

Religion as a Source of Moral Energy for Turkish Entrepreneurs

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Introduction

Turkey has a distinctive status within the Muslim world. It is a Muslim country with a greater than 95% Muslim population, and yet it is the only Muslim country that has inscribed the principle of secularism (*laiklik*) into its constitution. From the very beginning of the Republic, Turkish society has experienced polarization between the ‘Islamists’ and the ‘secularists’. As in every major religion, the Islamic faith prescribes ethical/moral values which shape the way of life at both the level of the individual and society. Unsurprisingly, it is possible to see Islamic moral principles also filtering through to regulate business life.

History demonstrates that Muslim countries, including Turkey, have not been characterised by a capitalist entrepreneurial spirit (Ulgener, 1991; Arslan, 1999). Nevertheless, since the 1980s, Turkey’s political economy has changed radically and shifted from a state-oriented economy to a free-market liberal economy. These relatively recent developments in Turkey have a potential to lead us to re-visit the relationship between religion and economic activities. It is observable that the number of private businesses, particularly SMEs (Small and Medium-sized Enterprises) increased substantially after the 1980s and the country has witnessed the emergence of a new type business people who are identified by their religious commitment. This study intends to understand how their religious beliefs influence their business practices, in particular the work ethic values and entrepreneurship. In this respect, the study attempts to understand to what extent and in which way the

Islamic ethic is influential in business by applying the approach of Max Weber's Protestant Work Ethics to both pious and secular entrepreneurs in Turkey. In doing so we identify the concept of *moral energy*, as a way by which religious entrepreneurs interpret their faith in their business life.

Literature Review: The Work Ethic Literature within a Turkish Context

Work ethic is an ambiguous concept. According to Clarke (1983:122) work ethic is regarded as "the bundle of values, beliefs, intentions, and objectives that people bring to their work and the conditions in which they do it". However, it has been used interchangeably with the concept of the *Protestant work ethic* (PWE) by some studies, as it refers to some certain attitudes towards working, such as hard-work, honesty, frugality, productivity, and so on. In this respect we are also facing different belief systems' work ethic values, such as *Islamic work ethic*, with comparable characteristics. Additionally, it should be noted that work ethic should not be confused with *business ethics*, although they are not entirely different entities. It is true that some aspects of work ethic characteristics contribute to business ethics. However, work ethic mostly refers to people's approaches and attitudes toward working itself. Therefore, it is related to people's real perception of what they understand from *working* and how they approach it; rather than idealised business ethics values.

Western-based scales measuring PWE and similar surveys on the other become compelling tools for understanding Turkish work attitudes. Here, we intend to demonstrate this particular literature. In doing so, we will be able to identify what are the recent approaches to the phenomenon in question, and show the gap which this study attempts to contribute. It should be noted that the literature is not sufficiently developed to warrant themed analysis, rather we look at the most influential scholarly studies on the Turkish work ethics in turn.

A useful starting point is a cross-cultural comparison of the work ethic values of three different nations. Arslan (1999, 2001) compares Protestant British, Catholic Irish and Muslim Turkish managers' work ethic values using Mirels and Garrett's (1971) PWE scale. Since he particularly focused on the managers who are actively

practicing their religious beliefs, his study can be regarded as one of the most considerable pieces of research regarding the work ethic values of the newly emerging religious business class in Turkey. The statistical results of the surveys, which were applied to 277 people, show that practicing Muslim managers demonstrate higher levels of PWE in several items (*work as an end in itself, internal locus of control*) than its Protestant and Catholic counterparts. The author explains his findings with the minimisation of the Ottoman despotism through democratic reforms and transformation of traditional Sufism into a kind of entrepreneurial ideology (Arslan, 2001:335). However, it should be noted that PWE values might be crucial for non-practicing Muslim people in Turkey. Additionally, as Arslan argues too, post-1980 period might have strong influence on religious interpretation in Turkey, since the 1980s liberal policies promoted relatively free atmosphere in aspects of social life. Therefore, we suggest that in-depth interviews with open ended questions might provide further understanding of how practicing Turkish Muslims conceptualise their work-related attitudes or work ethic.

Another survey-based study was conducted by Veysel Bozkurt. Bozkurt (2000) chose his sample from university students rather than business people to investigate the changing work ethic values in Turkey. The researcher applied surveys consisting of 49 questions identifying Puritan and Hedonic¹ work ethic among 500 students. The study shows that students from theology departments (they are mostly practicing religious people) have very high Puritan ethic scores (Bozkurt, 2000). The study also claims that while religious people are becoming more work oriented, their secular counterparts (non-theology students) are becoming more hedonistic. Although, this study provides some insight regarding the changing work ethics, it is inevitably ignoring the fact that there may be non-practicing theology students and practicing religious students from other departments.

Thirdly, Aldemir and his colleagues conducted a comprehensive survey study among 439 Turkish business people. The research defines a new concept called “Turkish work mentality” and aims to understand this mentality with a distinct profile of 58

¹ The term Hedonic is used as the opposite of Puritan which considers work as meaningful itself. Therefore Hedonic ethic regards work only as a means of making money and living more comfortably.

values divided into two parts, local and universal values. According to the findings, factor analysis of those values have been categorised into five dimensions. *Professional* and *rational* work mentality appear as universal values, while *status-oriented*, *mystical* and *hypocrisy-based* work mentality as local values (Aldemir, et. al. 2003). The study suggests that religious, as the authors call *mystical*, values are also playing crucial roles in the formation of the “Turkish work mentality”. In the questionnaire, there are five concepts placing under the name of mystical values: *religion*, *traditionalism*, *emotionality*, *fatalism* and *family relations*. However, this study is not particularly focusing on religious business people; but it encourages researchers to consider religious influences over the work-related attitudes of Turkish business people.

