

**The December 17-25, 2013 Corruption/Coup incident in Turkey in the Eyes of Islamic  
Social Movements**

By

Rumeysanur Erikli

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Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology

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Supervisors:

Professor Jean-Louis Fabiani

Associate Professor Davide Torsello

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## Abstract

Higher-level corruption has a power to denounce the legitimacy of the state in the eyes of citizens and to force governments to manifest its ability to rule in order to survive in this loss of trust. However, in some cases this power of the corruption does not manifest itself as smoothly as it is expected. What prevents people seeing “the truth”, the illegitimacy of corrupt governments? In this work, I will analyze how and why civil society organizations react differently to the state level corruption by focusing on Islamic social movements’ framing of the recent higher-level corruption, the December 17-25, 2013 incidents, in Turkey. This corruption scandal has constructed two polarized camps: those calling it corruption of the government, The Justice and Development Party (the AKP), and those calling a coup attempt of a movement, the Gulen Movement whose members in the state cadres manifested the corruption of the AKP. I aim to go beyond this polarization by focusing on three Islamic social movements which have different political and religious positions: (i) Islamists who desire for the Islamic unity, (ii) the Gulen Movement who have a nationalist and moral understanding of Islam, and (iii) the Anti-Capitalist Muslims who interprets Islam as imposing social and economic equality and opposes the empowerment of Muslim bourgeoisie under the rule of the AKP. I conducted ten unstructured and semi-structured interviews which lasted two hours averagely in order to capture clearly the impact of their particular combination of religion and politics and their imagination of the state on their framing of the December 17-25 incidents. . Based on my research on social movements’ construction of higher-level corruption, I argue that this type of corruption creates a legitimization crisis for the government and as a response to this the government deflects the crisis by presenting those manifested the corruption as a national threat.

## Acknowledgements

The idea of this research came to my mind after I conducted interviews with one of my unemployed friends on the Gezi Movement, which was my initial thesis research project. Early in the morning on that day, on the newspaper she had seen a list of relatives of ministers who were appointed to state offices at an early age, and had learned that she failed from public office entrance exam (*KPSS*) just by missing 0, 005 points. She compared the favoritism of the government and her grievances as being unemployed for four years. I came across such spontaneity many times in my interviews on the Gezi Movement. They talked about the government's corruption and narratives of corruption in their daily lives and I found their construction of this comparison and parallels really significant. As opposed to such intense public focus on corruption, interestingly Islamists have declared corruption scandal on December 17-25, 2013 as a coup attempt. As a result of such diverse claims, I decided to analyze how different Islamic movements have framed the December 17-25, 2013. This work would not be possible without the help and consultation of my supervisors, Professor Jean-Louis Fabiani and Associate Professor Davide Torsello. I also would like to express my special gratitude to Professor John Clarke, Alina-Sandra Cucu, Judit Veres, and Andrea Kirchknopf whose encouragement and insightful ideas helped me to have more analytical perspective and to be patient and enthusiastic in my research. I am grateful to my family for their financial and emotional support throughout my master and to my host, Zehra Aldemir and her cousins, for their hospitality in Istanbul. Lastly, I would like to thank my interviewees in Kayseri and in Istanbul and my friends and relatives who helped me to set these interviews.

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## Introduction

“Higher level corruption” which refers to the corruption of higher level officers and state institutions having transnational linkages (Pardo: 2004, p. 38) is expected to lead into citizens’ discrediting of the state institutions and the regulation mechanisms of the state, and as a result of this loss of trust, power holders are necessarily expected to manifest their power to reestablish the order by investigating the corruption.

However, in Turkey such a higher level corruption which was revealed through a series of investigations on December 17 and 25, 2013 did not supposedly compel the ruling party, the Justice and Development Party (the AKP) to prove its ability to judge politicians and businessmen involved in corruption. Rather, the AKP has portrayed these investigations as a coup attempt supported by the West against itself and as a matter of national sovereignty and independence. Therefore, the question of whether higher level corruption has resulted in delegitimization of the state has remained unanswered and if such a questioning of the state has existed, it has occurred in the public discussions. Although there is such a significant need to conduct an ethnographic analysis of the December 17-25 incidents, it is merely analyzed as a continuity of the authoritarian character of the AKP and Erdogan’s attempt to restructure the judiciary alongside its ideology through a series of purges undertaken after the corruption scandal (Belge 2015).

In addition to this gap specifically on the December 17- 25 incidents, on the questioning of the state, despite one insightful ethnography of the Turkish state presented by Navaro-Yashin (2002), there is still a huge gap in the literature on people’s framing of the Turkish state in different contexts and times. I aim to fill this gap by focusing on the Islamic

movements' references to the state while explaining their positions vis a vis the December 17-25 incidents. "Islamic movement" (Yavuz 1999, 586) refers to a social movement which base its claims on a specific understanding of Islam.

As focusing on Islamists, who have an idea of Islamic unity and society, the Gulen Movement, that presents a moral and a nationalist understanding of Islam, and Anti-Capitalist Muslims, who assert equal ownership of property as the basis of Islam, I aim to contribute to the literature on these movements from different bases. Firstly, the existing literature on Islamists presents them either as an oppositional movement challenging Kemalism and the state in the 1980s and 90s (Göle 1997; Tuğal 2009, 2013; Gülalp 2001, 2002, 2014) and as a transforming movement incorporated into western values, the market relations and to the state under the AKP in the 2000s (Tugal 2009, 2013). However, in their approach to the December 17-25 incidents, Islamists have opposed the Gulen Movement, which is a religious movement having Turkish nationalist ideas, and they have established an anti-western position and clearly existing literature on Islamism fails to analyze this social phenomenon. Secondly, the Gulen Movement is defined in relation to its depoliticized character such as "faith movement" (Yavuz 1999, 592) or "post-Sufi movement" (Tuğal 2013, 111); however, in the December 17-25 incidents, at least they become part of the opposition against the AKP, which is visible in their attempt to establish an institution in order to gather all the opposition in Turkey, the Victims of the Age Endowment (*Çağın Mağdurları Derneği*)<sup>1</sup>. Thirdly, there is no scholarly work on the Anti –Capitalist Movement in Turkey.

Within the limits of my research in terms of time and the number of interviews, I attempt to fill these gaps by analyzing how Islamic social movements in Turkey have framed

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<sup>1</sup>"Çağın Mağdurları Derneği Tüm Mağdurları Tek Çatı Altında Toplayacak," Bugun.com, last modified, April 18, 2015, <http://www.bugun.com.tr/gundem/yeni-hedef-artik-bu-haberi/1597268>. I translated the name of the endowment to English.

the higher level corruption, the December 17-25 incidents, and what kind of a role their imagination of the state is played in their framing of the incidents. Since the AKP government is known for its Muslim identity, I prefer to focus on Islamic movements in order to see how they challenge or comply with the government's framing of the December 17-25 incidents, a coup attempt, by mobilizing different merges of political and religious ideas. This higher level corruption is called the December 17-25 corruption and bribery investigation (*17-25 Aralık yolsuzluk ve rüşvet soruşturması*)<sup>2</sup> but I will call it as the December 17-25 incidents in order to give a neutral reference because I interviewed not only people calling it corruption but also those calling it a coup attempt.

In order to clarify and express my methodological limits and concerns, I would like to state that the research is based on three weeks of fieldwork. Due to a long extent of the interviews from one and half hour to three hours, I could only conduct ten unstructured and semi-structured interviews. Although this is such limited number of interviews for a well-established analysis, flexible nature and long duration of the interviews allow me to deeply analyze political experiences and positions of all interviewees, their use of theological and political ideas, and their particular references to the state. I conducted two interviews with Islamists in Kayseri and eight interviews in Istanbul (one Islamist, three formal Anti-Capitalist Muslims and four people having diverse relations with the Gulen Movement). Unfortunately, among all interviewees there is only one woman who is a Gulen Movement member. When I tried to contact with each movement, men were much more willing to talk and although I managed to find some women to conduct interviews, they directed me to men as well since these men were heads of the endowments and more able to talk in the name of

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<sup>2</sup>“ 10 soruda; 17 25 Aralık Operasyonları,” BBC.com, last modified December 16, 2014, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/turkce/haberler/2014/12/141212\\_17\\_25\\_aralik\\_operasyonu\\_neler\\_ordu\\_10\\_soruda](http://www.bbc.co.uk/turkce/haberler/2014/12/141212_17_25_aralik_operasyonu_neler_ordu_10_soruda).

the movement. Also, most of my interviewees are in their late 40s or early 50s and the reason behind this is again having interviews with the heads of endowments. Since my interviews are based on snowball sampling, I also interviewed their friends who are almost at the same ages.

