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1

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17/25 December Graft Probe in Turkey and Understanding Erdogan's Invincibility: A Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

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Abstract

This article aims to shed light on contemporary Turkish politics vis-à-vis the corruption scandals of 2013 that came to be called as the “17/25 December Graft Probe.” Its specific goal is to understand and explicate how Erdogan's continued success in local and presidential elections in 2014 came about despite grave allegations of corruption, an iota of which could, under normal circumstances, bring down any government in any country that occupies even an epigeal locus on the democracy indices. To achieve this task, we will first explain what the 17/25 December Graft Probe was all about. Then, we will embark on a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of various speeches of Erdogan, which he made before and after December 17/25. Finally, we will try to make an estimative analysis of where Turkey might be heading in the upcoming months and years in light of the December 17/25, which marks a turning point in Turkey's contentious politics.

Keywords

Turkey, 17/25 December, Graft Probe, Corruption, Elections, Tayyip Erdogan, AKP.

1. Introduction

On March 30th, 2014, Turkish voters had dashed into polling stations to elect their local leaders. Despite some complaints of election fraud in some polling stations, the incumbent Justice and Development Party (AKP) was able to get around 43 percent of the total votes. The results have flabbergasted many people who were not expecting a landslide victory this time for the AKP, which has been invincible since the 2002 parliamentary elections that had brought it to power. Discontented people, comprising individuals from all walks of life—e.g.,

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members of various religious groups, liberals, Kemalists, nationalists and ultranationalists—have been fulminating for sometime over the former Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan because of his leadership style, which they considered as becoming increasingly authoritarian, and for his proclivity to cronyism and nepotism, among other things. But the last straw for these people was the Graft Probe of 17/25 December 2013, which implicated that some cabinet ministers, their sons, Erdogan's son, several bureaucrats and high-profile businessmen have been involved in one of the largest corruption scandals in Turkey's history.² What is more, the leaked tape recordings in the media in the ensuing days showed that the PM may himself be involved in many of the alleged crimes, in addition to his meddling in the affairs of major media outlets, judiciary processes and even the inner workings Fenerbahce, a major football club with millions of fans that carries a significant force in Turkey's sociocultural life.

Not so long after, critiques of Erdogan were shocked once again in the Presidential Elections that were held August 10, 2014, as they were at least hoping that he could not be elected in the first round. Despite the aforementioned allegations implicating him, Erdogan was able to get around 52 percent of the votes and became Turkey's 12th President. In fact, the results in both elections were surprising for the AKP too, largely due to the supposed damages that could come from the said scandals. Thus, the question remains: how did the AKP increase its votes despite the negative outlook emanating from the foregoing allegations of corruption, nepotism, cronyism and, last but not least, authoritarianism? The purpose of this article is to understand and explicate how this success came about despite grave allegations of corruption, an iota of which could, under normal circumstances, bring down any government in any country that occupies even an epigeal locus on the democracy indices.

Myriad factors contributed to AKP's success in the elections, such as the public's feeling of being sandwiched between corruption and economic stability, heightened polarization within society during and after the 2012 Gezi Park Incidents, people's yearning for the resurrection of the Ottoman Empire and their identification of this ideal with the AKP, etcetera³. However, the lion's share of credit for this success belongs to Erdogan who has been able to main-

² Gul Tuysuz, "Dozens detained in Turkish Graft Probe," CNN International December 17, 2013, <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/12/17/world/europe/turkey-graft-probe/>

³ For a detailed account of the economic aspects of recent developments in Turkey, see for example an interview with Prof. Ziya Öniş by Research Turkey, (August 29, 2014), <http://researchturkey.org/interview-with-professor-ziya-onis-explaining-the-politics-behind-turkeys-stormy-year/>; and Ziya Öniş, "Monopolizing the Center: The AKP and the Uncertain Path of Turkish Democracy," Social Science Research Network-Working Paper Series (October 26, 2014), <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2499213>

tain both his and his party's popularity and power by exploiting almost anything at his disposal, e.g., sacking police officers and prosecutors who carried out the Graft Probe, appointing new prosecutors, judges, police officers and making new judicial arrangements to block further prosecution, and so on. But more importantly, he has been distinctively successful in creating and reinforcing a *political discourse* through which he tried, and achieved to a large extent, to divert public's attention from corruption and other allegations to an influential religious group, the Gulen Movement, which is popularly known as "*The Cemaat*" (which means 'religious community' in Turkish).

By exploiting the media close to him, Erdogan has managed to discredit the Cemaat, at least in the eyes of his constituents, via construction of narratives that labeled the movement as a '*parallel structure*.' The term 'parallel structure' has been the leitmotif of Erdogan's pep talks during and after his election campaign. Even so Gulen, who was highly respected previously by Erdogan himself, was attacked directly by Erdogan as he has utilized every opportunity to demonize him by labeling him with derogatory terms like 'ersatz prophet,' 'CIA agent,' 'Israel's accomplice,' and many more. Simultaneously with this endeavor, and cashing in on his successes in the elections, Erdogan used quite aptly other narratives like "*The national will*" and '*national security*,' by which he tried to vindicate his party from the alleged crimes against it.

All of the foregoing narratives have rather functioned as cloaks to cover up the AKP's hamartia or, at least, served a wag-the-dog kind of purpose: that is, the incessant effort by Erdogan to make sure that the public discourse has revolved around the terms like 'parallel structure,' 'national will' and 'national security,' but not 'corruption.' The aforementioned narratives and issues need to be deconstructed for a better understanding of the latest developments in Turkey's political cauldron. In what follows, we will first explain what the 17/25 Graft Probe was all about. Then, we will embark on a critical discourse analysis of various speeches of Erdogan, which he made before and after December 17/25. Finally, we will try to make an estimative analysis of where Turkey might be heading in the upcoming months and years in light of the December 17/25, which marks a turning point in Turkey's contentious politics.⁴

⁴ Contentious politics is defined as "interactions in which actors make claims that bear on someone else's interests, leading to coordinating efforts on behalf of shared interests or programs, in which governments are as targets, the objects of claims, or third parties," Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, *Contentious Politics* (Paradigm Publishers, 2007), p. 202. It is therefore an equally significant topic for inquiry to examine the political discourse of actors/parties, which are contending the AKP and Erdogan by embarking on similar discursive practices. For

2. 17/25 December Graft Probe and the unfolding of events after it

People woke up on December 17 to a different day in Turkey. It was different in the sense that long-time rumors about the AKP's corruption had come to surface, the size of which appeared to have reached shocking levels. Just to give an example, in a recorded telephone conversation between the former Prime Minister and his son Bilal, which was leaked to the media and became viral within minutes via twitter and youtube, Erdogan asks Bilal to move out truck-loads of money from his home in Istanbul, lest the police raid into and find them.⁵ In the following four more conversations over the course of 24 hours, it seems that the said money was transferred safely, though not very easily, to other locations. Everybody was waiting for a response from Erdogan, who defiantly rejected the allegations and called the tape-recording first a "montage" and "dubbing" later on.

In fact, police investigation had started 20 months ago based on suspicious currency activities of an Iranian businessman living in Turkey who has been allegedly transferring huge amounts of money in and out of the country. Over-time, the police explored that this young Iranian businessman, Reza Zarrab, bribed Ministers through directly sending cash and presenting high valued gifts, the most prominent of which being a watch that costs nearly \$320.000.

