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The Dubious Case *of a* Failed Coup

**Militarism, Masculinities,
and 15 July in Turkey**



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Feride Çiçekoğlu • Ömer Turan
Editors

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Feride Çiçekoğlu and Ömer Turan

The history of modern Turkey has witnessed several military interventions in politics of all types. The observers of Turkish politics already witnessed the execution of an elected prime minister in 1961, the martial law of 1971, the military junta of 1980, and the “postmodern” coup of 1997, targeting political Islam. All these former coups in Turkey have been scrutinised in detail in the literatures of civil-military relations, democratisation, and militarism. Yet, what happened on 15 July 2016 was a shock for most observers, as well as for laypeople in Turkey. It differed in many respects from the previous military interventions, not least because of its multilayered dubious aspects. On one level, there are still questions around what exactly happened on the night of the coup attempt. On another level, the government has insistently reinforced a militarised atmosphere in the aftermath of the coup attempt, in a perhaps somewhat unexpected way. At first glance, it might seem unlikely that a highly militarised atmosphere would follow a failed coup attempt; yet, a careful contextualisation, carried out in the following chapters, demonstrates the conditions that have led to the emergence of the Justice and Development Party (AKP)-led militarism while also highlighting the deeply embedded nature of militarism in Turkish state and nation. The difficulty of grasping this unusual

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phenomenon makes analyses of cultural products and social relations in this volume a convenient means to trace several manifestations of the repercussions of the coup attempt, most notably the current militarised atmosphere.

What happened on 15 July 2016 was a coup attempt by different forces of the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF), most notably the air force, supported by land troops. From the first hours of the coup attempt, the elected government declared that the putschists were soldiers, affiliated with the faith-based network of Fethullah Gülen. The reaction of the AKP government to the putsch attempt was firm and uncompromising, unlike in some of the previous military interventions, such as those took place on 12 March 1971 or on 28 February 1997. President Tayyip Erdoğan invited people to take to streets to stop the putschists. This invitation by live television broadcast was remarkably influential. Many people were on the streets, major squares in different cities, airports, and even in the entrance of army posts, to block troops' mobility. Beside this civilian resistance, the AKP also had the police forces on their side. A shocking aspect of the coup attempt was that the putschists fired on the civilians as well as soldiers not following their orders. F-16 fighter jets bombarded the parliament and the presidential palace in Ankara. Jets also bombarded a police headquarter in Ankara, killing more than 40 people. Putschists killed dozens of civilians in İstanbul, too. The total death toll of this bloody night is 284 people, including 36 putschists. In the aftermath of 15 July, it became obvious that there was considerable resistance from within the army against the putschists as well but the official narrative was that the civilian resistance had defeated the coup attempt. Even though the coup plotters failed to seize democratic governance on 15 July, this narrative paved the way for serious restriction of basic rights and freedom in Turkey.

This volume is an attempt to contextualise this coup attempt of 15 July, within the framework of militarism and masculinities. It brings together chapters produced with an interdisciplinary perspective. The repercussions of the failed coup attempt are far from being complete; therefore, one might safely assume that it is still fairly early for an analysis of the coup attempt, based on a conventional political analysis framework. Yet, the reactions of the democratically elected government to the coup attempt, including the gradual establishment of a regime of "state of emergency" has many epiphanies, visible at the levels of official discourse, popular culture, urban and cyberspaces, among others. Hence, this volume introduces a broadly defined cultural studies perspective. As a reflection of this

perspective, all the chapters take the world of symbols seriously and refer to their use in the current political climate in their analyses.

The interdisciplinary perspective of the volume includes four overlapping focuses: the first focus draws on a sociological perspective. The second chapter of the volume, “A Midsummer Night’s Coup: Performance and Power in Turkey’s 15 July Coup Attempt”, by Ateş Altınordu uses social performance theory to provide a detailed analysis of the coup night. Altınordu’s chapter emphasises that by constructing an authoritative narrative for 15 July, the AKP government made the ground ready to implement specific changes in the cultural, economic, and political domains.