I followed their framing of the December 17-25 incidents like a coup attempt and corruption and their framing of the Gulen Movement such as community *Cemaat*, *Hizmet* and *Parallel* in order to make them feel free and comfortable to express their ideas. Since I have been focusing on a recently occurred event, just two years ago, and highly a socially polarized issue, I came across occasions where I lost myself in the debates between the Gulen Movement members and Islamists and I also felt obliged to choose a side between them. I aim to overcome these ethical concerns with deep analyses of Islamic social movements, corruption, and the state. I translated all interviews, public speeches of the prime minister and names of institutions from Turkish to English. I will use “the Gulen Movement” and “*Cemaat*” which means religious community in Turkish interchangeably since *Cemaat* is the way how they are mentioned in Turkey and this reference is a neutral way to refer to them. “*Hizmet*” means service and underscores their service to the people and to the God and it is used by the Movement members and supporters.

Based on my research on social movements’ construction of higher-level corruption, I argue that this type of corruption creates a legitimization crisis for the government, and as a response to this, the government deflects the crisis by presenting those manifested the corruption as a national threat and I will show how these two parallel processes occur in the next section (chapter 1). Following this, in such a context under the influence of their understanding of nationalism based on the Islamic unity, Islamists has incorporated the government’s statist discourse and see the December 17-25 incidents as a coup attempt



(Chapter 2). Anti Capitalist Muslims participated in this research consider these incidents either as corruption of the government and use a statist discourse to uncover illegitimacy of the corruption or see it as a corruption of the both sides, *Cemaat* and the AKP, and keep their anti-state position, but all of them expand the content of corruption due to their vision of Islam as imposing political and economic equality (Chapter 3). People having diverse relationships with *Cemaat* participated in the research also consider these incidents as corruption of the government and employ a statist discourse as well while judging the corruption (Chapter 4). As a result of these analyses, I argue that Islamic social movements mobilize different merges of political and religious ideas while responding to the scandal as a coup attempt or corruption and those call it corruption refer to the norms and functions of the state in order to support their claim on the illegitimacy of corruption instead of questioning the legitimacy of the state.

## **Chapter 1: Legitimation crisis created by the 17-25 incidents and the government's response to it by creating a geography of anger**

In Turkey, on 17 December, 2013 Turkish police arrested 47 people, including sons of ministers, officials from *TOKI* (Housing Development Administration of Turkey), managers from *Halkbank* (the Public Bank, state owned bank), the real estate businessman Ali Agaoglu, and the Iranian businessman Reza Zarrab. They were accused of involving in gold smuggling, money laundering and bribery. While the country was in a big turmoil, the records of the phone calls among the former prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, his family members and the ministers were subscribed on YouTube and they revealed the big amount of cash money hidden in their houses and circles of people who were involved in laundering of this money which happened just on the same day of investigation. Since Erdogan was in a diplomatic visit in Pakistan on December 17, this silence heightened the frustration much more. When he came back to Turkey, he denied all these charges directed to the AKP government, the ruling government, and manifested this investigation as a political investigation and a coup attempt of the Gulen Community which was informally a former ally of the AKP and whose members were employed extensively in the judiciary and in the police. As a second step of the corruption investigation, on December 25, 2013, Tayyip Erdogan and his son became suspects and they were called to testify. Although the AKP government managed to close the file, this environment of crisis occurred right after the uncover of the government's corruption needs to be analyzed.

I argue that higher level corruption creates "legitimation crisis" (Habermas 1992, 46) which occurs in contemporary capitalist societies as a result of distrust to the legitimacy of the government and the political institutions in general. As Pardo argues (2004) higher level corruption has power to give birth to such legitimation crisis and to lead into a questioning of

the state; however, this power does not manifest itself in Turkey due to the AKP's construction of an extensive anger against the Gulen Movement which is a religious movement in the state cadres and uncovered the corruption scandal. This anger is established through attaching firm ideological meanings to the Gulen Movement. A number of ways are used to construct such meanings. In his speeches after the manifestation of corruption, Erdogan, the former prime minister, accused them of betraying the state and the nation<sup>3</sup> and called them "parallel organization"<sup>4</sup> due to the extensive amount of Gulen Movement members in state cadres and their acts challenging the AKP. Also, he accused them with allying with the West in order to curb the development of Turkey and the establishment of the Islamic unity and he grounded these arguments by reconstructing the history, such as portraying the Movement as in the same line with the February 28 coup makers, who took over the Islamist Welfare Party in 1997, and supporters of the Gezi Movement.<sup>56</sup> While such a pro-Western and anti statist ideology of the Movement has been established, the identity of the Movement has become more and more ambiguous. Their identity of being religious community was rejected and they were portrayed as an apparatus of America and Israel.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> "Olaylar Dershane Sürecinin Devamıdır," *akparti.org.tr*, Last modified December 27, 2013 and last accessed April 19, 2015, <http://www.akparti.org.tr/site/haberler/olaylar-dershane-surecinin-devamidir/57205#1>.

<sup>4</sup> "Erdogan: İninize Gireceğiz," *ntv.com.tr*, last modified December 21, 2013 and last accessed April 19, 2015, <http://www.ntv.com.tr/arsiv/id/25487330>.

<sup>5</sup> "Paralel Yapı 28 Şubat'ın Yargılanmasını Engelledi," *haberler.com* last accessed June 9, 2015, <http://www.haberler.com/erdogan-paralel-yapilanma-28-subat-in-7020496-haber>

<sup>6</sup> "Erdogandan Gezi Parkı ve Paralel Devlet Çıkışı," *cnnturk.com*, last modified June 19, 2014 <http://www.cnnturk.com/haber/dunya/erdogandan-gezi-parki-ve-paralel-devlet-cikisi>

<sup>7</sup> "Erdogan: Paralel Yapı MOSSAD'la İşbirliği Yapıyor," *bbc.com*, last modified January 31, 2015, [http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2015/01/150131\\_erdogan](http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2015/01/150131_erdogan)

<sup>8</sup> "ABD 'Paralel Yapı'yı Okullarla Besliyor," *aa.com.tr*, last modified May 22, 2015, <http://www.aa.com.tr/tr/haberler/514400--abd-quot-paralel-yapi-quot-yi-okullarla-besliyor>

The gap between this strong ideology of the enemy and the loose idea about its identity creates a strong motive to destroy them in order to sustain “us” (Appadurai 2006, 90).

As a result of such motives, in a short period of time state officers who have any kind of relationship with the Gulen Movement were purged,<sup>9</sup> *Bank Asya*, the bank of *Cemaat*, was appropriated by the Saving Deposit Insurance Fund (SDIF)<sup>10</sup>, arguments within and between families occurred and some of them resulted in the divorce of couples.<sup>11</sup> In addition to these harsh responses from the government and public, 220 civil society organizations established *Milli İrade Platformu* (the Platform of the National Will) and stated their support for the government in its fight against “parallel organization”.<sup>12</sup> They declared that during December 17 and 25 fake documents were produced to overthrow the AKP, and to curb the development of Turkey. I had a chance to talk to one person who has a managerial position in one of these endowments and I argue that the reason behind for such a support for the government and denial of corruption is their already existing nationalist worldview based on the Islamic unity and their trust in Erdogan, due to his active involvement in the Welfare Party in the 1990s. However, this appeal of the government has been rejected and challenged by the Anti-Capitalist Muslims and the Gulen Movement who interpret these attempts as covering up a truth that will come out and charge the AKP with corruption in the future.

<sup>9</sup>“Emniyette ‘Paralel Yapı’ Operasyonu,” *milliyet.com.tr*, last modified July 22, 2014, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/emniyette-buyuk-operasyon-gundem-1915308/>

<sup>10</sup>“10 Soruda TMSF Bank Asya’ya Neden El Koydu,” *sabah.com.tr*, last accessed <http://www.sabah.com.tr/fotohaber/ekonomi/10-soruda-tmsf-bankasyaya-el-koydu>. This is the original translation on the website and its name in turkish is TMSF.

<sup>11</sup> “Evde AKP Cemaat Kavgası,” *aljazeera.com.tr*, last modified April 16, 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/al-jazeera-ozel/evde-akp-cemaat-kavgasi>

<sup>12</sup> “Biz Değerlerimizin Tarafındayız,” *milliiradeplatformu.com*, <http://www.milliiradeplatformu.com/>

## **Chapter 2: Islamic Movements in Turkey, State and Corruption**

In my research on Islamic movements' responses to the December 17- 25 incidents in Turkey I will utilize a set of theories on Islamic movements, the state and corruption in relation to people's re/de construction of the state. If we consider these three notions as constructing a triangle, the first nexus lies between the diverse relations of Islamic movements with the state which needs to be analyzed one by one.

The Gulen Movement has always stayed within the boundaries of the state and never attempted to challenge it. Also, it has established an idea of Turkish nationalism based on the heritage of the Ottoman Empire (Yavuz 1999, 593). However, Islamist and Anti-Capitalist Muslims have more diversity and transforming relations with the state. In the 1980s and 1990s Islamists became the main oppositional force against the Kemalist state in Turkey, and local and global processes played roles in this rise of Islamists. Firstly, the leftists in Turkey were not challenging Kemalism; therefore, there was no other ideology can compete with the Islamists, and secondly, the nation state was intensively being questioned in the postmodern world in those years (Gülalp : 2014).