Iran has the world's second larger reserves of natural gas and the fourth largest reserves of oil.⁶ As an oil and natural gas rich country, Iran exported its natural resources under very strict sanctions and observations of the United Nations, European Union and the United States, all of which have imposed embargoes on Iran for nearly a decade. According to the Menendez-Kirk amendment, any financial institution that deal with the Iranian Central Bank find itself confronted with a stark threat to lose access to the largest financial market on earth.⁷ Humanitarian exceptions are made for medicine, food, and medical equipment. Businessmen like Zarrab have thus functioned as a respiratory system for Iran, which has been squashed under such strict financial sanctions.

Based on the indictment, what Zarrab simply did had to do with transferring Iran's money to Iran from its export of oil and natural gas to Turkey

the sake of this article, however, we preferred to focus on Erdogan's political discourse, which we believe to be more successful than that of his contenders.

⁵ This conversation can be accessed at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kcq4FgkmGW0>

⁶ Eia.gov, "Iran Overview," US Energy Information Administration (updated July 22, 2014), <http://www.eia.gov/countries/cab.cfm?fips=IR>.

⁷ David Frum, "Why Menendez-Kirk plan would give Iran sanctions teeth," CNN (December 29, 2011), <http://www.cnn.com/2011/12/19/opinion/frum-iran/>.

and third countries. This system required several complicated steps of money transferring through real and shell companies. To explicate, Iranian Central Bank purchased Toman from another Iranian Bank (let's say x bank). The cost of this trade was paid via money transfer from Iranian Central Bank's account in Halkbank⁸ to X Bank's account in Halkbank. Next, Y Bank or one of X Bank's associate company deposited Toman into X bank to purchase Euro or Turkish Lira at a privileged rate. In exchange for this, X Bank's money in Halkbank account was transferred to Zarrab's account in Halkbank. Lastly, with money in his Halkbank account, Zarrab bought gold in Turkey and exported it to either directly to Iran or Dubai.⁹

In 2012, because of rumors about this technique of money transfer, Halkbank's CEO allegedly pressed Zarrab and Minister of Economy to alter this technique. The Economy Minister rejected this idea and reminded Halkbank CEO the Prime Minister's order on reaching the export target of Turkey. Prime Minister of that time, Tayyip Erdogan, believed that gold export eases the current deficit of Turkey. In one of his speeches taken place after the police raid, he declared "Zarrab is benevolent businessman and his business is beneficial as it diminishes current deficit of our country." Starting in 2013, Zarrab transit traded of goods like medicine, food and cosmetics through shell companies. He gained privileged rate of commission in Halkbank and became a cartel in Turkey in transit trading to Iran. He allegedly greased Ministers' and Halkbank CEO's palm to sustain his business. Zarrab obtained commission in exchange for money transfers. However, the indictment carefully highlights that accusations are not related to breaching international sanctions on Iran, but rather criminal actions violating Turkish laws.

Minister of Interior and Minister of EU Affairs at that time were also grafted by Zerrab for several other activities. According to the indictment, the son of Interior Minister got bulged paychecks because he served as a consultant to Zarrab's companies. Zarrab allegedly asked for several favors from Interior Minister i.e. Turkish citizenship for himself and his relatives, to gain a right of way in traffic, and appointing a police officer for protection. Zarrab also allegedly bribed minister of EU Affairs. News media once captured intelligence about huge amount of gold export and had prepared news to publish in the daily newspaper. Once Zarrab came to limelight on several media outlets for his du-

⁸ Halkbank is a Turkish State Bank.

⁹ For more information on this mechanism and statistical data on Turkish Gold purchases of Iran, see for example, "Al-Monitor.com, "Iranian Purchases of Turkish Gold May Help It to Foil Sanctions," Al-Monitor (September 8, 2012), <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/business/2012/09/gold-laundering-behind-mind-boggling-iran-turkey-trade-increase.html#>

bious activities, he asked favors from the Minister of EU Affairs to intervene in order to prevent the newspaper from publishing anything related to gold export.

25 people were arrested on December 17, 2013, as a result of simultaneous police raids. The government took immediate action; police chiefs that carried out the operation were removed from the office. Three ministers who were accused according to 17 December investigation resigned on December 25 when the situation got even worse for the government and for Erdogan in particular. Another prosecutor carried out a separate investigation in which, allegations encompassed Erdogan's son Bilal and his clandestine partners in business Yasin Al Qadi, a Saudi Arabian businessman, who was on the US Treasury Department's list of "Specially Designated Global Terrorists" until November 2014 on the ground of supporting Al Qaeda. The December 25 indictment¹⁰ refers to unlawful amendments on construction plans in Istanbul. Minister of Environment and Urban Planning was accused of paving the way for contractors to gain illegal profits.

Furthermore, the foundation of Youth and Education (TURGEV), one of its executive board members is Bilal Erdogan, the son of PM at the time, allegedly accepted illegal donations. Public lands some of which were under environment protection were donated to TURGEV or sold to companies below their market value because Bilal allegedly used his father's influence over mayors of municipalities. Allegations include seizure of mines and selling those to businessmen close to the AKP. Interestingly enough, Turkey experienced later on successive mine accidents in various places such as Soma where 301 miners lost their lives, marking the deadliest one in the country's history.

During the following days and weeks, the former PM has embarked on an unprecedented reshuffling of the judiciary and the national police. This meddling by the government resulted in the closing down of the investigation. Thousands of prosecutors and police officers were either furloughed or assigned to inferior positions for attempting to bring down the AKP government to its knees, which the PM dubbed as nothing but a "coup." Moreover, to claim and maintain his legitimacy to his authority, Erdogan put all the blame on these individuals, which he came to call as "the parallel structure." By this, often implicitly and sometimes explicitly, he meant "the Gulen Movement", one of Turkey's most influential religious groups. To an outsider, it seemed like a sleight of hand given that the Gulen movement was but just one of the groups that have had some axe to grind with the AKP's undemocratic activities in recent years. Many people

¹⁰ Both December 17 and December 25 indictments can be found here (in Turkish), http://www.candundar.com.tr/_v3/index.php#!#Did=25947

interpreted this development as “former allies turned into enemies.” The PM’s cunning riposte was undergirded, or perhaps masked, by his charisma, stamina and powerful rhetoric, as well as his mesmerizing pep talks throughout his election campaign. As Erdogan’s political discourse has played a significant role in his success in politics, we will examine below some of his talks in an effort to show the semantic shifts in them regarding the Cemaat.

3. Conceptual framework: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Although being used in various ways in social sciences, the term ‘*discourse*’ is defined, in the most abstract sense, as “an analytical category describing the vast array of meaning-making resources available to everybody.”¹¹ From the analytical perspective of structuration, discourse shapes and gets shaped by socio-political phenomena; as such “it helps to sustain and reproduce the social status quo, and ... contributes to transforming it.”¹² Discursive practices therefore may have ideological effects in terms, for example, of helping the production and reproduction of unequal power relations between “social classes, women and men, and ethnic groups.”¹³ It is the main purpose of CDA to clarify these aspects of discourse as social practice, which are otherwise opaque and not easily visible.¹⁴ The term ‘critical’ in the CDA does not bear a negative connotation; it is used, in Marxist terms and Frankfurt School spirit, as a “mechanism for both explaining social phenomena and for changing them.”¹⁵ One manifestation of such change can be detected in political discourses that function in ways to “naturalize certain statements as self-evident.”¹⁶ For this reason, CDA also helps people be critical about this naturalization and recognize their misrecognition of their real situations, which are produced by ideological effects of constructed discourses.