The second focus is concerned with hegemonic masculinities in two sociological studies. Chapter 3, “Contending Sacrifices: Discontent of Military Veterans of the Kurdish Conflict for Civilian Veterans of 15 July” by Nurseli Yeşim Sünbülöğlu and Chap. 4 “Hegemonic Masculinity in Times of Crisis: 15 July Coup Attempt and the Turkish Football” by Başak Alpan not only inform the readers about how masculinity is constructed in modern Turkey by the state institutions in the realms of culture and ideology, but they also give an account of what types of challenges, crises, and ways of reproduction of normative forms of masculinity have emerged in the aftermath of the coup attempt. While Sünbülöğlu’s chapter offers fresh ethnographic findings on the emergent contention among two different veteran groups, old and new, the former who fought as soldiers against the militants in the Kurdish conflict, and the latter who resisted putschist soldiers, Alpan’s chapter analyses how the already existing hegemonic masculinity structures are reinforced in the football context right after the coup attempt.

The third focal point is about representation. Chapter 5, “*The Secular Army or the New Ottoman Fantasy?*: Negotiating Hegemonic Masculinity in the Image of İstanbul” by Feride Çiçekoğlu, and Chap. 6, “*Press Start to Remember the Martyrs*: On Video Games Commemorating the 2016 Coup Attempt in Turkey” by Diğdem Sezen and Tonguç Sezen deal with the ways of representing the army and the putschists in different cultural products. Çiçekoğlu examines two blockbusters and the position of the army in these movies. The chapter also asks how filmic image of İstanbul is positioned in different movies, and how contesting versions of hegemonic masculinities are produced during the decade preceding the coup attempt and in its immediate aftermath. Sezen and Sezen present an innovative approach by shedding light on post-coup attempt video games and how the night of 15 July is depicted in this virtual realm.

The fourth focus of the volume is related to the question of fatherhood. Chapter 7, “The Undead Father: The ‘Epic’ of 15 July as a Gothic Tale” by Bülent Somay, and Chap. 8 “Insidious Trauma and Traumatized Masculinities in Orhan Pamuk’s *The Red-Haired Woman*” by Çimen Günay-Erkol are in conversation with each other in many ways. Both chapters refer to a psychoanalytic framework. Somay’s chapter reinterprets Tayyip Erdoğan’s leadership and his political will to secure his position, including his determination towards the presidential system, by benchmarking it to the “Oriental Father” figure, intolerant towards any peer or check and balance mechanism. In her chapter, Günay-Erkol revisits the same theme of “Oriental Father”, and the father-son issues in Orhan Pamuk’s novel *The Red-Haired Woman*. Günay-Erkol’s chapter offers insight into insidious trauma caused by the military coups in Turkey as a fundamental constituent of Turkish masculinities.

The ninth chapter of the volume returns to the sociological perspective, and in a certain way closes the circle of these four focal points. In his chapter, “Return to the Status Quo Ante: Reloading Militarism Before and After 15 July Coup Attempt” Ömer Turan analyses the recent challenges to militarism and takes the peace process in the Kurdish conflict of 2013–2015 as the zenith of these challenges. Turan’s chapter identifies two steps to explain the return of militarism: first, the fall of the peace process, and second, the state of emergency in the aftermath of 15 July.

If “cultural studies” is one banner defining the mode of analyses of this volume, the other equally important point of reference is gender. This edited volume’s contribution is an analysis on the intense discourse of “hegemonic masculinity” that has reinforced militarism and nationalism after the 15 July coup attempt. Ideals of Turkish nationalist identity cannot be separated from the military-nation narrative, which prioritises the configuration of a specific type of masculinity. Drawing on this tradition, the construction of masculinity in the post-15 July period is a hegemonic and a militaristic one. Since hegemonic masculinity is a dynamic process rather than a static set of definitions and positions, the historically mobile gendered relations of hegemony pivoting around the 15 July coup attempt are investigated in several chapters of the volume. Chapters of this volume elaborate the “masculinity-in-crisis” debates in the complex culture of “winners and losers” created by the coup atmosphere in Turkey. Crisis of masculinity experienced by the veterans (Chap. 3 by Sünbülöğlu), gendered discourses in football stadiums (Chap. 4 by Alpan), and hegemonic

masculinity reproduced in the popular movies (Chap. 5 by Çiçekoğlu) as well as in novels (Chap. 8 by Günay-Erkol) are amongst the themes focusing on masculinity in this volume.