Two different waves of ideas were competing within the Islamists. While radical Islamists rejected the legitimacy of the Turkish state and avoided any sort of relation or benefit related to the state (Tuğal 2009, 62-68 ) and aimed to radically expand Islam to every sphere of life under the idea of Islamic civilization (Göle 1997, 54), more moderate ones believed the possibility of such an Islamic life within the existing Turkish state. However, in the 2000s under the leadership of the AKP these two waves of Islamism have become incorporated into the state and market relations (Tugal 2009) and this process can be analyzed in two different ways. Firstly, Tugal (2009, 32 ) identifies this incorporation

through the Gramsci's idea of "passive revolution" which refers to being subjugated to the rule of hegemony unwittingly and persuasively. Secondly, Navaro-Yashin (2002, 161) does not limit the questioning of the state to radical Islamists and rather asserts that deconstruction of the state was a general phenomenon among Turkish people in the 1990s; however, due to the expansive statist discourse, skepticism about the interest of politicians, and their need to continue to live, the state is sustained in mundane practices. By benefitting from Lacan's idea of symptom and Žižek's notion of fantasy, she acknowledges that "the state is a fantasy" (Navaro-Yashin 2002, 155-187 ) which refers to psychological meanings constantly attached to the state, despite the deconstruction of the state in people's minds. Although I will adapt this concept of fantasy, while analyzing meanings attached to the state, Navaro-Yashin's approach of the state presents this process of deconstruction of the state as a zero sum game: the state is expected to be either alive or dead. However, what is widely questioned in the postmodern era is not the ontological existence of the state, but rather a specific form of state, the nation- state, and what leads people to question the state is the changing nature of the state institutions (Held 1995, 285).

Although Tugal (2009) and Navaro-Yashin (2002) present this process of people's reconstruction of the state in their daily lives as an incorporation to statist discourse, I argue that this process, which is based on affirmation of norms and functions of the state by Islamic Movements who consider the December 17-25 as corruption, still has a critical power since they regard corruption as an illegitimate act due to violation of these norms and functions. Therefore, it is important to see how people reconstruct their ideas of the state.

For such an analysis, I will utilize constructionist perspective of the state (Abrams: 1977, Mitchell: 1991, Painter: 2006) since this perspective gives me insights about what people understand from the state, how they construct it, and how they encounter it in their

daily lives. If I look in detail into this perspective, Abrams is the pioneer and he advocates that the state becomes existent and relevant through domestic and foreign political relations such as education, judiciary and administration which are called “the state system” (1977, 58). Thus, the state legitimizes itself by creating a distance between itself and society and resumes being an illusion. However, the state is “the triumph of concealment” because it is the curtain itself, which hides the political relations and presents itself as a unified object despite the fact that it creates a disunity of practices (Abrams: 1977, 77); therefore, the state is unattainable, but our experience of the state system shows us how it functions and it is constructed. Abrams’ idea on the state system presents a fertile insight to study the state in an empirical analysis and the impact of the state in our daily lives although it needs to be developed and exemplified.

The second connection on the triangle of Islamic movements, corruption, and the state exists between the state and corruption. Corruption materializes the state through people’s everyday encounter with public officers and their talks on the misconduct of the state (Gupta 1995, 2005; Gupta and Sharma 2006, Haller and Shore 2005 ). It also has a power to disentangle people’s loyalty to the state and this is reflected upon by people’s narratives of corruption in localities, since this is the place where people directly encounter embodiments of the state, local bureaucrats, on daily basis (Gupta 1995). This dissolution process also makes people talk about the state and so they create, contrast and change representations of the state (Gupta 1995). Although I will focus on “high- level state corruption” (Harsch 1993, 32) or “higher-level corruption” (Pardo 2004, 38), this form of corruption makes people, talk about their experience of corruption in their daily lives, especially in their jobs and about the state as well. It also reveals implicit and informal functioning of public services which allows for corruption to occur due to ambiguous lines between legitimate and legal forms of

exchange and payment, and illegal ones (Blundo 2006). The gap between these two forms results in de facto “generalized informal functioning of the state” which constitutes the basis of corruption (Blundo and De Sardan 2006, p. 4). On the other hand, these informal and illegitimate practices of the state are not regarded as corrupt rather as a politician’s duty to distribute public resources which lies on public-private dichotomy in which private gains of public officers are considered as corruption but these officers’ conduct of the same practice for public benefit is not considered as such (Lazar 2005, 223). As a result of this, people establish collectivity, “citizens”, acknowledge their hopes and claims on the state by referring to corruption of bureaucrats (Lazar 2005, 224).

The last connection between corruption and Islamic movements’ responses to it, firstly lies in my framing of the December 17-25 incidents around these movements, and also the employment of discourses on corruption by civil society organizations in order to mobilize support for their cause, specifically the use of anti-corruption discourse against the EU projects by environmental movements in Eastern European countries (Torsello 2012). In relation to this discursive use of corruption, I will analyze how Islamic movements use the language of corruption in order to denounce the power of the AKP government, on which political and religious grounds they base this construction of corruption, and in which context and for which reason they use a statist discourse.



### Chapter 3: Islamists

I conducted two interviews with former radical Islamists (Hasan and Rıdvan) who are currently the AKP supporters. Hasan with whom I conducted interview in Istanbul told me that he became moderate as a result of his criticism of Islamism after seeing the extermination of Islamists by a militant radical Islamist group, *Hizbullah*, in late 1990s. However, Rıdvan who lives in Kayseri told me that encountering with “the real problems” in life such as being unemployed for a while and getting married made him moderate. My third Islamist interviewee who lives in Kayseri as well was a moderate Islamist in the 1990s which refers to being a Welfare Party supporter, which was the Islamist party in the parliament, involved in a coalition government in the late 1990s, and aimed to enforce policies to establish justice and expand Islamic rules in everyday life. This diversity of political stances requires to analyze history of Turkish Islamism.

In the Ottoman Empire, Islamism is used firstly as an ideology in mid 19th century by the Young Ottomans who were influenced by the Western modernism and tried to synthesize liberal Western values with Islamic knowledge in order to establish a political ground to hold the fragmented Ottoman Empire together (Gülap 2002, 23). However, in the Kemalist Turkish state, especially after the rebellion of Kurdish and Islamist Sheikh Said in 1925, all the political and civilizational capabilities of Islam were banned and seen as a danger to the regime (Gülap 2002, 28). The second Islamism emerged in the 1980s and 1990s as a result of the decline of the nation-state and questioning of western modernization projects since this decay resulted in two waves of movements: intra-national ethnic movements and international religious movements (Gülap 2001, 435). Modern Islamism in Turkey as a rejection of Kemalist ideas and all modern ideas in general fits into the latter.

This rise of religious movements has three important concrete and global reflections: the victory of Likud in Israel in 1977, the trips of the Pope John Paul II all over the world, during 1970s and 80s, and the 1979 Iranian Revolution and the last one has a much more direct impact on Turkey. The Iranian revolution and especially Ali Shariati<sup>13</sup>, whose name was uttered by all of my Islamist interviewees, established an Islamic idea of revolution against any form of authority except the God (Tuğal 2013, 120). Radical Islamists under the influence of these ideas rejected any modern institutions of the “infidel” Kemalist regime which was exemplified by my former radical Islamist interviewees such as voting, praying in the mosques ruled by the Directorate of Religious Affairs and not working in the state-cadres. However, the moderate Islamists who demanded reforms rather than revolution were influenced by Pakistani thinker Mawdudi and Egyptian thinker Sayyid Qutb, who supports the private property and enforces an alternative form of rules alongside the current ones (Tuğal 2013, 120).

In 1990s the Welfare Party in Turkey brought these two waves together under the same roof and became victorious in the 1995 elections, but the military took over the government under the rule of the Welfare Party on February 28, 1997 and closed the party due to its acts against the principles of secularism. Formation of a new Islamist party which gave compromises after the coup resulted in estrangement of the supporters of the Welfare Party from the party (Gülalp 2001, 434). These two developments led to the establishment of the AKP, which encourages market economy and “conservative democracy”, in 2002 (Tuğal 2013, 124). This retreatment from more radical ideas to more liberal and conservative ones is mostly encountered in two ways among former radical Islamists: indication of impossible

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<sup>13</sup> Ali Shariati (1933-1977) was an Iranian sociologist who established revolutionary claims against unjust rules by reinterpreting Islam on a socialist basis and whose ideas had a huge impact on the Iranian revolution and many revolutionary Islamic movements in Egypt, Pakistan and Turkey. <http://www.shariati.com/bio.html>

goals of Islamism and necessity to accustom into the real world or the goals of Islamism are still relevant but certain steps are needed to be passed before reaching the goals and most of the Islamists ply between two positions (Tuğal 2013, 121). My former radical Islamist interviewees believe in the latter, since they see Erdogan as having Islamist ideals such as the unity of the Islamic world and independence from the western capitalism, but for them, he had to hide these ideals due to the power of the West and its allies in Turkey.