Furthermore, according to Reisigl and Wodak, “racism/discrimination/exclusion manifests itself discursively: ‘racist opinions and beliefs are produced and reproduced by means of discourse... through discourse, discriminatory exclusion-

¹¹ Ruth Wodak, “Critical Discourse Analysis,” in Ken Hyland and Brian Paltridge (Eds), *Continuum Companion to Discourse Analysis* (London and New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), p. 39.

¹² Fairclough and Wodak (1997), cited in Wodak, “Critical Discourse Analysis,” p. 39.

¹³ Wodak, “Critical Discourse Analysis,” p. 40.

¹⁴ Wodak, “Critical Discourse Analysis,” p. 40.

¹⁵ Wodak, “Critical Discourse Analysis,” p. 40.

¹⁶ Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power*, (London: Longman, 1989).

ary practices are prepared, promulgated and legitimized.”¹⁷ Hence, using various linguistic indicators in a strategic way to construct in- and out-groups is essential for “political (and discriminatory) discourses in all kinds of settings.”¹⁸ One of the most important and commonly used settings is *the media*, which has been dubbed as the ‘fourth estate’ for its instrumentalization in control and domination. A specific focus in discourse analysis has therefore been given to the study of ‘news discourse’ by following two main traditions: “the first deals mostly with newspapers and the structure of news in written text; the second deals with the broadcast news interview as spoken discourse and as a form of social interaction.”¹⁹ While the first tradition was concerned with newspapers as “the embodiment of forms of ideology under late capitalism,” the researchers in the second tradition place their main emphasis on “issues of power and control as they are reflected in the engagement between public figures and news organizations.”²⁰

In the CDA literature, the construction of in- and out-groups necessarily implies the use of *strategies of positive self-presentation* and the *negative presentation of others*. In this article, we are especially interested in five types of discursive strategies, which are all involved in positive self- and negative other-presentation:

- 1) Referential and nomination strategies;
- 2) Predicational strategies;
- 3) Argumentation strategies;
- 4) Perspectivation, framing and discourse representation strategies;
- 5) Intensifying strategies.²¹

These discursive strategies underpin the justification/legitimization of inclusion/exclusion and of the constructions of identities. ‘Strategy’ generally refers to a (more or less accurate and more or less intentional) plan of practices, including discursive practices, adopted to achieve a particular social, political, psychological or linguistic goal.²² The aforementioned five strategies will be used below where appropriate.

¹⁷ Martin Reisigl and Ruth Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination. Rhetorics of Racism and Antisemitism*, (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 1.

¹⁸ Wodak, “Critical Discourse Analysis,” p. 46. In addition, construction of in- and out-groups chimes with the concepts of ‘boundary formation,’ ‘boundary activation’ and ‘boundary deactivation,’ which refers to us-them distinction between two political actors. For more information, see, Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

¹⁹ Heritage and Greatbach, in Martin Montgomery, “Discourse and the News,” in Hyland and Paltridge, *Continuum Companion to Discourse Analysis*, p. 213.

²⁰ Montgomery, “Discourse and the News,” p. 213.

²¹ Wodak, “Critical Discourse Analysis,” p. 49.

²² Wodak, “Critical Discourse Analysis,” p. 49.

Many authors have employed CDA by focusing on various aspects and functions of discourse. For the purposes of this article, we will focus mostly on the cognitive aspects and discursive changes about “the Cemaat” in Erdogan’s speeches that he made before and after 17/25 December Graft Probe. In order to achieve this task, we selected some excerpts from two talks by Erdogan that he gave in the closing ceremonies of the Turkish Olympiads, an annual event organized by the Cemaat in an effort to allow its students from more than 160 countries to showcase their talents on Turkish language, music and culture. For comparison, we selected a super-cut video on youtube containing a compilation of the words Erdogan used in labeling the Cemaat after the Graft Probe. We were curious to know how Erdogan depicted Fethullah Gulen and the Cemaat in these speeches, i.e., what words, symbols, attributes he used to describe them, and to see whether there were any semantic changes in them.

Erdogan’s speech at the 10th Turkish Olympics, TT Arena Stadium, June 14, 2012:

“*My brothers. Expatriation is longing. Longing... its price is very heavy. We would like to see those who are longing for the soil of this homeland among us (Applause...). Expatriation, also means being lonely, given that it takes its meaning from there. That is why we cannot tolerate loneliness. Thus we say that this longing for homeland should come to an end. We want it to end. In fact, looking at your behavior now (meaning the applauses and emotional eruption of the audience, i.e., Gulen fans), I understand that you want in unison this longing to end. So let’s say, “May this longing come to an end!” And in this meaningful day, as the children of an ancient civilization, I would like to thank you all once again that you addressed us in Turkish, the language of a rich culture. I also say that ‘Let’s put aside expatriation and longing.’ Stay well!*” [My translation].

Erdogan’s speech at the 11th Turkish Olympics, June 17, 2013:

(Note: This talk was given only six months before the 17/25 December Graft Probe).

“*Dear Brothers. Dear smittens of the Turkish language who came from nearby and far away places. Dear Teachers, Ladies... I salute you with my wholehearted love in this final ceremony of the 11th Turkish Olympics. I thank the International Turkish Association for allowing us experience this joy, exultation, inexplicable emotions. I congratulate the children of our friends and neighbors, who reminded us the beauty and unspottedness of the*

Turkish language, who held a mirror to us and who told us who we are... I congratulate again and again *teachers* who dedicated themselves to the Turkish language and to explicate our struggle for peace to the world in Turkish, *who hit to road to not return but to die with a sacred ideal of letting people live. Yes, he who sees beauty thinks of beauty! He who thinks of beauty gets joy from his life!* You have shown us the beauty for weeks. You made us ruminate on beauty amidst a thousand vices. Like a sapling in a steppe, like an oasis in the middle of desert, like a drop of water on dried up lips, like mercy in darkened hearts... you told and reminded us the beauty in most difficult times. For the last three weeks in Turkey, *there were two different scenes, two pictures, to views in two different places, which were diametrically opposed to each other.* On one part, there were *stones, slingshots, Molotov cocktails*; while on the other, there was *Turkish, songs and poems.* On one side, there was *anger, hatred, violence and skirmishes.* On the other, there was *peace, mercy, friendship, solidarity and brotherhood.* On one side there were *vandals* who became hostages of the language of anger; there were *ambassadors of peace* and hearts that fell in love with the Turkish language, the language of heart... Please rest assured my dear brothers; it is this, which is the real scene of Turkey.”