This volume offers several details about 15 July coup attempt and informs the readers about the contested narratives on this event. Having said that, this volume does not aim to give a journalistic or a descriptive analysis of the course of events. Political observers and commentators have already noticed several dubious points in the events before, during, and after the coup attempt. Furthering these details is not the task we assign for this collection of chapters. In naming this coup attempt as a dubious case, we accentuate a particular puzzle around the coup attempt: when a coup attempt fails to topple down a democratically elected government to seize power, rise of militarism is less expected, contrary to what has happened in this case. Several chapters of this volume delineate the paradox of “victorious militarism,” by which we mean that although the coup was not successful, its aftermath has been shaped by a new wave of state-sponsored militarism. The conventional definition of militarism describes a process in which the logic and values of the military and the army (including glorification of war) become prevailing in civilian life. Post-coup attempt Turkey has witnessed several instances of this kind of expansion of a militarist perspective, such as the use of heavy weaponry in the urban clashes in southeastern Turkey, criminalisation of dissenting voices that criticise the army as well as the government, rejuvenation of the cult of martyrdom, and glorification of the army in films and TV dramas. All these instances are analysed in different chapters of this volume. Beside the stark rise of militarism, democracy has had major blows in the country throughout the post-15 July period, such as many academics, teachers, health workers, and other state officials losing their jobs overnight by executive orders. Furthermore, the state of emergency declared on 20 July 2016 for a period of 90 days has since been extended 6 times and the referendum for a Constitutional change towards presidential system on 16 April 2017 did take place under the state of emergency.

In Freedom House’s “Freedom in the World 2018” report Turkey’s status is classified, for the first time, as “not free”. The report emphasises that the fear of arbitrary arrests stifled public discussion, weakened civil society with the authorities initiating prosecutions of key figures in Turkey’s non-governmental organisation sector. Freedom House also affirms that:

Since the attempted coup, at least 1,500 civil society organizations have been summarily closed and their property confiscated. The prosecution of journalists and closure of media outlets continues. Arrests based on messages shared via social media are common, leading to widespread self-censorship and a general chilling effect on political discourse.

Turkey's status, classified as a "partially free" country prior to the coup attempt, declined to "not free" by international standards. The chapters in this volume deal, directly or indirectly, with this transformation, and bring many valuable inputs for a deeper understanding of the "victorious militarism" puzzle, brought about by the dubious case of the 15 July coup attempt.



CHAPTER 2

A Midsummer Night's Coup: Performance and Power in Turkey's 15 July Coup Attempt

Ateş Altınordu

On the night of 15 July, Turkey experienced one of the most memorable events in its recent history. At about 10 pm, a series of unexplainable incidents followed one another, starting with the blocking of the bridges over the Bosphorus by the troops. Television stations and news websites reporting the incident assumed that this must be a precaution against a terrorist attack—Istanbul had seen four deadly suicide bombings within the last year—but soon enough the blockade was followed by news of fighter jets flying low over Ankara and reports of gunfire near several government buildings (Firat 2016).

The mysterious incidents were finally given a name at around 11 pm, when the prime minister announced on live television that the government was facing an uprising led by a group within the military. Something most citizens no longer considered within the realm of the possible in Turkish politics was taking place in front of their very eyes: a military coup attempt. For the next seven hours, Turkish citizens witnessed an

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extraordinary struggle where nothing less than the government's monopoly of violence was at stake.