I conducted three interviews with former radical Islamists, two of them in Kayseri and one of them in Istanbul. All my interviewees were in their early 50s and they saw the December 17-25 incidents as a coup attempt of a domestically of the West, *Cemaat*, against more or less Islamist and nationalist Turkey. In my interviews with them, I tried to analyze what kind of political and religious arguments influence their perception of the December 17-25 incidents as a coup attempt and how the statist discourse of the AKP affects their claims. Based on analysis of the interviews stated below, I argue that their understanding of nationalist Islam presents a dualist worldview in which *Cemaat* is regarded as an ally of the West and thus they expand the scope of the Western allies in Turkey, which mainly referred to Kemalists before the December 17 -25 incidents, by placing the Gulen Movement among these allies. Also, their Islamism leads them to see *Cemaat* as a “soft Islam” and to support Erdogan due to their belief in his hidden Islamism. Also, their awareness of the impossibility of an Islamic state prevents them to judge corruption as a phenomenon by rules in Islam. Thanks to the merge of Islam and nationalism the statist discourse of the AKP is welcome by Islamists and therefore they consider the December 17-25 as a matter of independence and sovereignty.

### 3.1: Turkish Nationalist Islam: “*Cemaat* is merely a project of the US”

I conducted two and half hour interview with Hasan in an endowment in Fatih. This endowment declares its mission as expanding the faith and working for the benefit of the society. The significance of this institution lies in their support for the AKP by participating in the Platform of the National Will (*Milli İrade Platformu*) in which many civil society organizations manifest their support for the AKP. Hasan mentioned about his radicalism in the 1980s with great excitement and unpleasantness since on the one hand, those were the times he read an extensive amount of books and magazines of diverse views with his friends and held discussions and consultations (*istişare*) as a group and, on the other hand, they had conflicts with their relatives and families.

We were too much influenced by Sayyid Qutb. We called Turkey a land of war (*dar'ül harp*) and the regime as an infidel. When you call the country, like this, you oppose your family and friends, anyone having any sort of relationship with the regime. We were opposing traditional Islam and the state. Once I did not allow my father to go on a pilgrimage. I told him that he would put money on the bank account of the Directorate of Religious Affairs and they would put out this money at interest. I am still regretful about this.

As opposed to Tugal's claim of the anti statist position of radical Islamists (2009, 62-66), his relationship with the state was not anarchic since he opposed the state due to its inappropriateness to Islam and there is also the land of Islam (*dar'ül Islam*), the Islamic state, which was a goal to be reached by radical Islamist in 1980s.

As opposed to his aim of establishing an Islamic state and society in the 1980s, his framing of current politics is based on a nationalist binary worldview in which the West always tries to prevent the independence of Turkey and the unity of Islamic countries since the 19th century. This kind of worldview has been utilized by Islamists against Kemalists in order to show their illegitimacy (Navaro-Yashin 2002, 112-113). After the December 17 25

incidents, this vision directed against *Cemaat* in order to manifest their impurity and betraying the people.

Turkey has a power to influence the Islamic world. They (the West) curbed the power of Anatolia to prevent this influence. This superior mind (*üst akıl*) tamed Turkey whenever it tried to become independent. When Erdogan tried to establish this new independent Turkey, they wanted to give a lecture to him. They did this in the Gezi and December 17. These were the processes determining whether Turkey will be dependent or not on the US. They set all the plans perfectly. This operation was against Erdogan. December 17-25 was a coup attempt against the will of the nation and it was organized by America. It was all about the independence of Turkey.

As opposed to Tugal's claim that under the leadership of the AKP Islamist shifted their focus from Islamic unity merged with Turkish nationalism to Turkish nationalism combined with Islamized western values (2009), here Hasan manifests an explicit anti western position based on western imperialism and hegemony and his vision of the Turkish nationalism which becomes salient with his reference to Anatolia. Also, the importance of Turkey for other Muslim countries is interlinked with Islamic unity. However, his Islamism is stripped from political and social meanings since he does not mention Islam as a social and political project as he did when he talked about his radical times. His nationalist Islamism leads him to make sense of all contemporary politics through a binary worldview in which an enemy West tries to circumscribe an independent and powerful Turkey and the unity of the Muslim world. He sees all coups happened in Turkey, the Gezi Movement and December 17-25 incidents within the same trajectory and as organized by the West through its partners in the country in order to curtail the power of Turkey. Thus, in this framework the December 17-25 is not considered as a domestic issue rather it becomes a foreign affair and a matter of security and sovereignty of Turkey. Also, this framework allows him to disregard all subscribed tape records of corruption since for him, they were part of a perfect plan. The

West and “superior mind” (*üst akıl*) are used interchangeably and here this superior mind refers to the power rules Turkey from above thoroughly.

His vision of *Cemaat* is also influenced by his Islamism.

After 1980 the US aimed to establish Green Islam (*Yeşil İslam*) or soft Islam, which will not threaten the interests of the US or have universal claims. The Gulen Movement is part of this project. They are calling themselves Muslims, but they are not. But it is like a triangle. The upper strata are the main problem and they are in the state cadres. They are responsible for this crime (coup) and they are like militants. Others (lower strata) are innocent. They were sympathized with *Cemaat* and donated money since they see them (upper strata) as Muslims.

What makes *Cemaat* to be considered as “soft Islam” for an Islamist, who is clearly anti-Western and sees the Islamic unity as an ideal goal, is it depoliticized and pro-Western character of *Cemaat*, and their detachment from an idea of Islamic unity. Thanks to these political reasons, *Cemaat* is stripped of its Muslim identity. However, through this metaphor of the triangle, he excuses the ordinary people in *Cemaat* and includes them into *the Ummah* since he sees them as innocent and deceived.

When I insisted to ask questions on corruption, he explained a number of reasons not to consider the government as corrupt and also told a counter narrative of *Cemaat*’s corruption, in his everyday lives, against all these claims of the government’s corruption.

Corruption exists in Turkey. Many people in the AKP are not idealists but, *Cemaat* is the real most corrupt. When I was working as an editor in their publication house, they were gathering students preparing for the university entrance exam and giving them the answers which they stole. They also selected their members to the state cadres. The money coming from Iran is a result of a global problem. You know there is an embargo against Iran. Intermediaries earn money from this relationship. Not only Turkey does this, but also Germany and the US do the same thing. This was used as a counter attack against the AKP.

Corruption has different meanings in different localities and sometimes the same incident is considered as corruption, but sometimes cultural meanings are attributed to it (Gupta 2005). Here corruption refers to stealing state documents and nepotism done by a

community. However, the money gained through the laundering of Iran's money in Turkey is regarded as a legitimate act rather than corruption since it is seen as a side effect of a global injustice against Iran. Also, this act becomes normalized since it is done by many countries, even those accusing Turkey with corruption. These two processes results in "generalized informal functioning of the state" which prevents illegal exchanges and extortions as corruption (Blundo and De Sardan 2006, p. 4).

All in all, for him *Cemaat* is the only guilty of the corruption although this nepotism, the distribution of offices to *Cemaat* members, is realized thanks to the AKP's support for *Cemaat*; however, he disregards the AKP's role in that. His view of the AKP's relationship with *Cemaat* becomes more salient when he talked about Erdogan's first speech after the December 17 scandal in which Erdogan asked *Cemaat* sarcastically "Is there anything that you asked and we did not give you?".

He gave everything they wanted: a huge land for their university nearby airport and all projects in ministries. In these words, he meant that: we made all these good deeds to you, we appointed all your members to the state cadres, gave all economic benefits to you but you tried to overthrow us and see how much you betrayed us.

Interestingly, he did not blame the AKP for its support for *Cemaat* and its disregard of other communities and civil organizations, including the endowment he belongs to while the AKP appointed state officers. In addition to that, he saw Erdogan as a follower of Necmettin Erbakan, who is the founder and leader of the the National Outlook, *Milli Görüş*, and the Welfare Party, and aimed to established social justice or as it is called "just order" (*adil duzen*) and to expand Islam in all spheres of life (Tugal 2009, 50). Also, he considered them as embodiments of his and his friends' works in 1980s.

When I was a university student, I had ten different reading groups in the school and also gave religious speeches to tradesmen. I wrote a book when I was 21 years-old. While we were doing this, there was no the AKP or the Welfare. As a result of these efforts, they

emerged. They are the results of the same process. People like us knew that *Cemaat* was a threat to the society.

“The cult of Erdogan” (Tugal: 2009, p. ) as an Islamist character plays a significant role in his perception of the new Turkey as an Islamist, independent and nationalist one which constitutes the basis of his vision of the December 17-25 incidents as corruption.

Hasan’s nationalist Islamism leads him to consider firstly the world as polarized between the evil West and good national Muslims strive for their fraternity despite all challenges of the West and within this framework he considers *Cemaat* as a Western ally rather than a religious community and Erdogan as an Islamist fighting for an independent Turkey. As a result of all these implications of nationalist Islamism, he asserts the December 17-25 incidents as a coup attempt. This nationalist Islam also has other reflections which lead them to portray them as a coup attempt and a matter of national sovereignty as well.