Analyzing the two texts given above, one cannot help but realize that these texts are specifically tailored to the audience; i.e., the Gulen sympathizers. Erdogan seems to have tried everything to touch a chord on them by using words and symbols that could move them and they were sensitive about. In fact, a multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) by watching the videos yields that he was quite effective in so doing, which can be seen clearly in his facial expressions and jubilant behaviors of the audience. Especially the terms ‘expatriation’ and ‘longing’ made the most impact in this respect, given that the audience instantaneously captured that those words were used as metaphors to describe the ‘longing’ for his homeland of the ‘expatriate’ Gulen, who has been on self-imposed exile in the United States for more than fifteen years.

Another point in Erdogan’s speech that captures an immediate attention is ‘teachers’ and sacrificial characteristics arrogated to them, which Erdogan stressed on by saying “...*who hit the road to not return but die with a sacred ideal of letting people live.*” Teachers who work in the Gulen-inspired schools worldwide are claimed to be known for their ‘sacrifices’ and ‘altruism,’ for which they were dubbed by Gulen, ‘*the devotees*’ (‘*adanmışlar*’ in Turkish). The reason why they are deemed as altruistic individuals has said to be linked to the notion that many of these teachers could find prestigious and well-paying jobs as graduates of top schools in Turkey but they choose to serve in Gulen-inspired schools, which do not even offer them sufficient resources for

their basic needs, let alone attractive remuneration packages. What is more, while some of these some 1,000 schools are located in developed or developing countries, an important number of them operate in places that have very poor economic, infrastructural, security and social life conditions.

It is thus clear that by focusing on the ‘devotees’ and calling Gulen sympathizers as ‘brothers,’ Erdogan wants to send a message of ‘oneness’ with them. Moreover, he tries to support this ‘oneness’ by pitting the devotees, Gulen sympathizers and his own electoral constituents (the AKP voters) against those who demonstrated their dissent during the Gezi Events in the summer of 2013. The main goal of such discursive endeavors seem to be related to his attempt to create in- and out-groups and make sure that the Gulen sympathizers remain on his side *vis-a-vis* his dissidents. As construction of in- and out-groups require a *positive self-presentation* and *negative presentation of others*, Erdogan also places a significant emphasis on positive traits of Gulen-sympathizers with terms like ‘sacrifices,’ ‘peacefulness,’ ‘solidarity,’ ‘brotherhood,’ and so on and negative traits of Gezi protestors— i.e., *the Other*— with terms such as ‘vandalism,’ ‘slingshots,’ ‘Molotov cocktails,’ ‘anger,’ and the like.

A super-cut video containing the words Erdogan used in labeling the Cemaat after the 17/25 December Graft Probe (length, 2:15 mins):²³

Below figure containing a scattered depiction of words and expressions clearly shows that there is an enormous shift in terms of how Erdogan depicted Gulen, the Cemaat and individuals and groups that he tried to show as Gulen supporters. We colored these words and expressions for an easier detection and in an effort to categorize them semantically to make more intelligible the different meanings that Erdogan aimed to convey to his supporters.

The meanings of colors used above:

- The text in *red* is used to show Erdogan’s emphasis on the term ‘parallel structure’ and its variants.
- The text in *bold-black* is used to show Erdogan’s questioning of the Cemaat’s ‘nationalism.’
- The text in *bold-green* is used to demonstrate Erdogan’s potential ‘actions’ against the Cemaat.
- The text in *blue* is used to demonstrate the attributes that Erdogan used in labeling Gulen and the Cemaat.

²³ The video can be accessed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TIQcj1v9xG4>

- The text in *yellow* is used to show how Erdogan labeled his political ‘opponents,’ which to a large extent meant Kemal Kilicdaroglu, the head of the Republican People’s Party (CHP) and Devlet Bahceli, the head of the Nationalist Action Party (MHP).
- The text in *violet* is used to show Erdogan’s attacks on the Cemaat via ‘religious’ symbols.

One of Erdogan’s most successful construction in his discursive war with his opponents is ‘the parallel structure’ as well as its variants like ‘parallel state,’ ‘traitor gang,’ ‘mobster lobby,’ ‘criminal mob,’ and ‘assassins.’ These terms, in fact, are linked to the notion of *intertextuality* in CDA. Wodak explains this notion as follows:

‘*Intertextuality*’ refers to the linkage of all texts to other texts, both in the past and in the present.” Such links can be established in different ways: through continued reference to a topic or to its main actors; through reference to the same events as the other texts; or through the reappearance of a text’s main arguments in another text. The latter process is also labeled

‘*recontextualization*.’ By taking an argument out of context and restating it in a new context, we first observe the process of de-contextualization, and then, when the respective element is implemented in a new context, of recontextualization. The element then acquires a new meaning...”²⁴

The term ‘parallel structure’ and its variants seem to have resonated with a significant portion of Turkey’s population for numerous reasons. First, people’s collective memory in Turkey is inundated with such structures, which have been usually subsumed under the term ‘*the deep state*.’ Although it is quite hard, and not the main task of this article, to make a clear definition of this elusive term, deep state signifies a secretive structure that has historically occupied a place in Turkey’s political life as *the* dominant force. For a perspicacious eye, the Turkish military will stand out as the core in this amorphous but translucent structure.²⁵ Many people in Turkey believe that the deep state has always been the owner of the Turkish car regardless of who has functioned as its *chauffeur*. Meanwhile, although some believe that the Turkish deep state has been largely eliminated recently through judicial processes like Ergenekon and Sledgehammer trials, an important part of society considers it to have remained intact.

²⁴ Wodak, “Critical Discourse Analysis,” pp. 46-49.

²⁵ For more information on the term ‘deep state’, see Kamil Yilmaz, *Disengaging from Terrorism: Lessons from the Turkish Penitents* (New York: Routledge, 2014), p.; and Fatih Demiroz and Naim, Kapucu, “Anatomy of a Dark Network: the Case of the Turkish Ergenekon Terrorist Organization,” *Trends Organ Crime* 15, (2012), pp. 271-295.

Figure 1: Erdogan's depiction of the Cemaat after the 17/25 December Graft Probe

They are assassins!	They are a criminal mob!	They are frauds, slanderers!
Grave robber!	They lie. Do monkey business, hypocrisy, plot and malice!	
Pervert, pervert!	They are worse than the Shia!	
	There is slander!	They are an insidious terror organization!
	They don't have morality! They have no shame!	They are perverse in their belief!
	They don't have love of country, flag, nation!	They are the lessers and traitors!
	They are montage, cassette fabricators!	
	They are bloodsucking vampires!	And by the way, they may sell heaven and hell!
	This gang of chaos, this blood lobby, this parallel state!	This parallel, traitor gang!
	This is a traitor network!	
	Pawns of Turkey's foes!	Mobster Lobby!
		Sucking like leaches!
		Pawns of international crime networks!
		Virus!
	They want to bring everybody to their knees through blackmail!	Mouthpieces of the parallel state!
	Was their brownnoser!	
	The stench and rottenness of their reign will surface!	
	We'll smoke you out of your dens!	We'll going to do this witch hunt!
	If you have kids in their prep schools and schools, take them out!	
	Did you see him criticize Israel? He can't do it!	He can't criticize his master who holds his leash!
	False prophets, fake saints, pseudo scholars who are hollow inside, with an empty heart and void mind!	
	He is as racist today as he was yesterday!	
		Oh, from now on there is no Turkish Olympiads, no nothing for them, not even water!