The ensuing hours saw the reading of a coup statement on public television, armed struggles for the control of key government buildings, and perhaps most traumatic for Turkish democracy, the bombing of Parliament by fighter jets controlled by the putschists. Following President Erdoğan's call on live television, tens of thousands of citizens went out into the streets and faced the tanks and soldiers. By the end of the night, 240 coup opponents and 36 coup participants would be killed and 2195 coup opponents and 49 coup participants injured (İhlas Haber Ajansı 2016). By about 6:30 am, most pro-coup soldiers had surrendered, and the coup attempt ended in decisive failure.

Almost from the moment the incidents were labeled a coup attempt, some observers characterized the events of 15 July as "theater" (cf. Lusher 2016). They used this expression to suggest that the coup attempt was a hoax, a simulation staged by the government itself (or allowed to proceed despite prior intelligence) to mobilize mass support for Erdoğan and justify a state of emergency, which in turn would allow him to accomplish his long-desired goal to establish a presidential regime (Coşkun 2016a, b). This conspiracy theory was built on the assumption that Erdoğan and the AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, the Justice and Development Party), the ruling party, were the main beneficiaries of the failed coup and lent credence by the "inexplicable sloppiness" of the putschists and critical questions that remained unanswered in the aftermath of 15 July (cf. Çandar 2016). Strikingly, Fethullah Gülen, the cleric whom the government identified as the mastermind behind the coup attempt, suggested that the ruling party staged the coup in order to provide a pretext for the impending purges (Finger 2016).

This chapter analyzes Turkey's 15 July coup attempt and its aftermath as a series of performances on the public stage. My aim, however, is not to partake in the political debate on the coup's authenticity but rather to argue that dramaturgical aspects of the coup attempt and of government actors' responses to it centrally mattered for the course, immediate outcome, and further consequences of "15 July." To that end, I analyze (1) symbolic struggles between the putschists and government actors on the night of 15 July and morning of 16 July and (2) the ensuing reconstruction of "15 July" by government officials and media actors, from the perspective of social performance theory. I use Turkish and English-language newspaper accounts, video recordings of news and debate shows on television, and opinion pieces and books by journalists and academics published online or in print between 15 July 2016 and 15 February 2017 to reconstruct the relevant events and the social performances of key actors.

As a model of cultural pragmatics, social performance theory stresses that all social action involves the communication of meaning to others. And in the sphere of politics, it emphasizes that success in politics—the acquisition of power either for its own sake or for other ends (Weber 1946)—often depends on successful social performances.

Jeffrey Alexander's cultural-pragmatic theory identifies six essential elements of social performances. Collective representations (1), structured by codes and narratives, come into play both as background cultural structure and foreground script. Background representations refer to historically established patterns of meaning in a given society. Scripts, on the other hand, are foreground texts; they selectively draw from background symbols and arrange these in a manner oriented toward dramatic action. Actors (2) who perform the script on the public stage seek to communicate the intended meaning and project a sense of authenticity to the audience (3), the observers of the performance. Whether the latter will decode the performance in the way desired by its producers, however, depends on a complex constellation of factors, including the effectiveness of the *mise-en-scène* (4), the organization of dramatic action in time and space.

All performances to some extent depend on the means of symbolic production (5), which range from props that actors use on stage to communications media that allow the performance to reach the audience. Finally, social power (6)—conceived broadly as the differential distribution of economic resources, political power, and social status—might delimit the range of background symbols, performances, and actors that are allowed on the public stage and restrict the public expression of critical interpretations (Alexander 2004: 529–33, 2011: 83–84).