### 3.2: “Nation” as an elusive reference point: “It was a national issue (*milli mesele*)”:

I went to Ismail’s furniture workshop in the central industry in Kayseri. His room was filled with books. In the first instance, I was aware of that he was a different industrialist. When I told him that I am a sociology master student, he talked about the importance of Bauman and Sennett's works for sociological analysis and criticized new poststructuralist wave in Turkey. When he defined his political position, he compared Islamists and *Cemaat*.

We are coming from Islamist front. We can call it the National Vision (*Milli Görüş*). We had two aims: the Islamic unity and the independence of this establishment from the imperialist west. *Cemaat* has never had such aims and even we saw in time that they tried to crush our attempts of independence in alliance with global powers.

Despite the fact he mentioned this Islamism as his experience in the past, his framing of contemporary politics, including the December 17-25, the AKP and *Cemaat*, is grounded



on this binary anti-imperialist worldview as Hasan has the same view. The AKP has an ambivalent position in this framework because on the one hand, he accused them as “not being national enough” in their social and cultural policies and on the other hand he considers the AKP as being national and Islamist in its inner self.

While the AKP was established, we warned them that they cannot be independent while obeying the global powers but we were marginalized. However, the AKP kept this nationalist and independent spirit more or less. This tendency exists in Turkey and this national power spew out this project of global powers (referring to *Cemaat*). The AKP has created an interval in which we experience an independent Turkey. When the AKP clashed with the global powers on December 17, we put its faults in social and cultural policies in brackets and of course we supported the AKP since it was a national issue (*milli mesele*). We saw it exactly like an issue of patriotism. Since the AKP emerged from Anatolia, formally it kept its promise to bend to the West but it kept its tendency to be independent. Actually, the National Outlook (*Milli Görüş*) could not be eliminated since it existed in the AKP.

Although he manifested his opposition against the pro-western AKP, he considers the AKP as a follower of Erbakan and part of the Turkish Islamism, the National Outlook. However, instead of using “Islamist”, he frequently referred to the AKP as being national. “National” has always had an elusive character among Islamists and the collective identity it refers to changes according to historical context (Tuğal 2009, 94-101). Ismail’s frame of national is firstly a form of social and cultural character and is supposed to be expanded by the ruling power. Secondly, it is equal to being independent and sovereign and this conceptualization of national allows him to consider the December 17-25, in which for him the independence of Turkey was threatened by domestic allies of the western enemies, as a national issue.

As Appadurai (2006) argues the gap between firm ideological meanings attached to the enemy and loose on its identity of *Cemaat* creates anger and a strong motive to wipe them out to secure the collectivity. Ismail’s account on the ideology and identity of *Cemaat* presents such an anger.

*Cemaat* is like a secret militant organization. It is hierarchically organized and had their distinctive aims and goals. The origins of them lie in Muun tariqat in India because, like them *Cemaat* is also located in the US and under the service of the global powers. They are also supported by crypto-Jews in Turkey and actually they sideline with the white Turks (*beyaz Türkler*) who owns the capital and ruled by the West. They deceived the people, the AKP and the state. They were organized within the state. They used the judiciary as a tool to discharge people from the state cadres and put their members. They distorted the aim of the judiciary. They acted against the principles of the state. They called the head of the intelligence service to give testimony. They also aimed to capture the state. If they were successful they would be the new elites. In 12 years the AKP tried to own the state. It tried to become the state which was established one thousand years ago by us.

His statements about the ideology of *Cemaat* are clearer: aiming to overthrow the state and apparatus of the West. However, he has diverse claims about what *Cemaat* is: Jewish project or Western capitalist etc. He also stated distinctly that “no one knows what *Cemaat* is about (*ne idüğü belirsiz bir topluluk*). The gap between assured ideology and uncertain social roots of *Cemaat* results in a feeling to destroy this “other” in order to maintain “us” as nationalist Muslim Turks.

He also pointed out the abuse of functions and tradition of the state by *Cemaat* while he was explaining how *Cemaat* betrayed the state. These claims show how the state is reconstructed in his mind (Abrams 1977 ). The state is portrayed a smoothly functioning organization in which all institutions have to act according to their own purposes of organization and these institutions constitute the state as a whole. Also, acting against “the tradition of the state” which is not defined, but surpasses legal framework of the state becomes a reason for treason. The state also becomes something can be possessed and managed in his statement of “we established the state”. This statist discourse which is directly established by Erdogan in his public speeches along with his nationalist Islamism lead him to consider *Cemaat* as traitors and the December 17-25 as a coup attempt against a nationalist and independent state in the hands of Islamists. Ismail’s criticism on the Islamist nationalism

of the AKP becomes more salient in the next interview and such criticism give fertile ground to analyze the division between ideals and realities of Islamists which do not allow them to judge corruption by Islamic rules.

### **3.3: Gap between ideals of Islam and the reality of the AKP they are living in**

Rıdvan also had this binary nationalist worldview like two Islamist interviewees which enabled him to see the December 17 -25 incident as a coup attempt; however, his ideas on *Cemaat* was influenced by Erbakan and he also criticized the AKP for its support for *Cemaat*.

In 1990s Erbakan told that Fethullah Gulen looks like a cardinal due to his style of beard and this means that Gulen had good relations with the Vatican. Also in Mavi Marmara Gulen supported Israel and revealed his Masonic connections. Erdogan is not innocent either. He is responsible for the empowerment of *Cemaat*. You know he said that ‘Is there anything that you asked and we did not give it to you’. Actually, this is the way how things work in Turkey. When Erdogan preferred to give the earnings to people other than *Cemaat*, the fight began. *Cemaat* was looking down all communities anyway. Erdogan was successful in manipulating the people against *Cemaat* by using its relationship with Israel and the US as a tool.

He considers *Cemaat* as affiliated with the Vatican and Israel and later on he defined it as being capitalist since they only help smart students instead of poor ones. He states both strong ideology of *Cemaat* and confusion about the identity of *Cemaat*. He also sees *Cemaat* as an interest group taking benefits from the corruption and clashed with the government. Generalized notion of corruption, “this is the way how things work in Turkey”, prevents him

to see corruption as a malpractice; however, he explained the corruption of *Cemaat* in detail thanks to his occupation, bank officer, which allows him to get information about bids.

In Kayseri *Cemaat* members in the municipality divided the applications of businessmen into two: those donating money to *Melikşah*(the university of *Cemaat*) and those not. They dealt with the first group, but never opened the files on the second. Erdogan became the voice of the second group.

Here corruption refers to favoritism in public offices. *Cemaat* members in the municipality have ambiguous characteristics since they are the members of the Gulen Community and state officers at the same time. However, Rıdvan underscores their community identity, disregards their official position which actually allowed them to involve in corruption and finds *Cemaat* responsible from the nepotism. While he was talking about *Cemaat*, corruption and favoritism were mere acts of injustice; however, they have become the way to establish justice by collecting money from greedy businessmen and sending it to endowments and this positive attribution to corruption is also related to Islamism of Erdogan.

After December 17, we gathered with my friends in the main square in Kayseri. We put the mask of Erdogan on our faces and we chanted as: ‘We are not the AKP supporters, but we support Erdogan for sure’ (*AKP’li değiliz ama ölümüne Tayipçiyiz*). After his clashes with *Cemaat* in the December 17, Erdogan pursues his real aims. He is becoming like Erbakan. Erdogan does not allow the money to pour into the pockets of greedy businessmen. He forces them to invest part of the money coming from bids to social projects.

He differentiates the AKP and Erdogan and he considers that the former might be corrupt but the latter is definitely innocent, follows Islamism, strives for the independence of Turkey and empowers the poor by taking money from the businessmen. Thus, the government’s transfer of money from bids to endowments which constituted a part of the proofs of corruption in the December 17-25 investigations turn into some sort of informal social welfare policy rather than being regarded as extortion. As Lazar (2005) argues public and private dichotomy and people’s demands from the government play significant roles in

not considering this act as corruption since the ruler is expected to distribute benefits to public and this gain is received by the public rather than a person.

His idea of Islamism plays a role in both his support for Erdogan and donation to the poor by the acts, even illegal ones like corruption, of this Islamist leader. Apparently, he has ambiguous views on corruption and they are revealed when I asked whether transferring money from bids to endowments is corruption in Islam.

According to the Islamic understanding of the state this is both theft and corruption. Once Umar (the second caliph) sees a goat near by the officer entitled with collecting taxes. He takes it from him and tells him that ‘They gave it you because of your position in the state. If you were not in this position, they would not give it to you.’ The real issue here is giving someone something that he does not deserve.

Here corruption refers to stealing public money and pulling strings and it was the only occasion in which he referred to Islamic rules. When I asked him, whether Erdogan is corrupt since what he does is prohibited in Islam. He replied as “But this how things occur in the Islamic state. Erdogan is a pure realist.” This manifests the widening gap between the ideals and norms of Islam and the reality he lives under the rule of the AKP. This acknowledged gap prevents him to judge these corrupt acts through Islamic values and leads him not to think them as corruption due to non-Islamic nature of the state.