As mentioned, religious and conservative Anatolian people’s increasing involvement with business activities has become a phenomenon in Turkey. Besides the aforementioned survey-based studies, researchers have also applied interpretive methods to understand the different aspects of this phenomenon. A sociologist, Sennur Ozdemir conducted 55 in-depth interviews with religious business people only. She chose her sample from a particular businessmen’s association (MUSIAD) long known for its religious leanings and support for the Islamic political parties in Turkey. The aim of the study was to understand the *transformation of the Anatolian capital* and the *deepening of Turkish modernisation*. Particularly, she focused on the transformation of the *Muslim work ethic* from a sociological perspective. She interprets this cultural transformation as an attempt towards creating an *indigenous Muslim ethic* compatible with the necessities of the modern world (Ozdemir, 2006). However, her emphasis was not on the so-called “Islamic work ethic (IWE)” or any work-related values, rather she regards *indigenous Muslim ethic* as new prototype or transformed Muslims. Therefore, the contribution of this study was on the discipline of sociology mostly. In this study, on the other hand, we focus on conceptualisation of this “new/transformed” work ethic values within a management perspective considering the secularist Turkish business people as well.

On the other hand, it is possible to mention some theoretical studies concerning Islamic business ethic with strong emphasis on the work ethic. The starting point of these studies is that Islam is a religion which prescribes an extensive set of principles

and regulations shaping all the aspects of life, including business ethics (Arslan, 2005). Islam regards working as praying, encourages trading and productivity, and puts strong emphasis on the equal distribution of wealth in a society (Ocal, 2007:32). Torlak, et al. (2008:23) mentions five basic Islamic Principles of morality: *Tevhid* (unity), *muvazene* (equilibrium), *ozgur irade* (free will), *sorumluluk* (responsibility) and *ihsan* (bounty). The authors suggest that these moral principles should also be applied to economic and business life. For example, the principle of *tevhid* refers not to discrimination among costumers, employees and share-holders; but suggests regarding the goods and properties as entrusted by God; while the concept of *muvazene* requires being poised/balanced in trading, namely measuring accurately, avoiding greed and ostentation. Especially within the last decade, the number of studies concerning business ethics in Islamic perspective has increased substantially. These studies, as in the above example, mention the implementation of the Islamic moral values into the business world (Turkdogan, 1998, 2005; Aksit, 2005; Ozcan, 2003; Bikun, 2004). However, these studies are not based on empirical data and their focal points are conceptualising idealised business ethic values in Islamic perspective. Therefore, the question they tackle is “how should it be?” rather than “what is it?”

In this respect, the question still stands: why do Islamic countries, including secular Turkey, failed to create a productive/entrepreneurial capitalist spirit based on rational thinking? This study argues that the answer to this question does not lie in the idealised business ethic values of Islam, but the actual work ethic values or the mentality of Muslim (Turkish) business people. For understanding the religious influences over the work ethic values of Turkish business people, it seems more reasonable to approach it as an insider with an interpretive methodology. The above-mentioned studies (both quantitative and qualitative) provide us with some insight as a starting point. In this respect, the current research will be the first that takes the concept of “Turkish/Anatolian Islam” into consideration particularly focusing on its most prominent representatives, the *Gulen movement* in Turkey. Meanwhile, this study also considers secularist business people’s account beside religious one as a control group. Obviously, the aim of this study is not to reach quantifiable generalisations. Rather, at the end of the analysis, it will be possible to demonstrate what meanings the business people apply to the so-called Islamic moral values. In

other words, it will allow us to understand the contemporary interpretations of Islamic work ethic through Turkish business people's account. Additionally and most likely, this research will be able to draw on some other influential factors (such as the post-1980s liberal influence) besides religion that affects work-related attitudes in Turkey.

Methodological Considerations:

The aim of this research is to present new angles for understanding what shapes the Turkish work ethic. As mentioned, this study pays special attention to religious influence over the conceptualisation of work ethic values of Turkish business people. Moreover, it does not only take the religious/pious business people's account, but also the secularist (with none or less religious practicing) business people's views into consideration. It should be noted that Max Weber's Protestant ethic thesis is only indirectly related to this specific study. What this study intends to do is use his sociological approach as a useful conceptual/theoretical frame. In his important essay titled "Economy and Society," he suggests that "real empirical sociological investigation begins with the question: what motives determine and lead the individual members ... to behave in such a way ...?" (Weber, 1968: v.1: 18). This study's main concern is also people's way of life, specifically their attitudes towards working. Therefore, this research is based on Weber's suggestions that religion has certain effects on people's way of life, rather than setting up some causal relationships between religion and economic activity. The study's main concern is how religion affects people's way of life in general and how does this way of life or the conduct of life shape their attitudes towards economic and business activities, particularly their work ethic values. In this respect, the Anatolian interpretation of Islam is considered only as a sample, like Calvinism in Weber's Protestant ethic thesis. Therefore, this study particularly focuses on the Turkish understanding of Islam. Its findings are only relevant within Turkey, not the whole Muslim world.

Fundamentally, this research seeks to understand the respondents' points of view. 'Understanding' is a key concept here and is used according to Weber's *Verstehen* approach. Weber's definition covers both explanation and understanding here, however the important point is that the task of 'causal explanation' is undertaken with reference to the 'interpretive understanding of social action' rather than to external forces which have no meaning for those involved in that social action (Bryman and Bell, 2003).

Weber's *verstehen* (interpretive understanding of social action) approach requires taking actors' own imagination/conception into consideration while examining a

social phenomenon. In this respect, it can be said that Weber provides a stimulating framework for raising some theoretical issues regarding Islamic development.

