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REPORT LEGIMITATION AND NORMALIZATION OF CORRUPTION IN THE  
PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN TURKEY: CULTURAL AND INSTITUTIONAL  
PERPECTIVES

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# **REPORT LEGIMITATION AND NORMALIZATION OF CORRUPTION IN THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN TURKEY: CULTURAL AND INSTITUTIONAL PERPECTIVES**

**Muhittin Acar**

**Ankara, 2015**

## **I-INTRODUCTION:**

At the dawn of December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2013, the biggest-ever anti-corruption operation of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Turkey broke out with a series of police raids and detentions in Ankara and Istanbul of around 100 people, including among others the sons of three ministers, a mayor, some prominent businessmen, and the CEO of a state-run bank. Around two-thirds of those were soon released after questioning, while 20-something people got detained and eventually arrested (They were freed altogether within a couple of months, by the decision of the newly-designated judges, though). Major allegations have been related to taking bribes and rigging bids on government contracts involving some big construction works and real estate projects and Turkey's gold trade with Iran. It has turned out later on December 25, 2013 that a second round of arrests involving executives from construction consortiums building, among others, the third bridge and third airport in Istanbul was aborted later, simply by way of police declining to follow the orders of from the prosecutors. Around the same time, three ministers were resigned, and a cabinet reshuffling soon followed the suit.

Mr. Tayyip Erdoğan, (then-the Prime Minister, now-the President of Turkey) has consistently denied any wrong doing while portraying these operations as a 'dirty plot to deny Turkey its destiny', a work of those 'trying to usurp state power by tarring him with specious corruption investigation', 'attempting to derail Turkey's transformation', 'intending to operate a parallel state within the state', 'political plotting', a 'coup attempt' and a 'smear campaign', among others.

To make a long story short, it is safe to suggest that the year 2014 has witnessed the emergence of hectic political and prosecutorial agendas drawn to corruption probes and debates. A year-long, arduous period of all-out war between the government and the alleged-members of Hizmet (Service) Movement in the judiciary and the police was ensued soon after, including but not limited to a handful of legal-institutional changes passed by the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA) related to the judiciary and the police, in addition to dismissing or reassigning tens of thousands of police officers and top police chiefs, along with hundreds of prosecutors and judges, leveling later against the former group an array of allegations ranging from unauthorized wiretapping to compromising the national interest and security by spying for 'foreign forces.'

On the other hand, first, the newly-appointed chief prosecutor dropped the corruption case against all suspects including ministers, their relatives and businessmen in September 2014. The reasoning of decision was that previous prosecutors in the probe breached judicial procedures, and conducted unlawful wiretaps and physical surveillance in order to attempt to overthrow the government. Second, the investigation commission established to examine the graft allegations within the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA-Turkish Parliament) has phased out its work almost on pace with political cycle during 2014, while going through

overly-politicized sessions and occasional restrictions on making news out of its proceedings, has finally (to the surprise of only few) decided not to commit for trial four former ministers accused in a corruption investigation on January 5, 2015. A floor vote on January 20 2015 in the General Assembly of TGNA was in the same direction. Strictly speaking, both legislative-wise and in terms of judicial processing, the case seemed to get closed. Adding to these, is the fact that AKP and Mr. Erdoğan have won two elections last year, local elections held in March 2014 and the first-ever presidential election through a direct popular vote held in June, 2014.

Nevertheless, the jury is said to be still out in terms of political and popular argumentations giving the fact that 'corruption' and 'coup' claims have been hotly debated almost around the clock and around the corner across the country, largely in the shadows of the two primary parties to the conflict, old allies-turned-foes, Mr. Erdoğan and Mr. Gülen, (a self-exiled cleric living in the United States). While detailing and discussing different dimensions of the probes and ensuing events could be a charging yet a rewarding enterprise for the sake of grasping the intricacies and politics of corruption in Turkey, the central focus of the current paper is intended to be something else. The analysis of field research data conducted approximately a year before by this unit is the focus of this paper.

Toward that end, a rather short section about problem statement and relevance of the study will follow next. Then, information about the research methodology and participants of the field research will be provided. Thirdly, major findings from the study will be presented with the help of materials gleaned from the interviews conducted. Finally, the paper will end with a section involving discussion of research findings and a number of brief concluding remarks and reservations.

## **II- PROBLEM STATEMENT:**

Corruption is an endemic, entrenched, and enduring problem in Turkey. While political and popular debates about it have been intensified especially aftermaths of December 17-25, 2013 corruption scandals and ensuing probes, corruption as a topic of scientific inquiry has not attracted enough attention from the scholarly community. Maybe more importantly, the extant research on corruption and anticorruption has long remained limited to few researchers employing theories and tools developed by only a number of disciplines, including political science, public administration, and economics (e.g., Acar & Dede, 2013; Acar & Emek, 2009, 2008). The list of social science disciplines less present in corruption research in the country involves such prominent ones as sociology, psychology, and anthropology. For instance, it is intriguing to note that even those few scholarly works touching upon the corruption-culture connection have been written by researchers coming from the economics and public administration, and they have hardly employed an ethnographic approach (Özsemerci, 2003; Şarlak ve Bali, 2008). To say that there is a dearth of scholarly pieces written by researchers coming from those disciplines should not be considered as an overstatement. On the contrary, the lack of scholarly involvement by multi-disciplinary teams in corruption-related research in the country can be said to limit the wider and better understanding of the issues involved in and around corruption. In fact, socio-cultural dimensions and dynamics of corruption needs to be adequately addressed and carefully analyzed if we are to grasp the causes, consequences and continuation of

corruption cases across the society over the years. That is why the expertise and experience gleaned from ethnographic studies might prove to be significant in achieving just that (Torsello, 2011). The current paper can thus be construed as one of the early research efforts taken ethnographic perspectives and methodologies into account in conducting scientific research about corruption in Turkey.

As such, it aims to provide ethnographic evidence on main factors contributing to the 'resilience' of corruption in the country. Through the information and insight gained from a field study, perspectives and processes involved in attempts toward 'excusing', if not 'legitimizing', corrupt behaviors will be identified and analyzed. In other words, the widespread perception concerning the 'banality'/'normality' of corruption in the country's politics and administration will be described and analyzed along with their social and cultural roots and reflections. The emphasis will be on three problematic areas in which local perceptions and perspectives regarding the administrative-political dynamics seem to be not conducive for the designing and implementation of conventional anti-corruption policies in the country:

- a) The existence of various types of common practices in the country that are not seen as corrupt while they can be considered as corrupt (at least potentially);
- b) The role of social and cultural norms in the continuation of corruption in the country.
- c) The nature and extent of 'common excuses' or 'popular legitimizations' of corrupt tendencies and behaviors in politics and administration.

### **III-RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PARTICIPANTS:**

The research strategy used in this field study was largely determined by the main purpose of the study and the nature of research questions posed, as well as by the extant resources and constraints. The overarching purpose of the interview component of our field research has been to identify, describe, and evaluate the most critical issues and themes associated with corruption and anticorruption in the country. Therefore, through the interviews, a more explicit and extensive inquiry into different dimensions of corruption and anti-corruption was attempted by posing a set of rather direct questions to the participants consist of government officers, inspectors/auditors, politicians, entrepreneurs, anti-corruption activists, and so on.