Second, the deep state has maintained its stronghold on power via legal and illegal means, the latter of which includes practices that could only be found in mafiatric organizations; such as extortion, bribery, blackmailing, assassinations, incitation or sponsorship of terror, and so on. Through these practices, it can be thought, the deep state has had the ability to maneuver the car towards the direction it desired and change the driver if it wished so. In addition, the foregoing practices connote to a structure that extends itself *horizontally* in an *underground* location. Hence is the usage of the term ‘parallel’ and what it flashes in people’s minds.

Third, the different ways in which the Cemaat has been perceived in Turkey facilitated Erdogan’s usage of the group as a scapegoat to cover up his party’s wrongdoings after the Graft Probe. To specify, to many people the Cemaat manifests itself as a ‘*mysterious*’ structure, if not a ‘*secretive*’ one. A popular conviction about the mystery behind the Cemaat has to do with its less than transparent functioning in terms of its assignments of personnel to different positions within the organization, its management and funding of schools and international activities, among other things. Moreover, because the Cemaat is a grass-root organization that follows a bottom-up approach, it is possible to suggest that it has touched almost all individuals in Turkey, both directly and indirectly. For its own sake, the Cemaat may have legitimate reasons to have a mysterious nature, e.g., the problems related to the freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, human rights, and so on. The said indirect touch by the Cemaat (for having a friend, family member or a relative in it), however, seems to have rendered some individuals only privy to the Cemaat’s structure and activities rather than providing them with detailed knowledge about them.

To sum up in light of the foregoing discussion, it is possible to opine that it is this *interdiscursivity* between ‘the deep state’ and ‘the parallel structure and its variants’ that enabled Erdogan to effectively decontextualize the term the deep state and recontextualize in forms of parallel structure and its variants signifying the Cemaat. Also, the lack of knowledge about the Cemaat, or mystery so to speak, in turn, may have been one of the reasons why the term parallel structure stuck in some people’s minds and thus facilitated Erdogan’s demonization of the Cemaat in a significant way.

Interdiscursivity, on the other hand, indicates that “topic-oriented discourses are linked to each other in various ways: for example, a discourse on exclusion often refers to topics or sub-topics of other discourses, such as education

or employment.”²⁶ Erdogan’s demonizing discourse on the Cemaat benefited greatly from a sub-topic related to education. To explicate, he claimed that the Graft Probe was a response of the Cemaat-linked people within the police and judiciary to the government’s decision to transform, to use a euphemism for closure, the privately owned preparatory schools (*dershanes* in Turkish) that have cashed in on the country’s nerve-wracking university entrance exam since the beginning of 1990s. The reason why this argument stuck with the AKP supporters is linked to Erdogan’s strategic packaging of the issue by tapping into their presuppositions about the Cemaat; i.e., the Cemaat’s *perceived* domination of the prep-school industry and hence its supposed fear of suffering significant financial pain in case of the closure of the *dershanes*.

Doubtless the Cemaat reacted strongly to government’s abovementioned intention to shut down *dershanes*; but there seems to be little rationale to make a link between such reaction and the Graft Probe, which was deemed by Erdogan as a *coup d’état*, at least for two reasons. First, contrary to the common conviction, the Cemaat has said to own only 20% of the *dershanes* in Turkey. As of 2012, there were 4,055 *dershanes* serving to 1,2 million students in Turkey.²⁷ In the event that all *dershanes* were closed down indiscriminately, the brunt of this closure would be borne by other firms that would be exploited, rather unwittingly, in Erdogan’s construction of a discourse against the Cemaat. That is why many of the *dershane* owners opposed to the government’s decision. Second, Erdogan’s pragmatic linkage between the 17/25 December Graft Probe and the *dershane* issue does not make sense given that the Turkey’s Central Intelligence Agency (MIT) had warned the Prime Minister’s Office in a report on 18 April 2013 that some of his ministers had murky relations with Iranian businessman Reza Zarrab.²⁸ It is therefore safe to suggest that the *dershane* row was not the cause of the Graft Probe; it seems rather to be used as a functional tool by Erdogan in his discursive war against the Cemaat in an effort to free his party from the corruption allegations.

²⁶ Wodak, “Critical Discourse Analysis,” p. 49.

²⁷ Fabio Vicini, “The Irresistible Charm of the State: *Dershane* Closures and the Domestic War for Power in Turkey,” *Jadaliyya* (March 24, 2014), http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/17027/the-irrepressible-charm-of-the-state_dershane-closn

²⁸ Pinar Tremblay, “Turkish Intelligence Agency (MIT) at the Center of Political Storm,” *Al-Monitor* (January 8, 2014), <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/01/turkey-mit-akp-gulen-battle-power-struggle.html>

4. Discursive strategies used by Erdogan in his speeches about the Cemaat

One of the most salient features that can be found in Erdogan's post-Graft Probe speeches is linked to his goal to solidify his own group while creating an evil image of the Other, i.e., the Cemaat. To do this, Erdogan embarked on the above mentioned five strategies in constructing his discourse about his opponents in general and the Cemaat in particular. Narratives that were constructed by Erdogan to this end indeed overlap; that is, they fall under one or more of these five strategies, as will be shown below.

Referential and nomination strategies

These strategies are used in constructing in-groups and out-groups by way of exploiting a number of categorization devices such as metaphors and metonyms.²⁹ The words in blue color in Figure-1 includes a number of concepts that Erdogan used as metaphors to discredit the Cemaat as an out-group and to solidify his power base as in-group. A closer look at these concepts reveals that they have not been picked arbitrarily: they were chosen to paint the Cemaat with a number of characteristic features, each of which would then trigger the minds of AKP supporters to shift their perception of the Cemaat by making linkages to certain accusations directed to it erstwhile, be it legitimate or illegitimate. One of the most popular among these accusations, which was articulated surreptitiously and remained largely dormant until December 17/25, has to do with financial matters. To clarify, the Cemaat has been viewed by some a behemoth that owns more than a thousand schools worldwide and that runs a number of TV channels and newspapers in different languages as well as a national bank with significant amount of holdings, among other things. While the Cemaat members argue that their main goal is educating children in Turkey and abroad and that money and financial institutions are only meaningful to them in terms of funding these activities, some people have argued that their main objective à la Calvinists has always been money making, a goal that has been supposedly masked under the 'sanctimonious' veneer of Cemaat's educational activities.

As mentioned earlier, the *dershane* issue came in handy for Erdogan in terms of constructing metaphors around it. For example, the utterances of '*they are bloodsucking vampires,*' '*sucking like leeches,*' and '*virus*' were chosen as indictors of the Cemaat's purported latent desire for money making,

²⁹ Wodak, "Critical Discourse Analysis," p. 49.

given that Erdogan used them within the context of his decision to close all *dershanes* to curb Cemaat's influence in Turkish society. As metaphors are indirect signification tools that are used to bolster the impact of the meaning that they connote to, it seems that Erdogan used them quite aptly in that the audience of these metaphors made an instant connection between them and the Cemaat *dershanes*. Moreover, Erdogan's iteration of these metaphors was accompanied with his action-taking practices, through which he openly called on his supporters to take out their kids from the Cemaat *dershanes* and schools. Even so, in one of his regular talks to the AKP group in the Turkish parliament, he also suggested AKP deputies to do the same and admonished those whom did not comply with this "suggestion." Interestingly though, while most of the AKP supporters bought into Erdogan's *argumentation strategy* on the *dershane* issue, there is little evidence suggesting that the same people acted upon it and took out their kids from the Cemaat *dershanes*. As the Cemaat *dershanes* and schools are known for their quality of education, most of these people did not take their own kids out and seem to have externalized the issue by delegating the action-taking to other AKP supporters. During our fieldwork in Istanbul's Bahcelievler district, we came across many people who deemed the foregoing phenomenon nothing but hypocrisy.