Max Weber's interpretative sociology takes individuals as active and constructive elements rather than passive, and considers them within the social context. He describes Sociology as a 'science which attempts the interpretive understanding of social action in order to arrive at a causal explanation of its course and effects' (Weber, 1947:88). As Weber did in his book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, the researcher of this study also focuses on the question *how* rather than *what*. In other words, Weber is not giving us the *ingredients* of modern capitalism (the reformation, politics, industrial revolution, etc.) but the *recipe* that answer *how*.

As is discussed in the introduction, this study does not intend to separate the concept of religion as scriptural one and living one. Eventually, religious beliefs appear as a set of interpretations. Therefore, this study argues that only the living Islam can tell us about the possible transition and transformation in the understanding of Islam. As in the example of the Protestant reformation, it is quite possible to observe the transformative potential of a religion.

In this research, semi structured interviews were conducted among thirty-two small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) owner-managers². In general, as in most countries, SMEs are regarded as the main carriers of the economy in Turkey³. SME owner-managers are thought to be in a better position than large business owners to bring their ideas, norms and values to bear in their business activities as SMEs are legally independent and ownership and control usually coincide in SMEs (Spence 1999: 164).

² The data gathering and analysis were carried out by co-author Selcuk Uygur. As a Turkish Muslim researcher, we acknowledge his own biases in this particular context. It should be noted that he is familiar with the activities of religious groups in Turkey. Although considering himself as secular (or non-practicing Muslim) he does not see the activities of the religious groups in Turkey as a threat to the secular regime. Rather he is in favour of the idea that suggests more freedom in all aspects of social life, including religious rights, minority groups' rights, recognising the different ethnic identities and so on. Therefore this analysis might be regarded as a liberal reading of the phenomenon in question.

³ Turkey accepted the EU definition of an SME in 2002 and we follow that line here.

The following table is a list of the interviewees, their main line of the business and the number of employees⁴. The first eighteen are the religious/pious businesspeople who define themselves as practicing Muslims. They mostly have certain religious group affiliations. The last fourteen are the secular businesspeople who have no or limited religious influences in their lives. Obviously, they have no connections with religious groups or movements. Important gender and sector differences were not the focus of this study so have been set aside for the purposes of our research. Interview questions were formulated in line with the findings from the literature review and developed through two pilot study applications. Data was analysed using techniques based in discourse analysis.

Table 1⁵

	Name	Sector	Employees
1	RKY1	Steel and Metals	9
2	RKY8	Construction and Petrol	11
3	RKY9	Accounting and Insurance	5
4	RKY10	Construction	56
5	RKY11	Textile	7
6	RKY12	Furniture	400
7	RKY13	Cooling Products	150
8	RG2	Leather and Shoes	60
9	RG3	Chemicals	35
10	RG4	Hardware Supplies for Construction	30
11	RG5	Printing	11
12	RG6	Construction Materials Trading	20

⁴ In terms of the number of employees, SE8 in the sample of this study with 280 employees is regarded acceptable since it is very close to the limit. RKY12 a furniture producer on the other hand with 400 employees is regarded as an exception in this study. It might be regarded as a medium-sized enterprise according to the former criteria of Turkey. Although we have not included any quotations from the interview conducted with this company's owner we still find the insights he provided useful and informative in terms of the research question of this study.

⁵ 'R' denotes religions, 'S' denotes secular in our sample.

13	RG7	Plastic and PVC	10
14	RKN14	Meat Products	100
15	RKN15	Metal Products and Oven	175
16	RKN16	Steel and Metals	45
17	RKY17	Steel and Metals	12
18	RKY18	Machine Replacement Parts	8
19	SA1	Glass and Framing	15
20	SA2	Industrial Engineering & Consulting	17
21	SA3	Mechanical Engineering	11
22	SG4	Automotive	15
23	SG5	Constructional Engineering	25
24	SA6	Restaurant Chain	33
25	SA7	Fast-food Consulting	5
26	SE8	Education	280
27	SE9	Construction Hardware Trading	10
28	SE10	Automotive	55
29	SA11	Office Supplies Import & Export	30
30	SA12	Recording	10
31	SA13	Public Relation and Consulting	3
32	SA14	Finance	12

The sample was separated on the basis of these criteria: People who have daily religious practices and have connection to certain religious movements are considered as pious; and people who have no daily religious practices and have no religious group connection are considered as secular in this study. We acknowledge that this sort of separation might raise some controversy. Although separating a Muslim society as pious/religious (*dindar/dinci* in Turkish.) and secular (*laik* in Turkish. makes some people uncomfortable, including the authors of this research; in

the Turkish context these concepts are freely used in the public domain by journalists, academics and the general public. In a sense, this separation can also be understood as systematically practicing Muslims and non-practicing or less-practicing Muslims. Therefore we believe it is a valid basis for the research.

Findings:

In this section we seek to understand what meaning religious people attribute to the existing Islamic work ethic values, or perhaps how they enhance the meaning of those concepts. Namely, five distinguishing characteristics emerge among the religious group: *Hard work* as Islamic duty, *Good will* (intention), *responsibility*, *bounty* and the *balance/equilibrium* in one's life. However, based on the qualitative data, it seems that some concepts are always mentioned in conjunction with each other. In this respect, hard work and good will (intention) on one hand, and responsibility and bounty on the other seem integral and will accordingly be discussed together under the same section. This study acknowledges that the Islamic ethic is not limited by these concepts. However, the following section intends to focus on the most influential factors which have been re-interpreted according to contemporary meanings. Here we develop the notion of the Islamic faith and its teachings as a source of *moral energy* for religious entrepreneurs in Turkey.