#### **Selection of the Interview Questions and Sample:**

Once it was decided to conduct semi-structured interviews as part of the field research, the list of questions to be explored with the study participants has become an important issue. After close consultations and collaboration with ANTICORRP WP4 coordinator and colleagues, we have been able to determine the key themes and issues to be covered during the interviews. In the process of drafting the list of questions to be asked, we have greatly benefited from the content and style of sample questions provided by WP4 coordinator, by translating some of them directly into Turkish, while adopting others with small revisions and still adding up some new ones. All in all, the questions we have asked were grouped into nine key themes/issue areas.

In the process of selecting the interviewees, elite sampling or purposive sampling was used. In other words, once the main themes and issues to be explored during the interview

component of the field research has been determined, we have decided approaching to a certain group of people consisting of inspectors/auditors, representatives of nonprofit organizations, academicians, journalists, and so on, who were 'experiential experts' about particular experience and/or issue. That is to say, we have gone after certain individuals to recruit them for our study sample, based on the premise that since we have aimed to gain more information and insight, we have selected a sample from which we can learn the most. It is needlessly to add that, the chief researcher's professional background and personal connections were also critical in contacting and recruiting the participants for the interviews.

### **The Interviews and Informants:**

Fifty-five face-to-face interviews were conducted during the interview component of the fieldwork between December 2012 and March 2013. Except seven interviews, which were conducted in Istanbul, all the interviews were conducted in the urban districts of the Metropolitan Ankara. The duration of the interviews ranged from thirty minutes to two hours, a typical one lasting around sixty minutes.

As a general rule, face-to-face interviews were conducted one-on-one, with the ethnographer on the one side and an interviewee on the other. However, in three cases more than one interviewees were involved in the process, thus bringing the total of people interviewed to sixty. Fifty-three of the interviewees were males and there were seven females participating the interview sessions. The age range for the interviewed people was around thirty-five to fifty-five.

The people interviewed for the study were a highly educated group of experts in that all were college graduates, a significant portion of them also having or pursuing graduate degrees (masters and doctoral degrees). In addition, they were, in general, a professionally well-equipped and highly-experienced group. It is interesting to note here that some of the interviewees were wearing two hats, for example, being an auditor/inspector in a public organization *and* a representative of an association of inspectors/auditors at the same time.

As such, the following information about the interviewees reflect these dual roles, explaining as to why the total number of occupational/professional attributions reported below (seventy) is higher than the number of people interviewed (sixty).

- 24 Auditor Generals/Controllers/Inspectors
- 19 NGO-Association Representatives/Activists
- 9 Researchers/Academicians/Scholars
- 6 Businesspersons/Consultants
- 4 Journalists/Media Reporters
- 4 Politicians, including two MPs and two members of local municipal councils
- 2 Representatives from Judiciary (A Public Prosecutor and A Judge)
- 2 Public Managers

A great majority of the interviewees have showed a genuine interest in the study and have exhibited a highly cooperative attitude towards the ethnographer conducting the interviews. A clear indication for their willingness to contribute to the study is the fact that a great majority of them have given, without hesitation, their consent to the ethnographer to tape-

record the interviews, on the mutually agreed-upon understanding that their names and organizational affiliations would be kept anonymous, especially would not be matched with their specific responses related to certain cases, events, or names.

The interviewees have frequently dwelled on such issues as trust (and lack thereof), the nature of relations between the state and the citizenry, the connections among politics, bureaucracy, and corporate world, and importance of education and effective enforcement of rules in the context of corruption and anticorruption, albeit in varying degrees of detail and depth. While they differ in their perceptions, perspectives, and proposals regarding various dimensions of corruption and anticorruption, the interviewees have nonetheless offered a valuable set of information and ideas on a range of topics covered during the whole process. The interviews with some public inspectors/auditors working for the central government institutions were especially informative and insightful, due in most part to the fact that these participants were not only very knowledgeable about many legal-administrative issues concerning corruption, but also they were eager to share their experience and expertise about the 'real' scope and scheme of 'corrupt practices', including those usually kept in 'bottom drawer'.

#### **Conducting, Recording, Analyzing and Reporting the Interviews:**

The existence of an interview guide enabled the ethnographer to have more control over data gathering than would have been possible with an informal conversational or a free-fall qualitative interview approach. As alluded to earlier, while ethnographer was keen on asking quite similar (if not the same) questions to all participants, a carefully dosed flexibility was practiced over the course of interviews to avoid the rigidity so common in standardized approaches to interviewing. For example, whenever appropriate, probing questions were asked to encourage participants to elaborate on the thoughts and information put forth. In addition, when a lead was provided by a participant, it was utilized as an opportunity to pursue topics that were not anticipated beforehand, or to explore specific areas further.

Out of fifty-five face-to-face interviews conducted, forty-five of them were fully tape-recorded, of course after getting the consent of the participating individuals. As far as the remaining ten interviews are concerned, our analysis of them was mainly based on the notes taken during the interviews and the reporting done immediately after by the ethnographer. It is important note here that in a few of these cases, notes taken and provided by ethnographer *and* the supplementary documents provided by the interviewees involving their responses and comments related to the interview questions were brought and assessed together.

As any experienced researcher involved in a qualitative research effort would tell, it was a continuous, iterative enterprise where the research team have started developing some insights, even speculations beginning with the first set of interviews conducted or before. But, it was only after the whole interviewing has ended that the researchers were able to give their full attention to analysis and writing. The analysis of the interviews proceeded in the following steps. First, all audio-taped interviews were transcribed by two individuals into word processing documents. Thus, separate files were created for each and every participant. Second, to conduct a theme-based, issue-focused analysis, additional files were

developed bringing the participants' responses relevant to each of the nine main categories together. Thus, nine large word processing documents were created, each containing all responses from the participants to the questions falling into that specific category. This process helped provide local integration of the interview material. In the meantime, separate files were kept involving direct quotations gleaned from the interviews. Third, the coding categories for answers to the questions falling into the nine categories mentioned above were jointly discussed and developed. In many cases, this was a straightforward process, while others required a number of iterations before the coding categories were considered satisfactory in capturing the diversity and richness of the responses. The latter has thus involved more time-consuming debates and efforts before some agreed-upon and sufficiently descriptive categories emerged. Then, summary tables were produced based on the number of responses falling into each category. Finally, concerted and continuous efforts were made to obtain an inclusive integration of the interview material throughout the analysis, presentation, and discussion of the findings from this field research.

#### **IV. FINDINGS FROM THE FIELD RESEARCH:**

##### ***Common Practices, Not-So-Common Perspectives: How Corruption is Detected/Defined/Differentiated?***

As noted in the previous section, three major issues were selected for a closer look within content-wise scope of the current paper. The first one places the empirical emphasis on the challenge of drawing a boundary, at least tentatively, among different practices depending upon whether and how they were perceived along the continuum of legitimacy vis-à-vis corruption. In other words, with the help of a carefully worded question, the participants' perspective were sought after as to whether defining a list of common practices delicately bordering along the line of 'accepted'/'legitimized' versus 'rejected'/'reproached' is possible or not. Toward that end, the following question was directed to the study participants during the interviewing period of our field research: *What types of common practices are not seen as corrupt while they can be considered as corrupt (at least potentially)?*

Except for fourteen participants who were either not directly asked, or opted for not addressing the question at all, study participants have named at least one 'topic', while some of them throwing out as many as six different 'subjects' within the context of aforementioned question. It must be added that listening to diverging issues and examples brought up during the interviews were as illustrative as the hearing about converging, if not purely common, concerns and cases put forward by the participants. Lastly, it can be said that regardless of its content, length of the 'list' in and of itself informative, even intriguing, since it contains more than twenty different 'points' or 'themes'.