His thoughts on the government’s corruption led him to talk about the forms of corruption he encountered as being a manager in a bank such as the offers that he got to give unfair credits. Although those were fitting into his definition of corruption: “giving someone something that he does not deserve”, he did not mention them as illegitimate acts merely. Rather he explained how expansive and ambiguous corruption is.

#### Chapter 4: Anti-Capitalist Muslims:

The integration of Muslims into market relations under the rule of the AKP (Tuğal 2009) is opposed by a group of Muslims who assert the importance of egalitarian property relations in Islam and called this process as “Islamicized Capitalism” (*abdestli kapitalizm*). The Movement is led and founded by Ihsan Eliaçık and it was institutionalized as Anti-Capitalist Muslims in 2010. I conducted three interviews with them. As opposed to it is claimed or they are accused of, all my Anti-Capitalist interviewees do not define or see themselves as Marxist Muslims or do not see Marxism as incompatible with Islam because for them Islam orders Muslims to establish political and economic equality among people. Their claims and opposition to the government became more explicit during my interview with Ihsan Eliaçık, the founder and leader of Anti-Capitalist Muslims. He acknowledged his three critics to the AKP: its maintenance of the capitalist order, the definition of the Turkish citizenship, and the secular character of the Turkish state. He bases his understanding of Islam on a political and economic ground, proposes a socialist state and collective ownership of property. The ideas of the Anti-Capitalist Muslims lie in Ali Shariati’s texts which were utilized to struggle against the Kemalist state in the 1980s and 1990s and are now mobilizing to establish equal property relations by the Anti-Capitalist Muslims.

Anti Capitalist Muslims participated in this research acknowledged the December 17-25 as a manifestation of the government’s corruption. Based on their egalitarian understanding of Islam, they see the AKP government as illegitimate not just because of corruption, but because its sustainment of capitalist unequal relations. Although they opposed the notion of the state either through a vulgar Marxist reading, which sees the state as a tool of the dominant class, or through establishment of autonomous cities by the Prophet

Muhammad, they employed a statist discourse in order to show illegitimacy of the government's corruption by pointing out passing over of mayors and the dominant position of the former prime minister which is against the notion of hierarchy of bureaucrats in the nation state.

#### **4.1: The government's corruption as an inconsolable truth**

When I went into *Insa* publication house, where the books of the movement are published, in Fatih, Istanbul, I met with İhsan Eliaçık who is the founder of the movement and Selim who works as an officer in *Insa*. Although Selim sees İhsan as the master (*Hoca*) and “the main source of true information”, their understanding of Islam is different. Selim was involved in a Marxist-Leninist organization and he was imprisoned after the September 12, 1980 military coup. He explained his encounter with religion as problematic since as being a Marxist, he also misunderstood Marx's thoughts on religion as mere opium, although for him Marx pointed out how religion is used by institutions.

He considers the December 17-25 incidents as a manifestation of the government's corruption and as a truth that should not be questioned by cynic views. His framing of the corruption scandal is influenced by his understanding of universal and Marxist Islam, and as well as his vision of the state.

Firstly, he considers Islam as in harmony with other religions and underscores common principles of all religions which present him a ground to see corruption as an illegitimate act.

All religions order same three main things: do not steal or lie or betray. What we see in the AKP is against all these. There is this verse in the Quran which has been translated wrongly and has not been uttered in the Friday sermons since the AKP came to the power: The only religion in the eyes of Allah is Islam. Many people here think that Islam refers to

the religion they belong to but actually this means that the only proper act for people is living in peace because Islam means peace and the God only wants us to live in peace.

He criticized corruption based on this prohibition of stealing and lying and so corruption becomes theft and deceiving people through these universal religious principles.

Secondly, his vision of corruption is also influenced by a combination of Marxism and Islam, which is based on the God's order Muslims to establish equal property relations.

We need to reestablish religion in the life itself. Religion applies to the market and every sphere of life. Religion and Marxism deals with the same issue: human relations. Main problems in the human relations for Marxists are hunger and exploitation. The Quran commands us not to have more than we need. Prophets were killed because they told people to give the things more than they need and they challenged the authorities of the rulers and the state. They were anarchist in that sense. The main reason behind all these conflicts, including the one between the AKP and *Cemaat* is appropriating property. Tayyip said "Is there anything you asked and we did not give to you?". He means that everything belongs to him and there will be no religious community anymore.

His understanding of Islam imposes people to share more than they need. This principle becomes essentialist since he positions it as the reason behind all contests. He also points out another form of illegitimate action, unfair share of the property, other than corruption. Although Pardo (2004, 35-37) points out the reason behind people's expressions of malpractices going beyond limits of corruption as being either not included in the law or not legalized, Selim's desire for fair property relations emerged from a Muslim Marxist ideal and this aims to establish a new social order and exceeds the discourse of rights and law.

In addition to this fusion of politics and religion, his account of the corruption scandal is interrelated with his views on the functions of the state and clearly as Gupta (1995) argues, corruption makes him express his reconstruction of the state since the state is seen as part of the problem and the solution.

The functioning of the state depends on the functioning of the chamber of accounts, council of state and the Supreme Court in the capital. These are the control mechanisms, but the AKP does not allow them to control the state budget. In such an uncontrolled situation,



corruption is inevitable. As has been citizens, we cannot know what happened on December 17 and 25. We can only know this if the judiciary acknowledges them. They cannot hide these files by saying nothing happened. Even fifty years later, those involved in corruption are going to be judged.

He considers corruption as a result of non-functional state institutions, incontestability of the state-budget by the judiciary in specific, and thus he reconstructs a smoothly functioning idea of the state. However, this reconstruction enables him to criticize corruption of the government and functions of the state institutions constitute a ground for him to criticize the acts of the government.

As Lazar (2005, 239) argues corruption of state officers allows for the people to imagine themselves as collectivity and oppose politician and elites. He also establishes this notion of “we as citizens” and with this imagined collectivity regard judiciary as responsible for investigating the corruption and manifesting it to “citizens”. He is also well aware of the fact that this expected potentiality of the judiciary does not manifest itself due to covering up of the scandal by the government and thus he relies on inconsolable nature of the truth which is corruption in this case.

Selim acknowledges the corruption as an illegitimate act through, on the one hand, his understanding of universalistic religion which prohibits theft and lie, and on the other hand Marxist Islam which imposes equal property relations. Under the influence of a statist discourse he also sees the reason behind the corruption as non-functionality of the state institutions which shows that he unwittingly considers the state as a set of fluently functioning organization and the motive behind the maintenance of the order.

#### 4.2: “Erdogan is using his influence, but *Cemaat* merely donating money”

Anti-Capitalist understanding of Islam becomes more explicit and content of property becomes more expansive in the account of Ihsan Eliacık who is the founder and leader of the Anti-Capitalist Muslim Movement. His criticism of the government’s corruption is based on both his understanding of Islam, which orders equality of all on social and economic bases and toppling of the hierarchy of bureaucrats in the alliance of businessmen and former Prime Minister Erdogan.

The main issue in Islam is not faith as opposed to how Islamists understand it so. Rather, it is human relations, especially share of property. Property which is composed of knowledge, power and wealth belongs to Allah. Polytheism means giving something more importance than you give that to Allah. For instance; being too much rich or obeying someone like you obey the God because of his authority (referring to Erdogan) are all polytheism.

He redefines faith and polytheism in Islam in relation to obedience only to the God and rejection of all other authorities. Based on such revolutionary understanding of Islam, he expands the meaning of property in order to include both material and symbolic values, both of which are significant to establish hierarchy among people. This enlarged meaning of a property influences his critics of the December 17-25 incidents.

*Cemaat* members are merely donating money, but Erdogan is using his influence and enriches his relatives and people who have a close relationship with him. String-pulling is a crime and enriching people with the influence is corruption. Erdogan is using discretionary fund. No one knows where this money goes and inquiring this is treason. He also established a discretionary fund for the presidency. Discretionary fund is not proper for states. It only exists in fascist states.

Corruption has two different meanings here. Firstly, it is regarded as using the influence of a state-position. Secondly, it is also defined as publicly unaccountable use of money by government authorities, although this is recognized as a legitimate right of authorities by laws. This is also seen as incompatible with the principles of democracy. Thus,

the opposition against corruption becomes reestablishment of the public authority over the rulers (Miller 2004, 53).

In addition to this combination of political and religious references, the corruption of the government is also criticized by its acts against the hierarchy of the bureaucracy.

The Prime Minister (Erdogan) bypasses mayor and gives right to businessman to construct more floor than it is allowed. Both politicians and businessmen were calling him *reyis* (chief) in the tape records subscribed during the December 17-25.

He argues that the corruption of the government is centered on Erdogan and he takes bribes from businessmen by surpassing both laws and hierarchy of administration which is expected to be binding for the prime minister as well. Also, he underscores the authoritarian nature of this relationship set by Erdogan. Therefore, he employs on the one hand the principle of the nation-state bureaucracy and democracy and on the other hand the Islamic principles based equality to criticize the corrupt practices of the government.