1. Good Will/Intention and Hard Work (Working as an Islamic duty)

In Islamic teaching, working is regarded as religious duty. In the past, a typical pious Muslim prototype was regarded as a man/woman dedicating him/herself to praying and isolated from most of the worldly activities. Some traditional sayings, such as "be content with what you have" or a "Muslim should not be rich" can be considered as the reflection of this mentality. Today, this mentality seems converted into hard work as virtue. As Yousef (2001) rightly suggests, people's intention, in the Islamic moral system, is more crucial than the outcome of their actions. In the Quran, a variety of verbs is used in the context of working, such as *amel*, *faal*, *cehd* (act/deed, making/doing, struggling). However, Akpinar (2006) argues that all these deeds turn into good deeds (*salih amel*) if they have been done with faith and good will. In this

respect, even ordinary worldly activities including making money and doing business are considered as praying, as long as they are done in religiously-allowed ways (*halal*) (Bikun, 2004). In the interviews, the religious group frequently stressed this point:

A Muslim shall work hard, but without forgetting the hereafter. This is what "not forgetting the hereafter" means: If I'm being fair in the workplace, if I'm doing my daily prayers, if I'm giving my "zekat" (alms)... This is what not forgetting the hereafter is. With a good will, even the ordinary activities of a Muslim between two prayers sessions will turn into righteous deeds anyway (RKY1).

This point has been also consistent with the writings of contemporary Islamic scholars, such as Said Nursi. Nursi and his followers have great influence over the contemporary Turkish interpretation of Islam. According to Islamic teaching, with a sincere intention, believers' ordinary activities between two praying sessions would turn into good deeds (Nursi, 1978). In a sense, it can be said that doing business in a rational way, which requires strong commitment and hard work, has been legitimised by the new understanding of the religion.

For the pious group, working is not limited to business activities at all. During the interviews, each person was asked to go through one of their typical business days. Namely, what time do you wake up and go to work, what are the routines during a business day, and so on. Naturally, most of them started the story with early morning praying and doing some religious reading in the morning. This attitude is quite exclusive to the pious group. For both groups, religious and secular, daily business activities within the workplace are almost comparable, such as meeting with the employees, visiting the operation ground, calling/visiting customers, and some paper work. However, the interesting point is pious business people do not finish the story by the time they close their office in the evening. They spend a considerable amount of time for the discretionary activities and they consider it as part of work as well. The following is how one pious businessman describes the work after they close the factory at 6:30 p.m.:

... Then, the evening part comes. With my friends, we think about what we can do for humanity, who can do what...etc. We plan all these. ... [The reason why I do this is to do with] the feeling of responsibility. If one feels responsible, especially while complaining about something for not being right, one develops the urge to find a solution. Here, we need to see what favour or goodness can be done for humanity; and we need to take initiative. ... We all, with my friends, work devotedly towards raising and educating youths in a good atmosphere; and also towards what we can do for supporting this educational activities within the country and abroad (RKN16).

These sorts of evening meetings are very common rituals among the pious group. They call it with different terms, such as “*akşam oturması* (evening sitting)” or “*çay* (drinking tea)” or *istisare* (consulting meeting). In a sense, these meetings are providing some sort of moral energy to the pious people. This moral energy aspect and the nature of these meetings will be discussed in the later sections further.

2. Responsibility and Bounty

The concept of responsibility appears at two levels. One is individual and the other is institutional, which is more close to the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR). At the individual level, the pious Muslims in Turkey find themselves responsible to demonstrate Islamic moral values and virtues as much as possible in their lives including business. Therefore, being a reliable, honest businessperson has been regarded as an Islamic obligation. From the pious Muslim perspective, all the good actions, virtues are somehow related to the religion. Therefore, this group applies all their virtuous actions to their religious beliefs:

It's entirely related to our belief system. If those around us cannot sleep comfortably for some reason, we shouldn't sleep comfortably either. It's a ethical feeling which conceives the trouble of others as also ours; I mean it's the faith (RKY11).

Some regard this responsibility as being observed by God. It might sound similar to the Christian concept of “witnessing” as Werner (2006) suggests. According to this

aspect of responsibility, one should be responsible not to behave in a way that would loose Islam's credibility or bring it into disrepute. As a cooling system producer, RKY13 states:

A pious [Muslim] person should be careful especially with "kul hakkı [not wronging others]". The following should be avoided in the [behaviour] of a Muslim: breaking promises, measuring inaccurately, delaying [due] payments. If someone (Muslim) doing daily praying is also committing any of those, there is something fundamentally wrong with him (RKY13).

For some, the source of ethical behaviour is the fear of God. It can be questioned how ethical is one's action, if it has been done just because of the fear. However, this concept in Islamic teaching is not used as being afraid of something dangerous. Rather it has been interpreted as sort of appreciation or respect for God. From the religious people's point of view, this "fear" would lead them to behave more ethically:

I try to implement what my religion orders me to do. And, I'm very happy to do that. [You can't show me] anyone (customer) worried about whether the good they bought from [my] firm is the same with the sample; or that whether he/she was cheated. Because, first, I fear Allah. Then our prophet orders us to measure accurately. This is the instruction I have also for those working for me. (RG3).

However, it should not be forgotten that the concept of "vicdan (conscience)" plays an almost comparable role in the secular business people's lives. Conscience seems to be a replacement of the religion from the secular point of view. A secular businessman, trading construction hardware, explains it as follow:

I'm not an atheist, but not a radical either. Everybody has a belief, even non-believers. ... However, my actual belief is being honest and, fair so as to have a clear conscience. From a religious perspective, I'd try and see if this here (pointing to his heart which refers to conscience in the Turkish

context) *is comfortable... I don't do daily praying, God would tolerate it, I think* (SE9).