Despite a relatively high degree of variations exhibited throughout the context of this question, it was eventually possible to come up with some kind of clustering around most-frequently mentioned issues, or themes may be at the expense of ignoring one or two cites scattered across the interviews. Here is the top-ten list of 'common practices that are not

seen as corrupt while they can be considered as corrupt', with the frequency of mentions put in the parentheses:<sup>1</sup>

- Nepotism/Favoritism in Recruiting & Promoting in Public Sector (18)
- Gift Giving-Hospitality Practices Involving Public Employees & Managers (15)
- Waste, Extravagance & Misuse of Public Resources (14)
- Rent-Seeking Activities in City Planning & Zoning, Urban Development (13)
- Public Procurement, Purchasing & Privatization (11)
- 'Petty Corruption': Small Bribes & 'Facilitative Payments' (11)
- Using 'Middleman', 'Strongman', or 'Our man' (10)
- 'Legalized Corruption', Misuse/Abuse of 'Discretionary' Power (9)
- Influence Peddling (6)
- Conflict of Interest (4)<sup>2</sup>

Obviously, for many participants in this study the **first category** concerns, in some cases even the single-most important issue mirroring the essential elements of corruption, is related to the selection and/or promotion policies and practices of public organizations. Various Turkish words, such as '*iltimas*' (preferential treatment, patronage); '*kayırmacılık*' (favoritism); '*adam kayırma*' (favoring your man); and '*kadrolaşma*' (putting cronies/political fellows into bureaucratic positions) were interchangeably used by different participants to exemplify 'common practices' that are not seen as corrupt while they can be considered as corrupt'. According to one NGO representative:

"Favoritism, favoring your men is not perceived as corruption in Turkey. It is in fact the greatest corruption here. Why do I believe so? Well, let's assume that you purchase a train worth of one million dollars. Then, you give it to a machinist who does not have the required knowledge, skills. And then the train crashes, derails. What happened to your one million dollars? Gone! (...) If you put into bureaucratic positions not-so-smart ones, lazy ones, you are committing the biggest corrupt act against the state. Entrusting the task, the state, the people to someone incompetent, undeserving is the biggest corruption."

'Common practices' involving gifts, gift-giving, and gift-receiving constituted **the second** most-frequently mentioned area in the category under investigation. While a number of participants have brought up different dimensions and examples of the current concern, the following response from a scholar captures well some of the issues discussed therein:

"In this country, there has been always a culture of gift (*hediye kültürü*), a gifting culture (*hediyeleşme kültürü*) in our relations with the state. When you look at some examples from the past, you can see practices very

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to note here that the terms, or words used to describe and categorize the 'practices' mentioned by the participants do not necessarily reflect fully their exact legal or scholarly definitions since the primary concern of clustering and ensuing analysis is to present the information and insight provided by the interviewed as directly and diligently as possible.

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that a number of 'practices', brought up during the interviews by at least one participant in the context of this question (but not listed here) include widely-known types of corruption such as embezzlement and extortion. Nevertheless, the list gleaned from our field research also contains some other 'common practices' in Turkey that may or may not be frequently observable in other country contexts, or easily tractable by 'outsiders': 'obligatory' donations the students/their parents are forced to pay during registration in public high schools/universities; 'bıçak parası' (when strictly translated it means 'knife money'), which refers to 'extra' money doctors 'receive' from the patients when they go through a medical operation.

limited, well; you can see luxury gifts were not accepted. (...) I am talking here about the relations between people who have business with the public (agencies) and the managers who are up to the task. Traditionally, it was about bringing a sweet to them or taking them to a lunch/dinner. At the beginning, they looked very innocent, but overtime these have become a ritual. Today, we are seeing, hearing a lot ... if there is a (public) tender, there is going to be a dinner in a luxury place before the tender. Why is it so? For obvious reasons. That is the purpose. The things talked about, dealt there ... they have become a tradition and a ritual in our society. I mean, the society got used to it. Also socially, everybody has started seeing this event as normal.”

**The third** category of ‘common practices’ is about wasting, or otherwise misusing of public resources (money, men, materials, and so on) assigned to public officers, which time to time ascends to the extravagance, splurge exhibited by them. The latter is frequently referred to as ‘sultanate in public’ (*kamuda saltanat*). At a minimum, it involves unnecessary, unwise deployment of public resources, which might easily turn into more ominous decisions and acts at the expense of public at large. A university administrator explains some subthemes as follows:

“We do not perceive public resources as something entrusted to us, something we should preserve and protect (...) We tend to use both public resources and public authority with a complete arbitrariness. Immediately after becoming a state employee, going to the other side of the table from here, she/he perceives herself/himself as the owner of the state. This comes from our bureaucratic tradition. They think they can do whatever they desire to do so. Alas, there is not such a thing! They need to use public resources and power to produce services properly, instead of creating jobs for someone. We are not there yet as a society. I have been administrator for the last two years. We are contracting-out services, such as cleaning, and security ... A lot of people, a lot of names come to or call us...(They refer many names for consideration) ‘Well, he is a lonely guy, she is so poor, they are needy’ and so on. In the end, you fail to voice this: ‘Hey, here is not a foundation for social solidarity!’”

Rent-seeking activities in urban planning and development, as well as decisions and actions related to city zoning policies, building codes, and so on constituted **the fourth** subheadings in the context of ‘yet-to-be-considered-commonly-as-corrupt’ issues. According to an investigative journalist:

“Despite the fact that a huge urban rent created via (frequent, undue) changes in city plans, ordinances, it is not perceived as corruption in the society. People say ‘there has been an empty land there, they have changed its status, and they constructed a building on it. What is wrong with it?’. People see it that way. That is how corruption involving urban rent-seeking does not trigger any reaction from the society, I think.”

**The fifth** category of ‘common practices’ include public procurement, purchasing, and privatization. For some participants, that is what lies at the heart of the corruption in the country, albeit the fact that these incidents are rarely counted as corruption for a variety of reasons. One journalist has sharply criticized the ‘irregularities’ and ‘smokes coming out of’ existing public procurement/purchasing system in the country as follows:

“I do not trust much public organizations doing a big chunk of public tenders and purchases. There exists an array of irregularities, even if some of them cannot be called as outright corruption. There has always been partisanship and favoritism in this country, but it was never so widespread before. Today, you cannot see much the name of once big contractors of the past, they redirected their business to somewhere else, they take their investments to new areas other than public tender in part because, it is almost impossible for them to get government contracts, in fact it is quite difficult for anybody to do business with government other than those have close ties, cozy relationships with the ruling party (AKP-Justice and Development Party). (...) When such an exceptional thing occurs, then they make the life very tough for that company, they exert mobbing on them,

for example by (unnecessarily, indefinitely) delaying their progress payments, and so on, they chase them until the very end, until they quit, go out of business.”