#### **4.3: The AKP and *Cemaat* as corrupt in the same degree**

Serhat works in *Caucasian Endowment* in Fatih. He was cynical about *Cemaat*'s interest in manifesting the government's corruption since for him the corruption of the AKP was not a mystery; therefore, he questioned the timing of the December 17-25.

*Cemaat* is not a victim. *Cemaat* and the AKP were serving for the same thing. The former was cultural and educational aspect and the latter was political aspect. I have friends and relatives from both sides. While my elder brother was a teacher in *dershane*, he had to take a certificate which became a rule in that time. He called some people who have influence and asked them to solve this problem. He also got some phones asking for graduate students to attain them to the police.

Although here the corruption refers to nepotism of *Cemaat* in appointing its members to the state offices, for him, *Cemaat* and the AKP are part of the same structure which is nationalist capitalism and his political and religious ideas constitutes such a critical standpoint against both of them. He used a Marxist language of substructure and

superstructure in order to explain Muslims relations with capitalism. Also, he defined his anti-capitalist position in relation to culture and he told how he and his wife buy their dark clothes from small shops in Fatih in order to maintain their opposition against consumerist capitalism despite the fact that there is no total escape from capitalist relations.

He considers capitalist culture as superstructure and faith as substructure which determines the superstructure. Therefore, he finds the perception of faith among Muslims problematic and redefines faith in relation to equal property relations in order to demolish this capitalist culture.

The faith in Islam is composed of three parts: believing that all property belongs to Allah, oneness of Allah and the prophet Muhammad is the messenger of Allah. Even though Islamists read Ali Shariati, they always have disregarded this first component. Also, Fethullah Gulen once declared that believing oneness of Allah is enough for the faith. Now *Cemaat* reminds Ebuzer (a saint who stood against the luxurious life in the era of caliphates and lived in the desert) to the AKP. They are both Muslim bourgeoisie. If *Ebuzer* were alive today, he would fight against both of them. We aim an order in which there will be collective ownership of property and all property belongs to Allah.

He explains how such an egalitarian understanding of Islam is disregarded by both *Cemaat* and the AKP and how they are same due to their dominant class position. This understanding of collective ownership of property allows him to go beyond the limits of corruption as a tool used to denounce the power of the government and *Cemaat*. Firstly, through these equal property relations, he opposes private property.

In his book, *The History of Religion*, Ali Shariati talks about the fight between Cain and Abel. Cain represents the private property and Cabil represents a collective property. The history of humanity is all about the fight between private and collective property.

Secondly, this collective ownership of property enables him to challenge the rich both in the AKP and *Cemaat*.

The AKP enriches by public concessions and the board of trustee in *Cemaat* enriches by exploiting lower strata. When my brothers were teachers in *Cemaat*'s schools, they did not take any salary.

In addition to these equal property relations, this egalitarian understanding of Islam proposes an anti-state position and autonomous rule.

In the Contract of Medina, everyone was participating in the rule and the Prophet Muhammad did not establish states, but rather self-sovereign cities like communes.

Although the statist discourse is used by another two Anti-Capitalist Muslims in order to manifest illegitimacy of the government's corruption, Serhat did not see the December 17-25 incidents as manifestation of the government's corruption and thus he maintained his anti-state position in his narrative.

## Chapter 5: The Gulen Movement

I conducted interview with four people having diverse relationship with the Gulen Movement: a female member of the movement, a lawyer of some of the policemen who held the December 17-25 investigations and were prosecuted, an employee in the Gulen Movement's TV channel, *stv*, and a bank officer who is a former nationalist and does not define himself as a member of the movement but supports them in their fight against the AKP after the December 17-25 incidents. Before analyzing their account of the incidents, I will lay out the history of the movement for a better analysis of these accounts.

The Gulen Movement is originated from the movement of Said Nursi who lived in the late 19th and the early 20th centuries. Nursi divides his life in different interims which presents as a fertile ground for the decadence of politics for the Gulen Movement members: firstly the old Said who involved in politics like Islamists of the 19th century and was concerned with saving the Empire and secondly the New Said who saw politics as a vicious act, abstained from politics and aimed to rescue people's faith through delivering his books (Yavuz 1999, 586). As opposed to Said Nursi, Fethullah Gulen, who is the founder of the Gulen Movement and known as *Hocaefendi* (the master) reconstructs an idea of Turkish nationalism and Islam by drawing upon the necessity of the state and the tradition of the Ottoman history which exemplifies the power of the Muslim rule, and also supports the market economy (Yavuz 1999, 593). Thus, the Movement took advantages of economic liberalization in 1980s by establishing schools, *dershane* (private educational institutions), dormitories, and media and financial institutions and as opposed to Islamists abstained from challenging the Kemalist state. This position of the Gulen Movement became salient in

February 28, 1997 since Gulen supported the military takeover of the Islamist Welfare Party (Yavuz 1999, 602).

This moderate position of the Gulen Movement and its well-educated members made them more eligible than other groups (Tuğal 2013, 111) and the alliance of the conservative Democratic AKP and Islamicized Turkish nationalist Gulen Movement brought back Turkish conservatism, which implements the rules of free market and to employ Islam in order to protect and sustain national values (Tuğal:2013).

In the interviews, they criticized corrupt acts of the AKP through religious and moral references. They saw corruption as prohibited by Islam and thus inconvenient for a government has become prominent with its Muslim identity. Corruption is also considered as immoral and manifestation of the immorality of the AKP and the society. These moral and religious claims are related to Said Nursi's stress on morality of individual and society. Unlike Anti-Capitalist Muslims, interviewees had a relationship with *Cemaat* did not possess explicit political claims or projects due to their vision of politics as decadent. However, they employed a statist discourse while proving the illegitimacy of the government's corruption by showing the dissolution of hierarchy of bureaucracy and reflection of it as stealing from the state. Although nationalist discourse was merely employed while referring to the sincerity of police and prosecutors who held the December 17-25 investigation, it became more explicit in the interview of the former nationalist current *Cemaat* supporter who saw *Cemaat* as creating a great threat to the West and thus targeted by the West.

### **5.1: Decadence of politics and pureness of religious movement**

Hulya is a Turkish teacher wearing a headscarf. She is 23 years-old. She was educated in Gulen schools in primary and high school. Her close relationship with the Community is

visible in her reference to it as *Hizmet* (Service) since members of the Community call the movement like this. Her father is also a member of *Cemaat* and was involved in the AKP on the local level till December 17-25 incidents.

I trusted them (the AKP). Since they became prominent thanks to their Muslim identity, you cannot presume that they are involved in corruption. The incident was a shocking event, but it was more shocking for my father. Unlike me, he did not accept that they (the AKP) were involved in a corruption scandal in the first place. He is a well-intentioned person, but later on he saw the truth.

She defined her relationship with the AKP as a trust relation to Muslims, which came to an end with the corruption scandal since corruption is seen as a misconduct in Islam and a reason for loss of trust to the government.

Although she sees corruption as an illegitimate act due to its wrongness in Islam, she distinctly divides politics and religion and attributes the AKP and especially Erdogan to the realm of politics and this worldliness and *Hizmet* and Fethullah Gulen to the realm of religion and otherworldliness. This separation is constituted by an understanding of decadent politics, which is prominent in Said Nursi's abstain from politics. This delegitimization of politics at all became salient when I asked her about the constant argument between Erdogan and Gulen on the media.

I cannot understand this. They are not equal people. They are not in the same political or religious position. One of them is a politician and concerned with this world, but the other one is totally different. He does not care about this world and he is only concerned with the other world. I cannot find right to compare them.

The loss of legitimacy of the government is not only because of corruption, but also subliminally politics is considered as a void act.



### 5.2: “The December 17 -25 hit those stealing from the state like a ton of brick”

This criticism of the government’s corruption through its inappropriateness in Islam and the inferiority of politics is also mentioned by Osman Ertürk who is the lawyer of the police officers who held the December 17-25 investigations and were accused of treason and espionage. He also criticizes corrupt practices of the government through a moral reference, greediness of Erdogan.

The December 17-25 investigations were undertaken by the sons of Anatolia and they showed that the king is naked. While praying five times a day, our Sultan (Erdogan) was stealing our money. People on this side (*Cemaat* members) had nothing to lose but he owns a kingdom and he does not want to give up from this.

Turkish nationalism, which is a political stand of the Gulen Movement, becomes salient in his reference to those policemen and prosecutors held the corruption investigations. This locality, “Anatolia”, shows the independence of the investigation from any foreign power as opposed to the claims of the AKP. This nationalist vision becomes clearer while he was talking about the corrupt practices of the government.

The December 17-25 investigations hit those stealing from the state and thus violating the rights of the people like a ton of bricks. They showed how extensive corruption is.

### 5.3: “Corruption has ripple effect on all segments of society because there is moral degeneration”

Although this expansiveness of corruption is not attributed any other meaning by Osman, it becomes a manifestation of the immorality of the society for Ahmet who is a supporter but not a member of *Cemaat*. Ahmet works in an Islamic bank that does not belong to *Cemaat* and, like Rıdvan who is an Islamist and works in an Islamic bank, he also talked about how corruption is involved in bids.