As it can be understood from the above quotation, interestingly, being a religious person has been regarded as being radical by the majority of secularist people. This attitude carries a special importance for the pious business people in Turkey, since the image of Islam or religiousness in the secular people's eyes is not very respectable. Early years of Republican politics on Islam, excluding the religion from the urban and confining it to the rural for many years, might have some negative affect on the image of being religious. Arguably, it can be said that the religious people in Turkey are showing strong enthusiasm to shine the image of Islam through their personal lives. Although, it is debatable to what extent they have succeeded in this goal, it seems quite certain that they take this issue as a responsibility. This might be the reason why the religious group frequently mention the concept of "true/real Islam" distinguishing it from the traditional one which has been degenerated by some superstitious beliefs.

Mine is not a slavish religiousness. It (religiousness) is the understanding of life and the creation. Therefore, I realise that it is necessary to be a conscious believer in all aspects of life, business, social and etc. ...Therefore, it makes us to behave in this way in business. I mean, piousness should be understood as having this intention; otherwise it shouldn't be understood in a way as being narrow-minded or fanatic (RKN14).

Ontologically, this study takes religion as a set of interpretation through practices. Therefore, in a scholarly piece of work, it would not be appropriate to decide whether one of them is true or not. However, this distinction between the "real Islam or religious consciousness" and the "narrow-minded or fanatic Islam" clearly demonstrates the transformation of Islam from one interpretation to another. This is what this study is trying to understand from business people's perspective.

On the other hand, it is clearly observable that many aspects of the religion have transformed and adapted according to the necessities of today's modern world in

Turkey. Some common traditional sayings, such as, “Muslim should not be rich and think about the other world”; or “being content with what one has”, are being strongly criticised by religious people in Turkey. In this respect, it seems that the meaning of *zekat* (alms giving or charity as a religious obligation) has been broadened as well. Regarding this issue, I frequently encountered the response proposing that a Muslim must be rich so s/he can do more charity. In fact, it seems it is more than *zekat*. I observed that most of the religious business people show great enthusiasm when they talk about the educational activities and charity organizations which they support financially. It could be claimed that the religious perception of the past has been changed dramatically in Turkey. Traditionally it used to be regarded as supplying food for poor people only. Now it seems it has extended as providing bursaries, establishing charity organizations, building schools and other educational institutions, including universities. It is an interesting point that even though the religious obligation for *zekat* is 1 out of 40 of one’s money earned in a year, they all imply that they do much more than that ratio. Considering the size of religious movements, their educational facilities and charity organizations, this claim seems reasonable. They believe that God will give them back even more if they spend money for the sake of God. However, it should be noted that people who spend time and money for charity and philanthropy usually receive a good reputation from the society, and it raises their credibility and fame in business as well. It might even be regarded as promotion or enlightened self-interest. The following quote is a typical response for why they spend a considerable amount of money for charity:

Of course, I have a motivation to do that. It’s for the sake of Allah. 1 out of 40 is really nothing (talking about zekat or almsgiving ratio in Islam). It’s the zekat of stingy people. This verse in the Quran (or, it might be a saying of the prophet), which is about Ebubekir (Mohammad’s closest companion), has great influence on me: “We (the God) are content with him; is he content with us?” It’s [said to be] because of his (Ebubekir) great financial help for the poor (He is a well known Islamic figure who is known to have spent all his money for the poor to please God). It’s very shocking; I mean it’s the best thing Allah could ever tell His servant. This is the basis of (main motivation behind) our actions. (RG5).

Among the religious group, it is also believed that spending money for charity would make one's capital even more over time. It is the Islamic notion of "bereket", meaning being/getting plenty or increasing by the blessing of God.

Yes, I do as much as I can. I give bursary and food support for poor. I helped to open a college preparation course in my village so that the folks in the villagers could go to universities. ...

Interviewer: *Do you always stick with the ratio (1/40) suggested by the religion?*

No, I try to do more than that ratio. I say if God gave me this much he would give me again. I believe that if we give for him, He gives us back. How does He give us? From where? I don't know, but He does. (RKY10).

This charitable-giving attitude occurs among the secular business people as well. Since these sorts of behaviours, such as helping poor people, providing bursaries, are considered as virtue within the context of humanitarian ethic or universal values, secular business people are also involved in these charity activities. However, as expected the source of their attitudes is not religious. The following is the response of an auto dealer to the question of "do you spend time and money for discretionary or charity activities?"

This is a university town. ... We help them (students), providing monthly bursary. Beside this, you can't exclude yourself from social solidarity (mutual support). For example, the municipality asks for support (food support for the poor) every Ramadan (Muslim's holy month), and we try to help as much as we can.

Interviewer: What motivates you to do this?

You can't exclude yourself [from this solidarity]. Of course, it's spiritual satisfaction. I want everyone to get a good education. Eskisehir is a good

place for opportunities for education. We help those (students) who are close to us (in terms of relatives or friends) (SE10).

It seems that both groups give importance to help people and be involved with charity activities. As mentioned, the source or the motives behind their activities are different. Beside that, another crucial difference is the amount of time and money for these activities. Additionally, the secular group makes their donations in a more traditionalist way as exists in all divine religions, namely helping the poor. On the other hand, it is very evident that the pious business people are very well organised in these sorts of activities and they spend much more money than the secular people do. Inferably, only a small portion of the money is spent for charity and direct help to the poor. A considerable part of the money is allocated for other discretionary activities, such as establishing private schools, universities, and funding civil society activities. This systematised way of alms giving reminds us of Calvinist influence on “helping the poor”. Weber (1993) notes that Calvinism puts some limitations on “helping the poor”; and he argues that it is one of the most important influences of Calvinism on the economy. Since richness and poorness are regarded as God’s will in Protestantism, charity activities are made in a more systematised way. In other words, the aim of helping the poor should be helping poor people to make them part of the labour. In Weber’s own words, “charity itself became a rationalized enterprise” (Weber, 1993: 220).