The item **number six** in the list of ‘common practices that are not seen as corrupt while they can be considered as corrupt’ might easily be called as a ‘usual suspect’, given the widely-debated nature of the topic in academic and political circles for a long time. It seems that some of the participants of the current study cite small amount of bribes, facilitative payments as examples of actions not considered as corruption by the society at large, while they should be called as such, indeed. An illustrative example can be found in the following words belong to an auditor: “Small payments in the office of land registry, for example. They are viewed, perceived as normal, ordinary things to get things done, to accelerate the process. (...) These types of things have long been ‘normalized’, many people are no longer at odds with them.”

**Seventh**, for a number of study participants, a combination of discretionary power and purposely designed regulations can create ample opportunities for corruption, even without carrying high risk of getting detected, let alone get tried and punished. A member of parliament from one of the opposition parties explains why he sees ‘legalized corruption’ as the most ominous among many types of corruption widely observable in the country:

“If you look at it system-wise, I consider the most dangerous thing as ‘developing regulations and institutional structures’ paving the way for corruption. (...) For instance, if you introduce a law related with telecommunication through which you lift all the checks there, if you remove all the tendering rules, then the corruption can go well beyond a single case, it eventually becomes a common rule, it settles down there, stays there long after you have made that change. (...) Nowadays, the path for corruption gets cleaned via regulations. This is the most dangerous type. There a lot of examples out there, showing how through legal initiatives, through introducing a single legal exception, corruption is turned upside down and gets legitimized”

The focus of **the eighth** subgroup has to do with reflections about state-citizen relations. The nature of many interactions occurring almost on a daily basis between public organizations and ordinary citizens cannot always be defined as effective or easy. On the contrary, as the number and complexity of public service units and transactions increase, so does the difficulty surrounding ordinary citizens for getting their hands into public organizations, fully grasping their structures, rules, plans, and so on. That is where a middleman or a strongman gets involved to facilitate the things a bit, accelerate the processes, and so on. According to some study participants, these types of involvement, even interference in public affairs, are not considered as corruption in the Turkey, which should indeed be counted as nothing more than ‘a bit different’ incident of corruption. An inspector working for a government organization explains it this way:

“We all know what is going on. Call it favoritism, nepotism, or corruption, whatever. It is something we all benefit from, as long as it is working for us, right? Why? Because, I want to solve my problem, I would like to get ahead of you in what we do. For instance, I am searching for somebody, calling an acquaintance before going to see a doctor. (...) You are going to get housing permit, there are a lot of things going on there, an array of transactions, regulations, those kinds of stuff. What are you going to do? You look for the help, you demand support from a friend, a relative to help you out, to get things done for you.”

In the subcategory **number nine**, six participants have cited ‘influence peddling’ among the types of actions that were not considered corruption in the country, despite its corrupt dimensions. One academician working on public ethics and corruption has lamented on the situation as follows:

“We usually call what we see as embezzlement. There are specific provisions about it in criminal codes. They have sanctions embedded therein. Nevertheless, there are some other things leading towards corruption, things that are not-so-visible, detectable, some supportive, facilitative elements. For instance, influence peddling, we do not see it much, despite it exists widely, in part because its detection is difficult. But we know it very clearly and say ‘he has the power and does that, she has the influence and gets this done.’ In fact, this is the most widespread thing.”

**Finally**, for four interviewees, ‘conflict of interest’ is yet to get a closer public scrutiny as occurrences of corruption. Beyond that, many participants suggested a diverse set of behaviors/actions to be included in the list of ‘common practices that are not seen as corrupt while they can be considered as corrupt’, in addition to those have already cited above. Among them are:

- Political use/abuse of social assistance programs to manipulate the political preferences/votes of the poor folks;
- Tolerating the building of many *gecekondus* (shanty houses, slams) on public lands in and around metropolitan cities;
- Almost automated overtime payments made to some public servants regardless of whether they actually worked those extra hours;
- Frequent pardons issued by subsequent governments lifting/discounting taxes, traffic fines;
- The use/abuse of public vehicles by public employees and/or their family members for private purposes/travels;
- Imposing on private individuals or companies ‘donations’ to public organization-affiliated ‘quasi-foundations’ to get a service, license or government contract; specific versions of which involve ‘encouraging’ government contractors to ‘donate’ to some foundations/associations preferred by politicians & bureaucrats;
- Selective enforcement of rules to sanction not-so-friendly media companies;
- Actions or transactions involving certainly a type of favoritism wherein the actors committing to them do not get monetary/material benefits;
- Gift cards, free vacations, and other promotional benefits provided by the drug companies/distributors to medical doctors; and
- Goodies, extractions (sometimes amounting to extortions!) attached to transactions of private companies doing business with public agencies and municipalities.

It is fair to say that the participants have presented a strong case and ample amount of evidence, exemplifying the existence of a set of perspectives and practices that seem to make the boundaries between corrupt and not-so-corrupt behaviors/actions much porous and problematic. These findings can also be interpreted as the nature of challenge vis-à-vis describing, detecting, and deterring corruption in such a country context.

### ***The Role of Social and Cultural Norms in the Existence and Endurance of Corruption:***

One of the main issues our field research aimed to deal with has to do with the question of whether and to what extent social-cultural norms influence the existence/endurance of corrupt behaviors in political and administrative system of the country. In order to gather information and insight on this issue, the following question was directed to the study participants during the interviews: *Do you think that persistence of corruption has a cultural explanation? For instance, what is the role of social and cultural norms in continuation of corruption?*

Approximately two-third of the respondents opted for an answer that in one way or another paves the way for assigning a role for social-cultural norms in understanding the continuation of corruption in the country. While three participants vehemently oppose the idea of relating the existence/endurance of corruption to socio-cultural norms, responses from four participants were highly ambivalent/ambiguous to dwell on, which were eventually left out of current analysis. Having said this, it is important to note here that those choosing the answer the question affirmatively (i.e., giving a role to socio-cultural norms in explaining corruption), presented their perspectives regarding 'cultural explanation' in such a wide window, definitely deserving a careful categorization and commentary in and of itself.

Leaving aside such short affirmative answers as *"yes, definitely."*, *"of course, without cultural support, corruption cannot endure so long."*, *"yes, cultural dimension is important"*, *"I believe cultural-social norms facilitate corruption."*, a great majority of responses put out in the context of this question, can be divided into four major categories. Chief among them are the ones emphasizing the formation-deformation of socio-cultural patterns (and pathologies) in the long run. One of the public auditors used an interesting metaphor to explain his position on the issue:

*"I tend to think of corruption as a systematic concept. Corruption is not one-shot thing. It is like a vampire tied into the arteries of public in a regular and continuous basis. (...) I am talking about the thing we are struggling against, called corruption; a giant monster. The most dangerous of it is the one that exhibits continuity, even establishing congruence/conformity with some moral values, furthermore legalized type of corruption."*

The response from another participant also highlights the long-term perspective of culture:

*"A pattern of behavior, both in the individuals and societies cannot be formed overnight, it is a product of many years, even centuries (...) Consciousness about corruption, culture of corruption is not a product of one day, one month, or a year: It is accumulation of many years, even centuries."*

In other words, some participants tend to attribute the continuation of corruption in the country to some historical-cultural roots, evidenced in such cultural artifacts as idioms, sayings, slangs, and so on. If there is no socio-cultural dimension, the reasoning goes, how come does the society have so many expressions, idioms, sayings etc. related with corruption, many of which confirm, if not condone or commend, corrupt characters/behaviors? For instance, a former local council member currently working as customs consultant asserts that:

"It (bribing) was widespread during the Ottoman Era, and was not much treated as abnormal, almost the same can be said about today; it means that it is ingrained in this culture. If you are in a position to receive a bribe and you decline it, you might be considered as fool."