They are giving unfair credits to Turkish Telecom (state-owned telecommunication company). Corruption has a ripple effect in all segments of the society because there is a

social and moral degeneration. While I was unemployed between 2005 and 2007, the AKP appointed thousands of people as state officers in order to gain more votes in the elections. No one questioned unfairness of this.

Among all the interviewees having relationship with *Cemaat*, he is the only one who told impact of the government's corruption in his life while he was desperately unemployed. He considers the reason for corruption as moral decay since otherwise the people would have either stood against the corruption of the government or rejected the bribery given to them. Thus, he indirectly judges, corruption through moral claims.

While he was talking about the AKP supporters' defense of the corruption scandal, wrongdoings in Islam other than corruption became salient.

People see money taken from bids and given to endowments by the AKP as legitimate since the caliph is not spending the state budget for his own interest by referring to the Islamic law. What about the palace that he has just built in Ankara? In my opinion, a Muslim should be humble and abstain from conspicuous consumption.

#### **5.4: “Back then we were defending that Muslims were not terrorists and now we have to declare that we are not thieves as well.”**

I met with Metin in the TV Channel of *Cemaat*, *stv*. Like other interviewees having a relationship with the Gulen Movement, he also considered the government's corruption as an illegitimate act due to its impropriety in Islam and its immorality. He also expressed his sadness about the impact of corruption of Muslim people, the politicians in the AKP, over all Muslims, which show the implication of illegitimacy of corruption in Islam and Muslim identity of the AKP.

Back then we were defending that Muslims were not terrorists and now we have to declare that we are not thieves as well because those people (the AKP politicians) became the governing party thanks to their Muslim identity.

Metin also employed statist discourse which helped him to judge corruption while he was talking about the tape records of the government's corruption subscribed on media.

In the records, the Ministry of Domestic Affairs is telling a Persian businessman that he will do whatever the businessman wants and even he can be his slave. Just imagine that my minister says these just a businessman. This is really humiliating.

He considers the state officers as being superior to the businessmen and this superiority of the state allows him to judge the alliance of businessmen and politicians which for him degrades politicians.

## Conclusion

Based on my research on the link between Islamic social movements and state-level corruption, the December 17-25, 2013 incidents, in Turkey I argue that state-level corruption has created a legitimization crisis for the government and the government has used a statist discourse, by which those revealed the corruption, *Cemaat*, has been reflected as betrayals of the state and the investigation in general has been portrayed as a coup attempt of *Cemaat* under the service of the West, in order to deflect the impact of the crisis.

In this context, the movements' responses to these incidents have been influenced by their merge of political and religious ideas and reflections of this statist discourse. An understanding of nationalist Islam presenting an ideal unity of Muslim countries and binary worldview, in which the West represents evil and Muslims as good ones who try to be independent from the West throughout history, leads Islamists to consider the December 17-25 incidents as a coup attempt of an ally of the West, *Cemaat*, against an Islamic and national government, the AKP. Thus, they have incorporated the statist discourse of the government and seen the incidents as related to the independence and sovereignty of Turkey. Their Islamism has also led them to consider *Cemaat* as soft Islam and the US project since it has been depoliticized and has undermined the Islamic unity. As opposed to these firm ideas about the ideology of *Cemaat*, they have claimed diverse and uncertain views on its identity and the gap between these two has resulted in anger against *Cemaat* and a motive to wipe them out.

Anti-Capitalist Muslim and the Gulen Movement members have called the December 17-25 incidents corruption of the government; however, their different understandings of Islam and politics have influenced their claims of corruption. Anti-Capitalists have

considered corruption as a form of theft and lying to the people due to their belief in universal religious principles and they have seen it, thanks to their egalitarian understanding of Islam, as using influence of a state position and enrichment of the upper strata. Also, thanks to this understanding, they have seen the government as illegitimate not just because of corruption, but also its maintenance of capitalist relations and hierarchy among people since for them Islam orders believers to establish economic and social equality.

On the other hand, people having diverse relationship with the Gulen Movement have judged corruption of the government through its illegitimacy in Islam since for them the AKP government has got supported due to their Muslim identity. As being a seemingly depoliticized movement and striving for building social morality, they have established moral claims on corruption instead of political ones like Anti-Capitalists have done. Both Anti-Capitalist Muslims and the Gulen Movement have employed statist discourses in the same way. They have pointed out non-functionality of the organization of the state and of the hierarchy of bureaucrats while the government, especially the former Prime Minister Erdogan, has given bids to businessmen. Also, these ideas on the state have revealed the image of the state in their minds which is composed a smoothly functioning set of organizations significant for the maintenance of order.

All in all, higher-level corruption has led the government which is accused of corruption to use statist nationalist discourse and this has turned corruption into a matter of independence and sovereignty. While these discourse have been appropriated by those having nationalist feelings and believing in having same ideological position with the government such as Islamism in the case of Turkey, it has been rejected by those having different political and religious ideas and they have judged the corruption based on these ideas. Also, the use of the statist discourse by the government has worked in reverse for those who have claimed

corruption of the government since they have used another form of statist discourse based on the functions of the state in order to show illegitimacy of the corruption and these ideas have manifested their reconstruction of the state. Since I have underscored the importance of Islamic movements' reconstruction of the state in relation to corruption several times, further research should be done about what kind of images of the state Islamic movements in Turkey have.

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## Appendix

| Interview<br>ee | Place of<br>birth | The place of<br>interview                        | Age | Gender | Ethnicity | Economic<br>and social<br>status                                   | Political<br>positioning   |
|-----------------|-------------------|--|-----|--------|-----------|--|--|
| Rıdvan          | Kayseri           | Kayseri, home                                    | 51  | male   | Turkish   | Coming from a farming family, bank officer, having four children   | Radical Islamist in 1980s, big fan of Erbakan, currently supporting Erdogan                    |
| Ismail          | Kayseri           | Kayseri, central industrial district of the city | 52  | Male   | Turkish   | Owner of a workshop, left the business school, having two children | Supporter of the Welfare Party in 1980s and supporter of the AKP since the Dec. 17-25 incident |

|       |           |   |    |            |         |   |  |
|-------|-----------|---|----|------------|---------|---|--|
| Hasan | Malatya   | Fatih/Istanbul,<br>Anatolian<br>Platform<br>Endowment | 48 | Male       | Kurdish | BA in<br>History,<br>writer,<br>manager<br>of the<br>endowme<br>nt  | Radical<br>Islamist in<br>1980s,<br>imprisoned<br>after the<br>Feb. 28<br>coup,<br>current<br>AKP<br>supporter |
| Hülya | Balıkesir | Uskudar/Istanbu<br>l                                  | 24 | Fema<br>le | Turkish | Her father<br>is a<br>businessm<br>an and<br>had a role<br>in AKP<br>till the<br>Dec. 17<br>incident<br>and still<br>Gulen<br>movemen<br>t member,<br>she is a<br>Turkish<br>teacher,<br>single | Involved in<br>the GM<br>since<br>childhood  |

|               |          |  |    |      |  |  |   |
|---------------|----------|--|----|------|--|--|---|
| Ahmet         | Istanbul | Bağcılar/Istanbul                          | 33 | Male | Turkish  | Bank officer, single   | Former nationalist and full fledged supporter of the GM since the Dec. 17 |
| Osman Ertürk  |          | Bağcılar/Istanbul                          | 53 | Male | Turkish  | Lawyer of deposed police officers, conservative Muslim as he defined himself |   |
| Metin         | Antalya  | STV(Tv channel of the GM) Uskudar/Istanbul | 30 | Male | BA and MA in Media and Communication Studies, works in the channel | Gülen Community Member   |   |
| Ihsan Eliaçık | Kayseri  | İnsan publication/Fatih /Istanbul          | 53 | Male | Turkish  | BA in theology, writer,  | Founder and leader of Anti-   |

|        |         |   |    |      |          |  |  |
|--------|---------|---|----|------|----------|--|--|
|        |         |   |    |      |          | owns Insa<br>Publicatio<br>n   | Capitalist<br>Muslim   |
| Selim  | Kayseri | Insa publication/<br>Fatih/Istanbul       | 52 | Male | Turkish  | Universit<br>y<br>graduate,<br>works in<br>the<br>publishin<br>g house | In 1970s<br>participate<br>d in the<br>Marxist<br>Leninist<br>organizatio<br>n,<br>scientific<br>and<br>socialist<br>understand<br>ing of<br>Islam |
| Serhat | Albania | Caucasian<br>Endowment/Fati<br>h/Istanbul | 35 | Male | Albanian | Universit<br>y<br>graduate,<br>works in<br>the<br>endowme<br>nt        | Anti<br>capitalist<br>Muslim,<br>but<br>different<br>from<br>others,<br>believes in<br>the<br>importance   |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |   |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|---|
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  | of tradition<br>and<br>religious<br>rituals |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|---|