In every Anatolian city, the *Gulen movement* (the largest faith based civil religious movement in Turkey) has business people and their civil society organisations, such as charities, educational and business foundations etc. In a way, the success of this movement attracts more business people getting involved in the civil society activities⁶. It seems it provides them with a sort of moral energy. With these motivational factors, the concept of “bounty/benevolence” (*ihsan*) makes more sense. Basically, in Islamic context, it can be defined as one’s good actions for the

⁶ Pious business people always state that their business associations are getting more pluralistic every day. Most of them strongly stresses that they have members from different backgrounds, consuming alcohol, and not very religious as well (i.e. RKY11, RKN14, RKN16, RG4). In a sense, this kind of civil organisations are regarded as a mean to attract more people. According to Ilhan (2009), the pluralism among the religious business associations might help to consolidate the Turkish democracy via being more efficient actors in the state’s policy making process.

sake of other people, though one did not have to do it (Torlak, et al., 2008). Within the pious business people's context, this attitude appears as spending more time, effort and money for the discretionary activities:

It's entirely for the sake of Allah. As Mr. Gulen says "it's the man of Anatolia". I mean, really, it's not a job which can be done with zekat. I know many friends; they don't do any zekat calculation. They do it 10 times, 20 times more than that strictly demanded for zekat. I really know these people. What can I say; it's magnificent, it's beyond words. Especially, those teachers who serve in foreign countries with very little salary have great influence on me. For a businessman it's easy to give the money; but I saw those friends (referring to the young pious teachers of the Gulen movement) who have dedicated their lives without expecting anything other than Allah's blessing. This really deserves appreciation (RKY13).

In a sense, this bounty has become one of the main characteristics of the pious business people in Turkey. Even some of them state that the main reason for working is being able to give more for 'the sake of Allah' (i.e. RKY9, an insurance agency owner promptly responds that it is the real reason for him working). It appears that they also like to spread this attitude among the society they live in. A hardware supplier for construction business, RG4 tells us an interesting question he encountered in a foreign country:

The man asks; "do you really give your money, which you earned with so much sweat and toil to the others". He is not used to it. He doesn't know about our generosity. Where does it come from; of course it's from the personal ethics that Islam teaches us (RG4).

According to Robinson (2008), in the context of the Gulen movement, the concept of responsibility is seen as the primary accountability to God. In this respect, the author argues that the concept provides some basis for a rich conception of responsibility associating:

Responsibility as accountability to God, and liability for His creation. Humankind as vicegerent is given this responsibility by God. This sets up an ethic of endless service, set in the relationship with God, but genuinely for others. (Robinson, 2008:689).

In a way, for the pious group the Islamic notions of *jihad* and *servicing religion* have been transformed to the struggle and hard work in all aspects of life, including business. As Ozdemir (2006) argues, it can be regarded as a struggle to create an indigenous Muslim ethic compatible with the modern aspects of the world. Although it is difficult to find proper examples for each aspect of business ethics and corporate social responsibility, this study argues that these civil society activities, such as supporting charity and educational activities, providing bursaries can still be considered under the concept of business ethics. As Hui (2008) argues, faith and business ethics can be combined in terms of responsibility. The author calls it “faith-based CSR”. In the Turkish context, the faith-based responsibilities are also regarded as a source of moral energy for the pious business people, as it will be explained in the later sections.

3. Balance in One’s Life

During the interviews, Islamic ethic frequently appeared in the shape of “balanced life”. It is mostly stated as “*muvaazene/denge*” (balance or equilibrium). The Islamic notion of balance refers to the universe that was created in balance; and it recommends Muslims to live a balanced life, namely it is avoiding lavishness and capitalist greed, in Islamic business ethic perspective (Torlak et al., 2008). Although the pious group appreciates the importance of hard work, they also insist on not being workaholic or worshipping to the work. A chemical producer, RG3 regards above mentioned religious meetings as a means of balancing the life between the worldly activities and spirituality:

Because we are inclined to the worldly activities a bit too much, from time to time we feel the need for a spiritual rest. When we rest, one of our friends reads something out of a book and offers his interpretation. ... It’s not simply an unwinding; but I actively get rid of the daily stress there. Life is full of stress (RG3).

Similarly, the notion of balance also shapes the pious people's way of life. How would being rich affect or change the lifestyle of pious business people? In the pious people's account it is a challenging matter. In a traditional perspective, it is known that Muslim should be modest, refrain from ostentation, luxury or show off. But, the real question is how to keep the life balanced in this respect. During the interviews, this attitude also appeared as an answer to the question of "how does your religious belief influence your business life?" The increase in the religious people's life standard is not escaped from the eyes. However, it is frequently mentioned that "Muslim should find the balance between the necessities and the luxury". RKY13 confesses the difficulties of this as follow:

I mean, one should not fall in to the splendour of this world too much. Maybe we do... May Allah forgive us! I mean, the houses we live in, the cars we drive, and the clothes we wear... But we should not develop too strong an attachment to these things which belong to this world. Maybe these are the things that we have to do; something necessary. But you cannot leave these totally. You can't go to a business meeting by a worn out car. I mean everyone should try to stick a balance for themselves (RKY13).

But, it seems that there is no consensus on this balance, in other words it is a quite subjective matter. It is generally left as a matter of conscience, and defined as living on the midway. However, it is clear that the traditional pious Muslim prototype, who is content with what he has, has shifted to a typical capitalist consumer, but with some red lines.