Interestingly enough, some participants have mentioned this line from Fuzuli, one of the greatest Azeri-Turkish poets, who had lived between late 15<sup>th</sup>. Century, until 1556: "*Selam verdim, rüşvet değildir diye almadılar*: I have given salute, but they have not received it because it was not a bribe." Other examples frequently given in this context include the following:

"*Minareyi çalan, kılıfını hazırlar*: Who steals the minaret will have a cover ready (the devil looks after his own)";

"*Devletin malı deniz, yemeyen domuz*: Common goods/ public property are open to everyone: one that doesn't steal is stupid/pig";

"*Bal tutan parmağını yalar*: One holding the honey jar licks his/her finger (Who has something to do with a big deal will always draw some benefit)";

"*Kaz gelecek yerden, tavuk esirgenmez*: Don't hold on to your chicken if you are to receive a goose in return (Throw out a sprat to catch a mackerel)".

Equally, if not more, important is the political-administrative aspects of socio-cultural norms and their influence on state-citizen relations. Many participants have tended to explain the existence/endurance of corruption in the country through some components of dominant political-administrative culture inherited from 'our predecessors'. In the words of one participant working for an NGO:

"There is highly authoritarian, statist, and centralized political-administrative structure in this country. (...) The mutual positioning of state and society is a lot different from the West. (...) We have a strong political culture based on glorification, even deification of the state. People pay a significant amount of taxes in this country. They should have a more say about what the state has done or will do (...) because, it is not just related with corruption, but it also is the essence of democracy."

Similarly, an academician compares the administrative culture of East and West, and attributes the 'arbitrariness' frequently found in the former to the cultural artifacts:

"Remember, I have mentioned before, Farabi, Eastern Tradition, where ruling is closely identified with the ruler. In other words, nobody says 'let's establish a good system so that regardless of who comes to power, it functions well'. We are not much worried about it. We have kept thinking and talking that 'rulers should be fair'; we have always hoped that with a just ruler, everything is going to be fine. We have always dwelled on this idea; we have connected this idea/ideal to a single person, which is prime minister, nowadays. (...) We have taken some systems from the West, but culturally still are attributing many great responsibilities to a grand persona. (...) Then comes this leadership culture and the leaders' perceiving of ownership of the entire country, arbitrary (whimsical) use of their power in all areas left to their responsibility."

Echoing similar sentiments, an inspector dwells on the 'historical background' of corruption as it relates to the 'state tradition' in Turkey:

"We know that Turkish state tradition is based on a Patrimonial perspective. It is quite different from Weberian legal-rational bureaucracy developed in the West. The latter requires patrimonial relations, which means that you get protection in exchange for obedience. This bureaucratic culture inherited from the Ottoman Empire into Turkish Republic continues to assert itself even today. (...) If you look at the foibles of Turkish bureaucracy in terms of being vulnerable to corruption, you can see a clan culture, favoritism based on origins, regions, and

so on ... these frailties, I think, create an atmosphere for corruption, such an environment stimulates, lashes corrupt behaviors.”

The **second** category can be defined as “mixing and mingling of past and present”, or “continuation of some old traditions in new forms and formats”. Responses placed in this category do not lend themselves to an easy identification with neither the past, nor the present: They are evolving around past, as much as they point out the perceptions regarding realities of today. In other words, perspectives were divided even among themselves between continuities and discontinuities. For instance, an experienced public auditor sees a problem in the way people not seeing a problem in benefitting/profitting from the common resources, resources of the state:

“In my opinion, getting something extra from the state, receiving freebies from the state is perceived, by and large, perfectly normal. Therefore, we should change this perception culturally. (...) Because of the prevalent view of the state, picking and stealing something from the state isn’t necessarily conceived as such a bad thing. This belief should be wiped out. Otherwise, this is turned into a very wrong building stone/infrastructure for future corrupt behaviors.”

Similarly, a scholar explains how the tradition of largess (*baksheesh, or bahşiş*) might turn into something else:

“There is a baksheesh tradition here. We like tipping the people who serve us. Culturally it is something common, prevalent. Nevertheless, if this turns around and becomes something of ‘handing out gratuities everywhere’, then it gets out of hand. (...) When the person who is accustomed to leaving a tip for waiters in a restaurant does the same thing when he/she goes to office of land registry, then the things go out of hand, go out of control. That is why I am insisting that something is rooted in our culture; something comes way back from our cultural traditions.”

A subcategory identifiable within the second category brings together perspectives reflecting upon the ongoing changes or clashes in the social-cultural norms. According to one academic:

“There is no corruption in our traditional culture, per se. Nevertheless, during the transition period from feudalism to capitalist system, those traditional norms and values have been severely attacked as ‘old-fashion’, or ‘outdated’ for the sake of capital accumulation which resulted in their collapse, paving way for spreading out of corruption. Thus, those values that were not causes corruption in the past have overtime become a feeding pipe for contemporary corruption. “

A real-estate company owner makes a similar observation, underlying the changes in the system: “Eyeing for more popular votes, some politicians have overtime turned other way many times when illegal practices occurred. Pardoning of irregularities-illegalities, favoritism, partisanship etc., many practices, have brought along cultural degeneracy, corruption.”

A state auditor puts her opinion on the matter as follows:

“Cultural and social norms are influential in continuation of corruption. (...) For instance, demanding or receiving bribes, or getting privilege might become a social rule. In such an atmosphere, those with ill-gotten gains are received as smart and business-savvy, while those persons getting by with probity and integrity can be called as not-so-savvy, or even fool.”

According to another public auditor:

“Certainly, there is cultural explanation for the continuation of corruption. In my view, corruption might start with economic, political, and psychological ... reasons, but its continuation or increase does not stem from the same reasons. If the cultural environment and the widely-held values condemn corruption, it is less likely that corruption survives therein, let alone increasing. If there is structure wherein the sense of justice and fairness prevails, it is more than likely that corruption remains a minor issue.”

An inspector/investigator working for one of line ministries has also emphasized the changing nature of ‘the cultural’, and its relations with the notion of fair-just society:

“You cannot prevent corruption when your moral values are eroded, your system moves haltingly, and thief & inauspicious became coveted persons! The main problem is to establish a society which shares fairly and justly. If people do not believe that haves did get what they have fairly, then you cannot convince those folks in living and behaving fairly, justly. This is indeed a very simple rule.”