Predicational strategies

Erdogan's speeches also contain plenty of predications about the Cemaat its spiritual leader Gulen. As Wodak³⁰ put it, *predicational strategies* may, for example, "be realized as evaluative attributions of negative and positive traits in the linguistic form of implicit or explicit predicates. These strategies aim at labeling social actors in a more or less positive or negative manner. They cannot be neatly separated from the nomination strategies." The terms like '*stench* and *rottenness*,' '*frauds* and *slanderers*,' '*lie* and *hypocrisy*' are chosen purposefully to downgrade Cemaat members collectively in the eyes of Turkey's general public. It is quite interesting though that both the Cemaat and the AKP supporters blame each other for being 'liars' or 'hypocrites.' When doing this, some members of the Cemaat calls the AKP people as Iran lovers and often makes a linkage between them and the Iran's shiah ideology by focusing on the term '*taqiyya*' (*deception* in English), which is said to be one of the core elements of Shiism. By the same token, the Cemaat's principle of '*tedbir*' (*cautiousness* or *surreptitiousness* in English) is used by AKP leaders and some of its supporters to argue that '*tedbir*' is nothing but a euphemism for 'hypocrisy.'

³⁰ Wodak, "Critical Discourse Analysis," p. 49.

Perspectivation, Framing and Discourse Representation

In his speeches, Erdogan also focused on another strategy called *perspectivation*, *framing* or *discourse representation* “by means of which speakers express their involvement in discourse, and position their point of view in the reporting, description, narration or quotation of relevant events or utterances.”³¹ Because this strategy requires active involvement of the speaker, it can be practically conceived as ‘agenda-setting,’ which is one of the most conspicuous personality traits of Erdogan. During his tenure as the Mayor of Istanbul in the 1990s and as the Prime Minister between 2002-2014, Erdogan has never accepted an agenda imposed upon him by the events taking place in the Turkey or abroad. He has always had a penchant to be an ‘agenda-setter,’ on which he has been quite successful most of the time. Nevertheless, most of his practices of agenda-setting have proven false or at best manifested themselves as red-herring in diverting the public’s attention from real issues to trivial ones. To exemplify, during the Gezi Events he said, “*They attacked my veiled sister in Kabatas,*” an illocutionary act performed to pit conservative AKP supporters against the protesters, most of whom appeared to be secular individuals. Later on, it became clear, as evidenced by the surveillance camera views, that such argument was untrue. In a more recent move on 15 November 2014, he said “*Muslim sailors had arrived in the shores of America in 1178. In his diaries, Christopher Columbus referred to the presence of a mosque on top of a mountain in Cuba*” and continued “*A mosque would suit to Cuba very much.*”³² This move was largely interpreted as Erdogan’s effort to shift the public debate over the construction of a luxurious new Presidential Palace (called AK-SARAY in Turkish)³³ to other trivial topics that have potential for shaping and dominating the public debate around symbolic issues such as religion and nationalism. During the row over the *dershanes*, Erdogan said, “*two of them threatened me in my office.*” With the pronoun ‘them’ he meant Cemaat members, but he has not exposed hitherto any names despite open invitations to do so from some Cemaat members who were in a position to speak for the group such as the Foundation of Journalists and Writers (GYV).

³¹ Wodak, “Critical Discourse Analysis,” p. 49.

³² For more information on this, see, Russia Today, “Before Columbus: Erdogan says Muslims ‘discovered America,’ eyes mosque in Cuba, (November 15, 2014), <http://rt.com/news/205895-islam-america-erdogan-cuba/>

³³ AK-SARAY literally means “White Palace” in Turkish. But a pun seems to be intended in the nomenclature given that AK also signifies Erdogan’s AK Party. It has been said that almost a billion dollars have been spent for the palace as of December 2014 and that the completed part was only half of the palace based on the construction plan. Many public opinion polls indicated that even AK Party and Erdogan supporters had an issue with AK-SARAY as they saw it as squandering of public money at a time when the country was inching towards dire economic straits.

Intensification strategies

Erdogan has consistently used *intensification strategies*, which “help to qualify and modify the epistemic status of a proposition by intensifying the illocutionary force of utterances.”³⁴ In other words, these strategies are an important aspect of presentation in terms of sharpening the narratives, both real and constructed ones. Moreover, intensification strategies can be used at least in two ways: i) intensifying quantitatively, which means that an argument is uttered repetitiously; and ii) intensifying qualitatively, which refers to making a seemingly convincing fallacious argument and sharpening it when one is expected to tone it down.³⁵ For instance, secular people in Turkey have blamed Erdogan from the get-go for his exploitation of religion in politics. While he used to assuage such fears of seculars during the incunabula of his tenure as Prime Minister by avoiding religious remarks and sticking to secularism, he recently made a volte-face in that regard. For example, when Kemal Kilicdaroglu, the head of the Republican People’s Party (CHP) called him “a religion merchant,” Erdogan responded in a speech on February 2012 by saying “of course we want to raise a pious generation,”³⁶ a grinding move far from being apologetic. Moreover, as part of his discursive war with the Cemaat, Erdogan exploited intensification strategy both quantitatively and qualitatively. Starting with December 17, he started to openly criticize Fethullah Gulen and the Cemaat by saying, *‘they are pawns of Turkey’s foes’* and *‘did you see him criticizing Israel? He can’t do it.’* Overtime, however, his criticism increased a notch every time he spoke, culminating in his out loud insults or even defamation that can be found in the following utterances: *‘He can’t criticize his Master who holds his leash,’ ‘this parallel, traitor gang,’ ‘they are an insidious terrorist organization,’ ‘they are assassins,’ ‘false prophets, fake saints, pseudo scholars who are hollow inside, with an empty heart and void mind.’*

Another point about Erdogan’s use of intensification strategy against the Cemaat has to do with his selection of lexical items. As Trew³⁷ suggested, “grammatical choices in nominalization (active versus passive) and transitivity” need to be looked at closely as crucial aspects of text analysis. For example, opening lines of two reports on 2 June 1975 in *The Times* and *The Guardian* describes the same incident differently. The former uses “Rioting

³⁴ Wodak, “Critical Discourse Analysis,” pp. 49-50.

³⁵ Toning down in political discourse falls into the category of ‘mitigation strategies,’ which can be considered as the opposite of ‘intensification strategies.’

³⁶ Hurriyet Daily, “We Want to Raise a Pious Generation, (February 1, 2012), (Translated by me from Turkish), <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/19819295.asp>

³⁷ Trew 1979, cited in Montgomery, *Discourse and the News*, p. 216.