In contemporary politics, where performances must be attuned to the structural demands of mass media; authenticity and legitimacy are routinely contested by opponents through counterperformances; audiences are fragmented and potentially cynical; and critics mediating between performances and audiences abound, performative success requires command over key resources as well as considerable cultural and dramaturgical skill. Access to the means of symbolic production is necessary but not sufficient for performative success; all elements of performance—background symbols, script, actors, *mise-en-scène*, and audiences—must be seamlessly brought together. A performance succeeds when the audience psychologically identifies with the actors, is persuaded by their message, and experiences catharsis (Alexander 2004: 531). When, on the contrary, the observers find the actors inauthentic—“acting not from sincere motives but to manipulate the audience” (Alexander 2004: 548)—and their message artificial, the performance fails.

Some observers of Turkish politics have noted that symbolic politics has played a central role in the power struggles between Islamic parties and the military in the past. Jenkins (2006) has characterized the civil-military relations in the first term of the AKP rule as “a shadow play of symbols and oblique rhetoric,” likening them to a symbolic box match where each side made careful moves against the other, only to draw back when the anticipated consequences of intransigence would contradict its interests. Altinordu (2016) has argued that while earlier Islamic parties’ failed incorporationist performances paved the way for interventions by the secularist military and high judiciary, the AKP’s successful projection of a mainstream political identity on the public stage between 2002 and 2011 allowed the party to achieve political incorporation. Taking these culturally sensitive studies of civil-military relations in Turkey one step further, this chapter focuses on the coup attempt of 15 July 2016, a case where this relationship has taken the form of a sensational event involving violent confrontation.

I argue that in the case of the 15 July coup attempt in Turkey, social performances played a central role in (1) the relatively limited span of time when the outcome of the coup attempt was still indeterminate—the contingent moments “when things could literally go one way or another” (Wagner-Pacifici 2000: 2)—and (2) the construction of the authoritative narrative of the event in the weeks following the putsch. In the first stage, they helped determine whether the coup attempt would succeed or fail; in the latter stage, they helped determine the cultural, social, and political consequences of the coup attempt.

EVENTS AND SOCIAL PERFORMANCES

From the perspective of social participants, events often appear as self-evident units of history. As cultural and comparative-historical sociologists have extensively demonstrated, however, occurrences do not dictate their own boundaries, labels, and interpretations. The designation of an event involves the selection and linkage of a set of temporally distinct occurrences, their packaging under a recognizable label, and their signification as remarkable and transformative. Events constructed in this manner mark collective consciousness and continue to serve as reference points for social and political agents after their occurrence (Mast 2006: 117).

Of course, events do not construct themselves. It is social actors who, through meaning work, mark the boundaries of an event, craft the narrative

that links and attributes an overarching meaning to a set of occurrences, and establish this “bound” event as a collective point of reference to sanction particular actions and institutional transformations. This also means that some potentially relevant occurrences are excluded from the boundaries of the event; alternative plausible narratives with different protagonists, antagonists, and plots remain unformulated or marginalized; and various possible courses of action are rendered inconceivable or inappropriate. Thus, the way an event is culturally constructed has a major influence on its social and political consequences. Robin Wagner-Pacifici (2010: 1352–54) acutely underlines this point in her study of September 11 as a “restless event”:

Where and how do we look at the numerous actions we call “September 11”?... Do we bind the event by limiting it to acts perpetrated on that one day in 2001, a day in which startled news commentators progressed unevenly from describing airplanes flying into buildings as “accidents” to describing them as “incidents” and then as “terrorist attacks”? Do we bind the event by limiting it to acts taking place in the air on that day, or do we include acts taking place in buildings in two major U.S. cities and on the ground in one rural field in Pennsylvania? Do we include speech communications occurring in these spaces or those transmitted (as images and discourse) across electronic media?...[S]ocial and political agents have alternately incorporated within September 11 the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the legitimization of the torture of “enemy combatants,” and the militarization of public health structures and activities. Where September 11 begins and ends is no small question... [T]he business of event framing is part and parcel of the continuing effect flow of events.