The responses falling into the **third** major category, on the other hand, consist of a much broader set of perceptions about the culture in general, and its relations with corruption in specific. For instance, some respondents equate culture with the level of economic development and democracy, and then attribute the existence of corruption in the country to the lack of one or another, or both. Inputs such as *“Of course, it (corruption) is something related with the level of culture. You cannot see such a thing in civilized countries.”*, or *“There is no corruption in those countries that have advanced democracies”* exemplify these kind of opinions. In a similar line, some participants pointed out the diverging performances of similar, if not same, institutions established across various countries (e.g., across EU member and candidate countries), which they claim is easily attributable to variations in social-cultural norms and values. Still others cite the importance of such factors as the level of illiteracy in the society, the rise of consumption culture, the degenerating/degrading of traditional cultural values in connection with the influence of social-cultural factors on the existence or continuation of corruption in Turkey. Finally, a number of participants suggest tracing back of some corruption-related occurrences in today’s Turkish Society to ‘Toy’ tradition in old-Turkic communities and ‘pillage culture’ of nomads. Similarly, there were those who attributed the modern-day corruption to ‘Oriental slyness and laziness’, along with ‘fatalistic’ or ‘community-oriented, collectivist’ nature of Turkish culture, as opposed to individualistic culture prevalent in the West.

As mentioned at the beginning of this subsection, three of the study participants did not join the rest in conceiving a role for social and cultural norms in the existence and/or continuation of corruption. One of them, a public inspector has reasoned that: *“Perception of corruption begins when cultural and social norms start losing their values.”*, A scholar working on ethics, on the other hand, has taken a critical stance on the issue:

“Cultural and social norms never say ‘go, get corrupted!’. They direct people to just to do otherwise. Well, when we mention ethical values, sometimes the audience starts muttering, asking why I haven’t given much examples from Turkish-Islamic tradition and history. My brother, you had already forgotten them; if you observe them in your life and practice, then there is no need for this ethics stuff to be on our agenda! We put those (verses, sayings etc.) on the wall as nice slogans, we put them into our speech, but when we do our job, we still look after our interests.”

The third 'opposing' person, a state auditor, has the following words to explain his position on the matter:

"Obviously, I do not want to attribute it to difficult-to-change factors such as culture and traditions. I find that the explanation being rather more robust than the problem (corruption) is because the system is established this way. This type of reasoning is also more optimistic, since implicit in it the idea that if we direct correctly, if we do right things, it is not such an unchangeable thing!"

To sum up, a significant portion of the study participants tend to think that social and cultural norms exert influence in the existence and/or endurance of corruption. Yet, the participants differ widely on such matter as defining the components of the culture, the ways, means, and degrees of influencing, and so on. That is why the opinions and comments of the study participants vis-à-vis the role of social and cultural norms in the conceiving and/or continuation of corruption in the country have examined in four different yet related categories.

### ***Toward Normalization & Banalization of Corruption? Ways and Means of Excusing, Justifying, or Legitimizing It!***

The third major theme of the current paper resonates with, but goes well beyond, the perspectives and positions presented in the two previous subsections. In fact, the information and insight provided by the participants in response to one specific question bring together some additional ethnographic evidence that might be knitted into the already presented ones to help seeing the whole picture better. The main question directed to the interviewees in this context read as follows: *How is corruption in the country legitimated/legitimized?* The question was intended to understand thoughts and opinions of the study participants as to whether and to what extent corruption is explained and justified. May be more importantly, the issue of how, through what kind of 'reasoning' and 'explanation', or 'excusing' corrupt behaviors happened to get normalized and banalized proved to be very crucial along the whole process.

Apparently, responses such as "Well, I doubt that corruption is directly and completely legitimized at all."; "It is legitimized through individuals' conscious."; "Corruption in Turkey is legitimized through assembling/covering it with materials that are reminiscent of good, nice things."; "Thieves do think of their actions in a negative perspective, they always find a justification for what they do." do not lend themselves to any kind of easy categorization, or meaningful analysis. Nevertheless, it was possible in the end to identify six distinct yet somehow related subcategories upon a careful analysis of the responses collected from the related parts of the interview materials.

**The first category** is named after a popular expression increasingly used in Turkey (especially after corruption scandals of December 2013): "*Çalıyorlar ama çalışıyorlar.*" (They are stealing but they are working). It refers to the notion that those in power are indeed involved in corruption, yet, they are performing well, provide for the populace, then, it is OK. Said differently, at least some segments of the society are not much worried about corruption of the rulers, as long as they overall run the country, city, company and so on, effectively, productively. Many participants, one way or another, have pointed out this short, yet increasingly popular saying in their responses. For instance, a manager of an NGO specialized

in anticorruption explains the situation from his perspective as follows:

*“My brother, the man eats but he is also working. The general attitude of the society is like that. This is a bad approach, indeed. In this way, they accept your corruption, bribery, misuse etc. from the very beginning. He can rip off when he gets things done, or he can steal, so long as he does the job.”*

Another participant, an inspector/investigator working for a central organization has lamented that:

*“People culturally legitimize corruption, so to speak, by tolerating, if not vehemently defending some certainly dishonest people on the grounds that they are producing; they are performing well, although the latter are working for themselves. That is the biggest woe, in my opinion.”*

A journalist reflects upon a similar thinking:

*“The logic of ‘Well brother, this man is getting things done. I do not care if he steals.’ He is well-rooted in the society, anyhow. (...) Managers can also serve with honesty. However, there is no such an expectation in the society. Bring the service to me, however you do it, I do not pay attention to it.”*

It suffices here to put as the last example the views of an MP from an opposition party:

*“They see that those in power are stealing, but in part because they are also benefitting from it in the form of getting food assistance, free coal for heating, and so on, they do not file a petition for complaining, they do not hold them to account. There is even this widely held rumor (view) ‘Well, what we can do? Others before them have also stolen. They, (the current ones), are at least sharing (giving out) some of it.”*

**The second** major category of responses can be defined as **‘corruption-in-rotation’**, or **‘corruption shift’**. It refers to a mindset, or a perspective about the use of (discretionary) power to please ‘our’ family & friends first. It is rooted mainly in a particularistic world view, reflecting a certain dose of favoritism. What might be considered as new here is the evidence showing its widespread existence in the minds and hearts of some people when it comes to ‘excuse’, or ‘justify’ even outright corruptive attitudes and behaviors. The thinking proceeds somewhat like this: *‘It is our turn. Therefore, we have the right to expect from ‘our party’/‘our government’ some special, preferential treatment. ‘They’ have discriminated against us in the past. Thus, we now need to benefit from some positive discrimination. That is how governments are run and things get done here; do not be shy about it!’* Of course, this hypothetic paragraph does not necessarily fully reflect the calculated logic of people’s involvement in or tolerance for corruption. Yet, it was intended to help visualizing the proxy picture developed based on the information and insight shared during the interviews. Below are two sets of excerpts from interviews with two auditors/inspectors working for two different public organizations:

*“When those, who think that they were insulted/injured in the past because of their ideological/political affiliations, come to the power start asserting that the disadvantages they had to incur in their past should be removed. They think: we were treated unjustly in the past, we have faced a lot of negativities, therefore, you should now find ways of doing positive discrimination for us. For example, you can find this kind of situation across the municipalities. We heard some local council members squeeze mayors about this, saying that ‘you should first protect us, take care of us, allow us involve in some corruption so we can get to the point zero, until we can come to a normal point, then we can act/ behave fairly. Yet, that point zero, breakeven point is never seized, never reached.”*

“The society see it almost an entitlement deserved for those in the power. ‘If they are in power, they would bring along their men, they would give priority to their cronies, why should they work with others?’ We say, brother, what if the other guys are more qualified, more experienced for those tasks? They reply, ‘that is not important. Things move alone, anyway. State is not collapsing, it will not collapse, do not worry too much about it’.”