Blacks Shot Dead by Police,” while the latter wrote “Police Shoot 11 Dead in Salisbury Riot.” In the first example, the sentence structure follows ‘Affected- Process- Agent’ sequence; whereas the latter prefers the sequence of ‘Agent- Process- Affected.’ As such, the first newspaper puts the rioting blacks into the forefront, while the second clearly emphasizes the agent who is behind the action. In a similar vein, Erdogan has often used the terms ‘Cemaat’ and ‘Gulen’ in the active voice and opted for using pronouns or metaphors in their place to magnify the impact, as evidenced in the sentences like, ‘*they are montage, cassette fabricators,*’ ‘*they are frauds and slanderers,*’ ‘*Ey Pennsylvania!*,’³⁸ ‘*this gang of chaos, this blood lobby,*’ and so on.

Finally, in employing the aforementioned strategies Erdogan benefited greatly from select media outlets, which came to be known as “the pool media” (*Havuz Medyasi* in Turkish) as a vivid example of crony capitalism. The reason for this term, as indicated in the 17/25 December indictment, is that Erdogan allegedly entered into murky relationships with certain businessman, to whom he provided a privileged status in public tenders. Such privileges are given as a *quid pro quo* for receiving kickbacks from those tenders, which are then siphoned into a pool and ultimately used to purchase various newspapers and TV channels for the purposes of propagating Erdogan’s image and AKP policies. It has been reported that Erdogan has a direct control over 7 newspapers and 12 national TV channels, which he exerts by silencing critical voices in these media through individuals embedded in them as AKP commissaries. One example of this systematic practice was revealed by the now infamous “Alo Fatih” or “Hello Fatih” hotline leak, which was also confirmed by Erdogan.³⁹

5. Instead of a conclusion: misconstruing “facts” as “fictional reality” and dissolution of fiction

A legitimate question that could follow the abovementioned analysis is the following: *How did Erdogan supporters believe the irrational, incoherent and flimsy arguments that he foisted upon them?*

Answers to this question are manifold, the most important of which seems to be related to the locus of AKP supporters as being stranded between cor-

³⁸ He uses Pennsylvania to refer to Fethullah Gulen as he has been residing in there for more than fifteen years.

³⁹ Alparslan Akkus. “New Turkey, Old Rules,” Huffington Post (November 16, 2014), http://www.huffingtonpost.com/alparslan-akku/new-turkey-old-rules_b_6163218.html

ruption and economic stability. It is hardly connected to their *belief* in Erdogan's constructed discourse; it is rather linked to a fathomable pragmatism, given that the backbone of AKP's constituency is the middle-class and newly emerged conservative business tycoons, known as the Anatolian Tigers, which have benefited remarkably from the stability during the AKP's ruling since 2002. Other members of the business enterprise, e.g. the secularist business elite, have also kept supporting the AKP all the while as they became richer during AKP's ruling. Furthermore, most of these people have a strong belief that there is no alternative to the AKP and Erdogan for the nonce, as proven by a public opinion poll conducted by SONAR Research Center,⁴⁰ which suggested that the cost of the 17/25 corruption scandals to AKP was only 4% compared to the previous elections. Naturally thus, despite not denying the corruption allegations of 17/25 December, people that fall into the aforementioned categories have continuously backed Erdogan in order to make sure that the status quo, which has been in their favor, has remained unchanged.

There are other AKP supporters, *the AKP devotees* so to speak, however, who do not believe in these allegations simply because of emotional reasons, at least for two reasons: First, these people cannot juxtapose Erdogan's name with the word corruption as they think that, since Erdogan is a pious man, he would not downgrade himself to that level and let anyone of his entourage to do so. Second, for the AKP devotees the size of the alleged corruption and individuals involved in it is the biggest reason for not believing in them in the first place and viewing it as nothing other than a *coup attempt* aiming to bring down the AKP government. They ask, for instance, "Is Erdogan stupid to store such amount of money (allegedly several billion dollars) in his house?" or "Even if he stored, why would he risk trying to it out while knowing that his house cannot be searched by the police?" "Why would he speak about these things on the phone?" and so on and so forth. In brief, to the AKP devotees, 17/25 Graft Probe is yet another example of "fiction" that has been produced by the notorious "external powers" through their accomplices inside Turkey. In the case of the Graft Probe, the accomplice is believed to be the Gulen movement.

This approach by the AKP devotees can only be understood against the backdrop of a national education, which has inculcated people into the idea that "Turkey is surrounded by enemies," or that of a national culture, which has been nurtured by soap operas like "The Valley of the Wolves" that are based on a monomania about a *fictional* international cabal against the Turk-

⁴⁰ For a detailed analysis on who still supports the AKP, see, Pinar Tremblay, "Who Still Supports Turkey's AKP?" Al-Monitor (March 2, 2014), <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/03/erdogan-akp-support-popularity-turkey-scandal-corruption.html>

ish state. Since the Turkish state has been equaled lately to the government of the AKP, it is the latter that has been conceptualized as the chief victim of this international cabal. Also, dehumanizing the Cemaat by associating it with this cabal, President Erdogan and the AKP have tried to convince the world that the Cemaat can be dealt with impunity.

In fact, what we have been witnessing since the inception of 17/25 Graft Probe is not fiction, but “fictional reality,”⁴¹ a concept that has been used in many sociological and anthropological studies. The gist of the concept has to do with the scale of an incident, which can only be seen in movies or fiction books but not in real life. To exemplify, considering the jaw-dropping plane crashes on September 11 in New York, people had become inured to similar images only in Hollywood movies. So when they saw it in real life, on the news, the first reaction of the people was “No, *this is not possible. Is this a movie!*” Corruption allegations against the AKP on 17/25 December therefore made a similar impact in that the size and alleged actors of corruption seemed nothing but fantasy to the supporters of the AKP in general and Erdogan in particular. We argue, however, that when the fiction will be jettisoned from the term ‘fictional reality,’ either automatically, *via* the resumption of judicial processes in the future or by other means, AKP supporters will likely change their ideas over the Graft Probe, yielding enormous ramifications in Turkish political life.

In effect, we have recently witnessed several examples that have had a potential to dissolve fiction around the 17/25 corruption allegations. For instance, Etyen Mahcupyan has been appointed as the Chief Adviser to Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu around the first-year anniversary of the Graft Probe. In an interview he said, “To escape from the danger of a coup, people accepted putting up with corruption for some time more... There were two evils and they had to choose. They made a rational choice.”⁴² Even though

⁴¹ Some authors who wrote extensively on terrorism used ‘fictional reality’ in different ways and mostly to explain how a ‘real’ is structured as ‘fiction’ in order to manipulate people’s perceptions. For example, in her analysis of the Spanish state and terrorism, Aretxaga used the term to mean “the configuration of a ‘real’ that is structured like fantasy, and a fantasy, a plot, a scene that configures reality by articulating forms of knowledge and social practices,” Begona Aretxaga, “Playing Terrorist: Ghastly Plots and the Ghostly State,” *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*, Vol.1, Iss.1, (2000), p. 55. We, on the other hand, use the term to explain how ‘real’ (i.e. corruption) is perceived as ‘fiction,’ and how Erdogan’s negative discourse on the Cemaat led AKP supporters to disregard the allegations outright and continue their support for the AKP and its leader Tayyip Erdogan.