We live like a middle class, no matter how wealthy we are. ...Free of ostentation. One should be afraid of being like a Pharaoh in rebellion to Allah. But it doesn't mean an extreme state of being content bordering on paupery either. Doesn't Islam mean the "middle way"? (RKY11).

It should be appreciated that, during the interviewing, it would be quite difficult to ask people about their personal expenses and judging whether they are luxury or not. For this reason the scope of these answers are limited to what they stated. However, in recent years, luxury consumptions of the pious business people, especially their

young generations, are not escaping from people's attention according to Sabrina Tavernise (2008) a New York Times journalist. Although it upsets the secular segment of Turkish society, it seems understandable that the Islamic middle class is also producing its own elites. Among some pious people it is a debatable issue as well. It can be inferred from the interviews that excessive consumption of luxury products is mostly regarded as a potential threat for the Muslims since it might cause degeneration of Islamic ethics. However, it seems that the religious people's homogenous lifestyle of the past gets its share from the dynamic process Turkey has been experiencing (Ozdemir, 2006:133), especially after the emergence of this new business class.

This transformation sometimes creates tension within the religious people in Turkey as well. In a sense, according to the necessities of the modern world, the rules of an Islamic way of life are being re-written through practices. It seems that this re-shaped structure will produce its own generation, and some contradictions between the new and the old might be inevitable in this sense. RKY11, from the textile sector, tells about this Islamic transition in general, and its benefits. However, he also has some worries and concerns:

It's a secularisation quite and unobtrusively. It's kind of a weakening of idealism. Not only in trade, but also in family life. We have acquaintances who start life dancing at wedding ceremonies. (Referring to Islamic teaching:) do we have dancing [as a legitimate form of entertainment]? (RKY11).

Another gripping point is that the appearance of a newly emerging pious business class seems irritating to some secular people, in more accurate words to the strict secularists. Especially, pious people's involvement with worldly activities, and their way of life have been criticised by the secularists. In the eyes of secular people, religious man should be living a very modest life and away from luxury. The imagined religiosity in their mind reminds the traditionalist Muslim prototype who has been criticised by the religious people. A restaurant owner SA6 seemed annoyed with the recently emerged religious business class as they became an important part of social structure:

Now, these people... Why don't they apply their Islamic ideas to their lives? Why does this man drive a Mercedes?. This man should be successful within his own economy producing his own car. Why do they go to Italy to buy a scarf, why do they drive Porsche? (SA6).

In the strict understanding of Turkish secularism, the image of religious person represents ignorance, poverty and isolated from the worldly activities which were seen as the by-product of Islam for a long time in the late 19th and the early 20th centuries. It appears that the strict seculars (or the *secularists*) are having hard time to bear with the reality of social transformation. It seems that the new Muslim prototype does not match with the image which the strict secularist people have in their minds. A typical response regarding the life style of the pious people appears as follow:

They both call themselves Muslim (or religious) and wear the kind of expensive shoes worn by Madonna (i.e.the first lady of Turkey, President Gul's wife) I think this is the primary sin (SE9).

At the time these interviews took place, Turkey's biggest debate was the presidential elections. The ruling government nominated the minister of foreign affairs, Abdullah Gul whose wife was wearing Islamic headscarf, as a presidential candidate. Therefore, during the interviews, secular business people usually gave examples related to the ruling government and the politicians. It sounds paradoxical as well since the main motivations of the Turkish secularism were fighting with ignorance and helping the country's development. On one hand, secular people are complaining about the traditional perception of the religion which has been regarded as a barrier to development. But on the other hand, the religious transformation, also seems discomforting to them.

Discussion: Belief as a Source of Moral Energy

The aim of this study is not to claim a causal relationship between religious belief and work ethic; it is more concerned with the transformed perception of pious businesspeople towards Islam in Turkey. It is important to make clear that we in no sense claim that an Islamic ethic produces more ethical people. From a sociological perspective, ethics does not necessarily signify the “good” (Carr, 2003). However, from what we perceived from the interviews and our observations, the ethical transformation in question seems to provide some sort of moral energy exclusively for the pious business people in Turkey. This is the primary difference between the two research samples.

It has been mentioned earlier in the paper that religious perception in Turkey is in transition. Whether it is called “Turkish/Anatolian Islam” or “Muslim Calvinists”, it is very obvious that the interpretation of Islam in Turkey shows some distinctive characteristics. Arguably, it can be claimed that today’s Turkey is experiencing a development resembling the one which the Protestant Western world had after the Protestant reformation. In this respect, Weber’s Protestant ethic thesis gains special importance. Here we adopt Hennis’ (2000) interpretation of Weber to aid us in understanding this similar development. This section will stress the “conduct” of religious business people’s life, which is the central question of Weber’s thesis according to Hennis⁷. This new conduct also seems to provide moral energy for the pious business people in Turkey. It is observed that in the religious circles of Turkey, entrepreneurship and business activities are strongly encouraged. In a way, the traditionalist Sufism has turned into an entrepreneurial ideology, as Arslan (2000) argued; and this transformation might be a crucial reason for the emergence of this new business class.

Since Islam provides rules governing all aspects of life, it also introduces principles which regulate business life (Arslan, 2005). In fact, none of these earlier mentioned

⁷ Hennis (2000), while interpreting Weber, gives a special emphasis to the concept of *Lebensführung* as a conduct of life.

concepts are new. Among the religious people in Turkey, the recent developments within the last two decades should be the focal point of this transformation. As discussed earlier, Turkey experienced a significant liberalisation process after 1980s. It can be said that a fast urbanisation process moved traditional religious teachings from rural areas to the cities and the religious concepts have been re-interpreted and gradually transformed within the contemporary framework. Mardin (2000) interprets this development as the periphery's new positioning into the centre. In a sense, it can be argued that the traditional or rural religion is attaching itself to the centre, and becoming urbanised. It might be regarded as sign of producing an urbanised religion.