**The third category** of excuses or justifications might be called as ‘**combination of need and greed**’, or ‘**company of the needy and greedy**.’ Alternatively, it can be called as ‘nitty-gritty of anticorruption’ partly because responses falling into this category point to the dynamics of or the driving forces behind the sustaining of corruption in the country. These dynamics bring people from very bottom of the society along with those in higher echelons together, as if they have formed a coalition for abstaining from openly arguing against corruption, even getting involved in it, individually or as a group. The following response from a scholar, for example, points to the not-so-desirable salaries of public employees:

“Government does not give me sufficient/satisfactory salary, then, what will I do? Am I going to live starving? How about my family, my children? Well, I would do it (corruption) as well. Or, he/she looks around and says: ‘those on the top are doing it’, ‘if they do so, then I would do it.’ Legitimization usually works its course something like this. (...) ‘Even pious people are involved in it. They might be reasoning this way: ‘Come on man, those on the top, whom I can relate to/associate with, are doing just this. They must know something (better than me).’”

A state auditor, on the other hand, emphasizes how a different kind of coalition can be formed between some citizens and politicians:

“Citizens already think it as their rights to get something from the state. Therefore, citizens do not consider politicians’ or bureaucrats’ involvement in corruption—unless it is really too big, outrageous—as big deal, because they themselves are somewhat in it. For example, forty, fifty percent of residential estates do not have proper licenses, permits.”

Key responses grouped into **the fourth category** highlight economic growth, urbanization, and political changes witnessed in Turkey in the last decade or so, and emphasize the need for patience, even a bit of tolerance when it comes to corruption. In other words, what some participants have said is tantamount to arguing for this: during what might be called as ‘**period of transition and transformation**’, people should not get so though on corruption, a certain degree of lenience, even mercy might be useful. As put one of the participants: *“It (corruption) gets legitimized, because...I will return to the point I have been making earlier. It is Turkey’s developing country status, cravings of people for wealth. That is the main reason.”* A corollary to the fourth category mentioned here, (or may be a subgroup within it) is a more conservative, ‘ethereal’ version of ‘lenience’ or silence (if not outright support) toward corruption. One of the chief inspectors working for a central government board of inspection has put growingly prevalent attitude of this kind in this way:

“There is this ascertainment made by some people involved in a religious congregation (*cemaat*) that ‘We used to be busy with (worshipping) praying through rosary, now we are counting/calculating money.’ Why? Because, they want to provide (members of) their congregation (*cemaat*) with better conditions, standards of living. There is nothing wrong with it, it is not necessarily corruption, *per se*. But what if these guys set aside some public contracts for this purpose. Is it still not corruption? Well, they tend to legitimize this by arguing that ‘it is not enough to be strong faith-wise, you should also be strong in materialistically (money-wise) as well!’”

**The fifth category** emerges from the interviews as to create/confirm the mundane, everyday occurrence of corruption as a common, widely happening thing, which in turn contributes to banality, normality of it. Briefly told, a type of reasoning, or an escape clause employed by some people can be presented something like 'since it is everywhere, since everybody does it, then there is nothing extraordinary, nothing to be worried or be shameful about it!'. Responses from various participants such as the following point to the widespread use of some justification/excuse on the way towards normality/banality of corruption: *"First of all, there is this view of 'Well, I am not the only one doing it, **everybody does it.**' Let's assume that you are getting middleman when you are recruiting, everybody does just that, it is perfectly normal." It is everywhere partly because some people start thinking like 'everybody does it, why should not I?' then the sector gets growing!"* According to an investigative journalist: *"It gets accumulated, massive. Then, it gets legitimized, nobody reacts against it. That is what is going on in Turkey now. There is an unbelievable insensitivity (indifference) towards corruption, some of the people do not react because they are sick and tired of it, and others remain silent because they are benefitting from it. Thus, nothing changes, everything remains the same."*

**The sixth category** involves a critical stance toward the way corruption-related issues and debates are subsided, hid from the public at large by those in power. In other words, some participants have harshly criticized the increasing polarization among people along political-ideological lines lest this allows the current ruling elites to conceal, even cover-up their corrupt policies and practice. For example, a retired journalist maintains that:

*"Consequences of corruption bear heavily on the economy, on the polity, and on the morality as well. (...) you can take the society to a point where your one shot alcoholic drink is perceived as a big perverseness, whereas stealing the orphan's share is absolutely not considered as something against morality and religion. (...) People might start paying more attention to the former, instead of the latter. Polarization, manipulating the masses and some other illusions are thus desperately needed for the sake of maintaining system, of keep the wheel working."*

## V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As stated at the very beginning of this article, the current study, on which this paper is based, can be considered as one of the initial research efforts attempting to utilize ethnographic approaches toward better understanding of local perceptions and perspectives regarding different dimensions of corruption in Turkey. Although our field research in its entirety has covered as many as nine broad thematic areas, our main focus here was on three different but related research issues.

First, our study has attempted to see whether and how definitions and delineations regarding corrupt behaviors are 'rightly' understood and 'widely' accepted in the larger society. In other words, we have intended to assess the existence/non-existence of various types of common practices in the country that are not seen a corrupt while they should be considered as corrupt. The findings indicate that there exist a wide-range of practices in the country that were not collectively treated as such. As detailed in the previous section, the study participants have pointed out altogether more than twenty such practices. In the order of frequency, favoritism in recruitment and promotion of public employees, practices

regarding gifts and hospitality, and wasting, misusing public resources have topped the list, the rest are following them in a descending order. It is reasonable to claim that the length and content of the list might be interpreted as a strong signal as to the porous and problematic nature of the boundaries between corrupt and not-so-corrupt behaviors/actions in the society. Alternatively, it might be suggested that an array of corrupt practices have become so well ingrained in many different sectors and institutions of the state and society to such an extent that they are no longer treated with any kind of public outrage, to say the least. Furthermore, the emergence of this kind of a list, in and on itself, can be conceived as an alarming indication toward the treatment of many corrupt acts at least in some circles of the society as 'open secrets', *"(S)ecrets in the sense that they are excluded from formal or official discourse; but they are open in the sense that they are familiar and referred to in idioms and language games, though these often require explanation for outsiders."* (Ledeneva, 2011: 725, original italics).

It must also be noted here that some of the items listed in the scope of the issue under investigation (e.g., favoritism in recruitment and promotion of public employees, corruption in public tenders and purchasing, and corrupt behaviors involving urban development/city planning) were also highly rated in the context of another question whose responses were not materialized in the preparation of the current paper, namely 'most common and costly forms of corruption in the country'. This is an intriguing finding in the sense that same issues/sectors were pointed out by the same group of participants in two different occasions during the interviews. One way of interpreting this could be such that the people in our study sample are decidedly pointing to a number of corruption-ridden areas in the country, emphasizing nonetheless the possibility that majority of people in the country may not see the things in the same way as the 'experts' do. Another way of looking at this finding is to treat it as yet another evidence of 'mixing and mingling of' boundaries between formal and informal on one hand, and between corrupt behaviors and legitimate interest-seeking activities, on the other.