Besides their culturally constructed nature, cultural and comparative-historical sociologists have identified at least two other important attributes of events. The first is that events are contingent: While they unfold against the background of existing structures, their course and outcome cannot be completely predicted, as they involve the rupture of structures, human agency, cultural creativity, and chance (Sewell 1996; Wagner-Pacifici 2000). Second, events are transformative: They lead to durable transformations of cultural, social, and political structures (Sewell 1996). Cultural processes of signification arguably constitute the thread that connects these two dimensions. Emergent and post hoc interpretations of an event by participants and publics do not merely represent social agents’ efforts to make sense of it—they also play a significant role in determining

the event's course, immediate outcome, and long-term consequences. As Sewell (1996: 861) puts it, "[S]ymbolic interpretation is part and parcel of the historical event."

Social performance theory offers powerful analytical tools to study these symbolic-interpretive processes, which constitute an essential dimension of contingent, transformative events. Do the observers consider the actors in question authentic, their actions legitimate, and their messages valid? Do these actors appear to be in a position of power or weakness? Does the audience psychologically identify with the script and experience catharsis? As I argue later in the case of "15 July," the answers to these questions help determine whether potential participants will join the action or remain bystanders, which side pivotal individuals and groups will take, and who will reap the benefits of public legitimacy. Thus, the contingency of events partly lies in the contingency of the social performances they entail.

Moreover, the dominant public interpretation of the event constructed through post hoc social performances has a major influence on the cultural, social, and political transformations that follow from the event. This retrospective construction determines what courses of action are seen as sensible or inappropriate, what kinds of ideas are considered relevant or outdated, which symbols appear to be compatible with collective identity or sacrilegious, and what sorts of changes in social and political arrangements seem necessary—and thus "pave[s] the way for specific actions and institutionalizations" (Wagner-Pacifi 2010: 1353). Therefore, analyzing post-event social performances is crucial for understanding an event's transformative effects in the longer term.

The following sections focus on two major stages in the construction of "15 July" as an event. While these two phases cannot be neatly separated, each has distinct but equally important political implications. The first stage includes the social performances of the putschists and top government officials during the contingent course of the coup attempt on the night of 15 July and morning of 16 July. As I demonstrate in detail, the performances of the putschists who sought to project a sense of power and control and claimed legitimacy for their actions failed. This performative failure significantly contributed to the failed outcome of the coup attempt.

Following the failure of the coup, government officials, pundits, and media actors engaged in the construction of an authoritative "narrative of 15 July." Their meaning work built on the cultural elements that had been invoked by top government officials on the night of the coup attempt but

articulated them in new directions through a more fully fleshed-out narrative. Despite emerging after the fate of the coup attempt had been conclusively determined, this retrospective construction of the event paved the way for major cultural, social, and political transformations in Turkey.

THE COUP ATTEMPT: PERFORMING LEGITIMACY AND POWER

“We Are Focusing on the Possibility of an Uprising.”

Around 10 pm on the evening of 15 July, Turkish news media interrupted their regular programming to report that gendarmerie troops—a military police unit—had blocked access from the Asian to the European side on the bridges over the Bosphorus. Given that İstanbul had seen a number of terror attacks in the preceding months, most media outlets and citizens assumed that this must be a precaution against a terrorist threat (Firat 2016: 35–36). Shortly thereafter, however, reports arrived of military jets flying low over Ankara and gunshots from near several government buildings in the city, leading the news stations to talk about a “flurry of activity.” Finally, at around 11 pm, Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım declared in a live phone interview on the news channel NTV, “We are focusing on the possibility of an uprising” (Firat 2016: 37).

Yıldırım defined the uprising as the work of a minority within the military acting outside the chain of command and underlined the determination of the government to resist and defeat it. The event unfolding before the public was a struggle between the democratically elected, legitimate government representing the will of the people on the one hand, and dark forces that had illegally appropriated the means of violence under their care on the other:

The government of the Turkish Republic, the government elected by the citizens, by the nation, which represents the will of the nation, is in charge. It would quit only on account of a decision by the nation, this must be known. (Firat 2016: 37)