One can see that even traditional Sufi terms are being re-interpreted within contemporary meanings. For instance, an important Sufi concept "zikr" (remembrance of God) is interpreted by RKN15, a religious businessman as:

If saving an unemployed person in society is a form of worship according to my belief, and if you are satisfied with this, and put every step for the sake of Allah, this is the remembrance of Allah in my opinion. (RKN15).

As Yousef (2001) indicated, Islamic work ethic puts more emphasis on the intentions (good will) of the people, compared to the PWE. This exegesis seems quite suitable to open new horizons for the religious business people through the secularised business world. In a sense, it could be said that for the pious group, this way of thinking creates more flexibility and room for manoeuvre in their business mentality. For example, religious business people regard their ordinary business activities as a way of acquiring merit in God's sight. A kitchen appliance producer, RKN15 tells us about how his ordinary business activities make him happy and satisfied:

If you think about this [remembrance of God] in every single task of yours, and if you do everything for the sake of Allah; for example, say suppose I'm going to produce a new product and I will need five new workers for this particular product. If I take this as how can I be more helpful to another five [unemployed] people, how can I be more beneficial to my country... it's

something beyond money... Troubles turn into pleasure, since I believe that the reward would be great in the sight of Allah, if I do this. (RKN15).

It should be noted that religion plays a crucial part in their daily lives. In the interview process, questions were always asked in an open-ended way with no simple yes-no answer. This helped us to listen to their stories with their own words and definitions. In other words, the researcher let them construct their own reality without strict limitations. For instance, the question, “would you take me through a typical business day of yours”, provided a variety of interesting responses. Some of the religious people started to talk about their typical business day from the very early morning by mentioning the “morning prayer” first, which is a quite early time. Among the all pious group, waking up in the early morning for the praying is a common practice. However, it does not seem like prayer alone. Some of them also mentioned that they have some religious reading habits in the morning as well. This attitude is regarded as “spiritual gratification” before starting to work, as RG2 states:

Work starts at 8 here. Before I start work, I read a few pages out of the Quran like a kind of praying,. I do it everyday, try not to skip. It is a habit. After that phase, it gives me a kind of spiritual gratification. Doing it as a dictate of my beliefs makes me feel happy. (RG2).

Additionally, the religious business people seem very active in civil society activities too. Especially within the last two decades, it can be said that political Islam gradually shifted to civil society organisations in Turkey. The number of civil initiatives financed by pious business people has increased dramatically during that period. Thousands of private education institutions, hospitals, college student accommodations, charity organizations, even some media institutions could be regarded as the outcomes of these civil initiatives. As explained in the previous section, these activities are regarded as a responsibility, which is related to the Islamic notion of *zekat*. Since Turkey is a secular state, this Islamic tax is paid voluntarily by the pious people. The gripping point is that all of the religious people interviewed declared that they pay a considerable amount of money to these civil society activities, even more than the ratio required by the religion. Their enthusiasm for these volunteer projects was impressive. They regard these sorts of activities,

such as building schools or providing bursaries, as social responsibilities influenced by their beliefs.

These kinds of activities might be a proper example of how a civil society acquires its autonomy from the state. It appears that the religious movements in Turkey have found a way of practising religious activities which are away from radicalism. In other words, it can be said that the religious movements play an important role in the empowerment of civil society, which is crucial for the consolidation of Turkish democracy and pluralism among the society.

Conclusion

In summary, contemporary Islamic understanding within the Turkish context appears as a source of moral energy in terms of creating a new type of businessperson. Based on the empirical research, we have observed that religiously committed businesspeople in Turkey have found a mechanism through which to express themselves via their civil society activities and the business associations which they work through. Compared with religious activities in the past, this puts more emphasis on the people's actions as setting a good example, rather than didactic teaching of Islamic principles. Arguably, it can be said that the Islamic notion of "serving the religion/God" (*dine hizmet*) has been transformed and re-interpreted within the contemporary framework.

This new attitude should be understood within the context of Bourdieu's (1990) *habitus*. As the concept refers to the system of dispositions, Bourdieu regards *habitus* as the key element of social reproduction (Bourdieu, 1990). In a sense, Turkey has started to experience the emergence of a new Muslim *habitus* which is a central element in regulating the practices that make up social life. We argue that religious actors have always re-interpreted religion and this new structure creates new Muslim individuals. As Giddens (1984) suggests, the relationship between agent and structure is not a one-way causal relation. Instead there is more of a co-created circular relationship. While religious sources and rules are shaping individuals, the religious actors produce and re-produce the social structure through their social practices.

The pious group in the research presented here seem very pleased with the 1980s liberal policies and the new Islamic discourse. The following is a proper summary of how these people feel about the changes taking place within the last two decades:

Yes, it has changed. And this is a positive change. They (the pious people) realised that life, wealth, and big business do not exist in Istanbul only. They saw that if they work hard they can acquire them here as well. It was triggered by Özal (referring 1980s liberal politics) and it keeps going. After the 80s this nation has woken up. No one can make them go back to sleep anymore (RKY10).

Using the metaphor of “waking up” is significant. It appears that the recent developments in Turkey, though not definable as a purely religious phenomenon, have been regarded as a renaissance of the country, awakening the entrepreneurial spirit in a way which is congruent with Islamic beliefs. The new Islamic discourse illuminated in this paper provides an original perspective from which to understand the relationships between Islam, capitalism and entrepreneurship in Muslim countries.

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