⁴² Gulsen Solaker, “Turkey bans reporting on corruption investigation of ex-ministers,” Daily Mail UK, (November 26, 2014), <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/reuters/article-2850578/Turkey-bans-reporting-corruption-investigation-ex-ministers.html>

he angered some staunch and rational AKP defenders, his acceptance of the AKP's corruption, or perhaps the disclosure of the truth as such, made a visible and disillusioning impact especially on those who supported the AKP and Erdogan not necessarily for rational reasons but because of their emotional attachment to Erdogan as the leader of the Muslim world and their longing for a New Ottoman Era that could only be realized with his leadership.

Another example which possibly helped dissolve fictitiousness of 'fictional reality' was linked to the construction of a new presidential palace in 2014, which was described as follows:

"Gouged into about 50 acres of former public parkland and constructed in defiance of court orders, the 1,000-room palace, replete with marble floors and soaring atriums, has already cost \$615 million, double its initial price tag. An additional \$135 million in outlays is slated for next year. Yet to come are a conference center and public mosque."⁴³

Doubtless this new palace, AK-SARAY, has been interpreted by seculars as Erdogan's attempt "to ride roughshod over the legacy of modern Turkey's secular founder Mustafa Kemal Atatürk... who set aside the land on which the new palace was built as a farm."⁴⁴ But the palace also angered a lot of Erdogan infatuates who believed that such lavishness was unnecessary not only for its inappropriateness based on AKP's religiously conservative stance banning prodigality, but also during an economic crisis which is thought to be in the offing. Even Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc said, "The cost for the palace is over 1 billion," adding, "it could be argued whether such an expense should have been spared. This is no small figure."⁴⁵

Similar examples can be given as evidences of the shifting attitude of the AKP supporters towards corruption. For the lack of space here, it suffices to say that such examples manifest themselves as signs of removal of fiction from 'fictional reality'; as such they have started to function as illusion-breakers around the infallibility of the AKP and its leader. It is therefore possible to

⁴³ Glen Johnson and Patrick McDonnel, "Turkey Lavish Presidential Palace Proves Divisive," LA Times, (November 28, 2014), <http://www.latimes.com/world/europe/la-fg-turkey-erdogan-20141129-story.html#page=1>

⁴⁴ For more on the debate over AK-SARAY, see "Erdogan's New Palace: Costly Folly or Symbol of New Turkey," AFP, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/787393/erdogans-grand-palace-costly-folly-or-symbol-of-new-turkey/>

⁴⁵ Bgnnews, 6 November 2014. "Deputy PM Arinc latest to criticize Presidential Palace." Retrieved 17 December 2014 from: <http://national.bgnnews.com/deputy-pm-arinc-latest-to-criticize-presidential-palace-haberi/1358>.

expect more of these examples, which will most likely put the AKP in trouble in the upcoming parliamentary elections slated to be held June 2015.

As a penultimate note, seeing the Graft Probe as an existential issue, Erdogan has made numerous mistakes on domestic and foreign politics, which resulted in the tarnishing of his image in both realms. Trying to muddle through the danger from the 17/25 Graft Probe by defining the issue as a ‘war of independence,’ he catapulted the country into a state of exception where laws have been self-servingly modified, if not suspended, freedoms have been stifled and human rights violated. As has been shown in Figure-1, Erdogan’s vows in saying “*We’ll do this witch hunt!*” and “*We will smoke you out of your dens!*” clearly demonstrate the extent of the foregoing human rights violations.⁴⁶ Furthermore, Erdogan’s obsession with the Cemaat, and hence intensification of all his focus on it, in the domestic realm have contributed considerably to colossal failures in Turkey’s foreign policy choices. Although having been praised for its generosity in hosting hundreds of thousands of Syrians who fled from catastrophe in their homeland, Turkey’s political stance and actions on the Syrian civil war has not only been interpreted as the nixing of its “zero problems with neighbors”⁴⁷ policy, but also made Turkey a prime suspect in terms of providing assistance to thousands of foreign fighters who have been participating in wars straddling Syria and Iraq. To clarify, insistence of Erdogan and Davutoglu on the removal of Esed from power as a precondition for a potential resolution in Syria has led many governments and political pundits to argue that *Turkey would do anything to see the Esed regime down*. One of the most circulated allegations in recent months in this respect has been on Turkey’s alliance with the

⁴⁶ To give a striking example, on 14 December 2014 some journalists, police chiefs, a director of a TV conglomerate (Samanyolu Group) and individuals who worked on a soap opera on Samanyolu TV were arrested based on the allegation that they acted in unison as part of a plot against a religious group called Tahsiyeciler. In fact, members of the group had been arrested and put in prison in 2010 after a police operation, which was announced by the state officials as an operation against “Al-Qaeda.” For more information on this, see Emre Uslu, “What is happening in Turkey,” *Today’s Zaman* (December 17, 2014), http://www.todayszaman.com/columnist/emre-uslu/what-is-happening-in-turkey_367276.html. The government’s actions against these individuals were largely interpreted and criticized internationally as the AKP’s attempt to muzzle critiques and as red herring aiming to prevent people from arranging protests on the first-year anniversary of the 17/25 Graft-Probe. For the warning of the European Union on December 16 after Turkey’s media arrests, see: <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-12-16/eu-said-to-consider-warning-to-turkey-after-media-arrests.html>

⁴⁷ For more information on Turkey’s “Zero Problems with Neighbors Policy,” see Ahmet Davutoglu, *Strategic Depth: Turkey’s International Position*, (Istanbul: Kure Yayinlari, 2000).

Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS), which has been wrecking havoc both in Syria and Iraq since its declaration of an Islamic Caliphate on 29 June 2014.⁴⁸

The negative effects of Erdogan's obsession with the Cemaat in domestic politics on Turkey's foreign policy are noteworthy for future research. We will just settle now by saying that the 17/25 December Graft Probe marks a turning point in Turkish politics in terms of bringing together different sections of society, which challenge Erdogan's reliance on and loose definition of the 'national will' by saying *'The ballot box cannot clean off the purloined bucks!'* Also, the aforementioned failures abroad, combined with the ever-increasing authoritarianism of Erdogan⁴⁹ inside Turkey, may have a dwindling effect on the hegemonic power of Erdogan in Turkish politics in the short to mid-term, which may even beget streams of contentious performances from Erdogan's opponents and culminate in hurling of AKP into extinction in the long term.

⁴⁸ Pressure on Turkey for its 'alleged' support for ISIS has increased especially during the latter's siege of the town of Kobane, Syria in September 2014. For more information consider, for example, Alexander Christie-Miller, "Kurds Accuse Turkish Government of Supporting ISIS," *Newsweek* (October 22, 2014), <http://www.newsweek.com/2014/10/31/kurds-accuse-turkish-government-supporting-isis-278776.html>. Also, Pulitzer-Price winner journalist Seymour Hersh had argued in April 2014 that Turkey was behind the chemical attack in Ghouta, Syria that took place on 21 August 2013. For details, see: http://www.democracynow.org/2014/4/7/sy_hersh_reveals_potential_turkish_role

⁴⁹ For an alternative account of Erdogan's turn to authoritarianism, see Caroline Lancaster, "The iron law of Erdogan: decay from intra-party democracy to personalistic rule," *Third World Quarterly* 35(9): 1672-1690.

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