, minority groups have lived in constant insecurity due to not being able to express their identities freely, being excluded from the public sphere, and being left without legal assurance. Similar processes continue in the modern world, and many states damage social peace by implementing oppressive policies towards ethnic and religious groups. This situation threatens the long-term security of states besides individuals. For individuals living in ontological insecurity begin to question the legitimacy of the social order and state authority when they lose their feelings of belonging, which can lead to political and social instabilities.

States' security policies violating human rights directly affect the social structure, besides individuals. Oppressive policies implemented in the name of security decrease individuals' trust in the state and institutional structures, increasing social unrest and polarization. Especially the systematic violation of human rights in authoritarian regimes causes individuals not to be able to use their basic rights and not to feel safe. This situation leads to

the alienation of individuals from the system and to their belief in legal and political mechanisms.

Individuals' feelings of security should be supported by human rights guarantees, in addition to the prevention of physical threats. States restructuring security policies with an individual-centered approach will contribute to both the protection of social stability and the strengthening of individuals' feelings of identity and belonging. At this point, alternative approaches regarding how security policies can be shaped without violating individuals' rights and freedoms need to be developed.

It is essential for states to adopt a human rights-based perspective while creating security policies, to strengthen legal mechanisms protecting individuals' basic freedoms, and to develop policies ensuring social equality. Instead of policies limiting individual rights in the name of security, adopting policies where the individual can protect their self-identity, which will strengthen the sense of belonging and increase social harmony, will contribute to the provision of social peace in the long run. Ultimately, ensuring the balance between human rights and security appears as a critical necessity for building a social and political order where the individual feels safe.

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