Secondly, our study has aimed to understand whether and to what degree the people in our sample envision a role for dominant social and cultural norms of the society vis-à-vis corruption in the country. It is safe to assert that a great majority of the interviewees tended to assign a crucial role for social and cultural norms in the existence and/or continuation of corruption in the country. While the study participants have differed in their definitions and discussions regarding the scope and content of 'social-cultural norms', they have nonetheless been keen on attributing a rather bleak role, sometimes even pivotal culpability to the extant social and cultural norms and values. The overall picture emerging from the interviews as to the role of social and cultural dimensions of corruption cannot and should not be seen as a bright one. Worry-some signals should especially be saved for those vehemently defending anticorruption policy proposals that are heavily, if not exclusively, focus on legal-institutional tools and tactics in preventing or reducing corruption. In other words, widely-held assumptions about corruption and frequently employed approaches toward anticorruption originating from principal-agent theories may not be effective in country contexts such as the one under investigation (cf. Persson et al. 2012). It is not to suggest that those theories and approaches currently dominating academic and policy circles were negated by our findings, or there is no room for improving legal-institutional framework of anticorruption in the country. It is to say that more broadly defined sets of

theoretical perspectives (including ethnographic, sociological and historical ones) and a better nuanced and contextualized anticorruption approaches and policies should be brought to the table in the future debates and designs (cf. Torsello, 2011).

Thirdly, we have inquired about the extent of ‘banalization-normalization’ tendencies of corrupt behaviors in the country by way of delving into local ‘excuses’ or ‘explanations’, that might be tantamount to ‘justifying’ or ‘legitimizing’ such behaviors in the society over the course of a certain period. It was possible to cluster into six sub categories the majority of responses from the study participants to the main question of *‘how is corruption in the country legitimated/legitimized?’*. While some the response categories can be treated as widely observable many country contexts, almost universally, others might better be considered as more if not purely country, or context-specific. For instance, it is more than likely that a process of normalization or banalization of corruption centered on the ‘everybody does it’ type of justification might be said to exist in many different countries or cultural contexts. If in a country ‘any self-interested actor’ would reason like: ‘well, if everybody seems corrupt, why shouldn’t I be corrupt’, then it is reasonable to suggest that *“in a context in which corruption is expected behavior, monitoring devices and punishment regimes should be largely ineffective since there will simply be no actors that have incentive to hold corrupt officials accountable.”* (Persson et al. 2012: 9). Similarly, the use and misuse of low salaries of public servants in explaining, even excusing their involvement in corruption has long been in circulation across different polities and policies, although social-cultural contexts and practices may significantly differ in terms of how it has been conceived and communicated commonly.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, it can be reasonably argued that some of the categories identified in the previous section within the context of normalizing-legitimizing corruption reflect a high degree of culture/country specific tones. It is interesting to note, for example, that the expression *“Çalıyorlar ama çalışıyorlar.”* (They are stealing but they are working) has been in use for years, nonetheless its visibility (and viability) has increased after 2013 corruption scandals. A quick online search with the help of existing search engines would reveal the wide-ranged use of this now-common expression across mainstream journalistic pieces as well as popular social media outlets. Similarly, some elements of the views and anecdotes presented within the scope of second, fourth and sixth categories identified above are very much traceable in the political and popular debates intensified in the last fourteen months or so. For example, the use-misuse of political fragmentation and polarization in the context of corruption claims and counterclaims were in fact heavily involved ‘rationales’/‘excuses’ that were previously identified and discussed by some of our study participants during the interviews we have conducted.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> One of the studies cited earlier has utilized a local expression commonly used by public employees in Turkey as one of the ‘evidences’ of ‘cultural ‘infrastructure’ in the country: *‘Bu kadar maaşa bu kadar iş’*, which can be roughly translated to English language as ‘So much work for this much salary’. Özsemerci, 2005, s. 10-11.

<sup>4</sup> At this point, it might be interesting to translate a related piece from a local newspaper. The columnist Ahmet Hakan asks in his column today this question: Why are they (conservative muslims) so silent in the face of corruption? He continues as follows: “The other day, it was asked in a setting: ‘Why religious folks who should scream against corruption are so speechless? (about it recently)’ I said ‘there are two hundred fifty to reasons for that.’ ‘Let’s start naming them’ the audience remarked, and I have started enumerating. 0 They know that when they believe in (that) corruption (has in fact happened), then their current disposition will fall apart, that

Results from our field research has enabled us to identify and present a set of ethnographic evidences about the entrenched and enduring characteristics of corruption in Turkey. In essence, the findings reported in this paper have indicated the porous and problematic nature of conceived boundaries that are indeed inclusive of a number of common practices situated right along the river of corruption. Equally important are the perceived role of social and cultural norms in the existence and continuation of corruption in the country, along with popularity of an interesting set of `excuses` or `explanations` frequently coming to the help those involved in justifying or legitimizing their corrupt behaviors. Arguably, their combined effects might be traced back to the resilience of corrupt individuals and practices across time and place, along with the silence of the majority of citizens in the country.

Having said this, a number of cautionary remarks must be noted here. Chief among them is the need for invoking usual caveats here concerning the hardships of conducting a field research about corruption, a complex phenomenon which does not lend itself to wide and complete observations/examinations. Also, it should be noted that our study sample are consist of people `experts` who have long have been investigating, studying, and/or reporting corruption. They might be more keen on talking about, may be more `sensitized` toward the main issues covered by the study than a random sample of common citizens might prefer to so. Equally important is our intention to avoid offering ready-made analyses and quick solutions about the ongoing political debate in the country emerged after December 17-25, 2013 corruption scandals and probes. It is for sure that much can be said about them, may be in another paper in the future, after the dust and cloud surrounding them is moved and removed a bit.

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is why they choice not to believe (corruption). "Zafer, Egemen, Muammer...(The former ministers whose names were involved in 2013 corruption scandals, after which they had to resign from their posts. The trios have gone through a parliamentary investigation about their alleged role in corrupt actions....) the religious folks find some comfort in the fact that these personalities do not have conservative background. They say 'Well, we have come to power ...Are we going to lose this magnificent acquisition for wrist watch worth of 700,000 US Dollars?' (The wrist watch issue was among the allegations leveled against one of the former ministers, namely Mr. Zafer Çağlayan in that he got this expensive gift from Reza Zarrab, a businessman involved in gold trading with Iran, who was also among those arrested initially but released and got off the hook later). They think like this: 'If the Captain (Erdoğan) says something, he must know something. What remains in our part to do is just obedience.' They have also this reasoning: 'Well, if so many hodjas, alims (religious intellectuals), sheiks say 'there is nothing there, let's everybody mend his/her business' and they get away with it, then we are safe, as well.'...I have continued to count on ...then; those in the audience stopped me by saying: That is more than enough, OK. We got it.'" (Hürriyet, print edition, January 24, 2015, p. 4)

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