At this early point, it was impossible for the media and the citizens to ascertain the balance of power between the government and the putschists. Aware of the significance of the public perception of the coup's prospects of success, Yıldırım sought to appear calm and confident and project a resilient government. Referring to the putschists' undertaking as

“madness,” he underlined the irrational nature of the coup plotters and undermined their chances of success:

Our citizens should remain calm. But they should know that we will never allow acts of madness such as this...We will never tolerate illegal actions that would suspend democracy. Our security forces have been mobilized, we will do what needs to be done. (Firat 2016: 37)

Yıldırım’s message on live television finally allowed the media to label the event. Until then, the succession of unusual incidents reported from İstanbul and Ankara remained unexplainable occurrences begging for a definition, as evident in this statement of a newscaster on live television: “We are witnessing developments that make our blood run cold, which we don’t know how to describe or explain” (Firat 2016: 36). With Yıldırım’s remarks, the puzzling occurrences were linked and logically organized according to the familiar label of a “military coup attempt.”

From this point on, media actors and citizens knew that what they were reporting and witnessing belonged to that category of a historic event, which would leave a mark in collective consciousness and was likely to have serious consequences. This cultural classification also activated collective memories of previous coups in Turkish history—including the coup of 1960, the military intervention of 1971, the coup of 1980, and the “post-modern coup” of 1997—which would inform subsequent audience interpretations as background representations.

Beyond its content, the interview revealed that the prime minister had not been captured and was not on the run. But given that Erdoğan had increasingly consolidated executive power in his person in recent years (Cizre 2016), the outcome of the night could not be predicted as long as his location remained unknown. Nearly half an hour after Yıldırım’s remarks on television, an e-mail message sent from the General Staff informed journalists that the Armed Forces had taken over the state administration (Firat 2016: 43).

THE COUP STATEMENT

At around 12:15 am, the agents of the coup finally communicated with the public. The putschists had taken control of the public broadcaster Turkish Radio and Television (TRT), and, for the first time since the beginning of the events, they conveyed a message that could illuminate

their identities and motivations. The coup statement was read live by a news anchor a few times and then played in a loop until government forces managed to suspend the TRT broadcast altogether.

As the only substantial verbal communication of the putschists to the public, the meticulously worded coup statement merits a close reading (Firat 2016: 81–83). The putschists identified themselves as the “Peace at Home Council,” and a passage in the statement cited Atatürk’s phrase, “Peace at home, peace in the world.” The president and government authorities, the statement claimed, had fallen into “heedlessness, perversion, and even treachery,” alluding to a well-known quote from “Atatürk’s Address to the Turkish Youth.” The putschists signaled through these references that they were motivated by the values upheld by the founding figure of the secular Turkish republic. The statement justified the military takeover with reference to the special mission of the Armed Forces as “the protector of the republic,” a notion which had played a central role in previous military interventions in Turkish politics.

At the same time, however, the language of the coup statement contained significant differences from the discourse used by the military in its two most recent interventions, the “postmodern coup” of 1997, which toppled the coalition government led by the Islamic Welfare Party, and the “e-memorandum” of 2007, which sought to prevent the election of Abdullah Gül, a politician with a pedigree in political Islam, to the presidency. The central trope used by the military on these occasions had been the “reactionary threat” against the secular republican regime (Altınordu 2016). The 15 July coup statement carefully avoided this vocabulary, which had been discredited in the intervening decade and avoided overt references to the AKP’s religious orientation. Instead, the putschists simply referred to the government’s “ideological motives” in restructuring state institutions and promised that they would institute “basic universal human rights for all citizens without discrimination on the basis of sect or ethnicity.” Thus, while courting republican sensibilities, the statement mostly signaled commitment to a nonmilitant version of secularism.

The central theme of the coup statement was the violation of laws and subversion of the judicial system by the president and the government. The declaration opened with a reference to “the systematic violations of the constitution and laws.” The next passage describing the dire state of the country underlined that “the rule of law based on the separation of powers has been practically destroyed” and asserted that Turkey “has become a country ruled by autocracy.” Even the passages on widespread