

“ISLAMIC PURITANISM” AS A SOURCE OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF THE GÜLEN MOVEMENT

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Abstract

Turkey has been going through significant transformations over the last two decades, which might be studied under diverse rubrics. The focus in this paper is on the emergence of a new bourgeoisie that is overwhelmingly religious; its aim is to describe the motives behind the attitudes of religious business people and to discuss the contribution of the Gülen movement.

The paper begins by clarifying relevant concepts that appear vague – such as ‘Islamic Puritanism’ and ‘Islamic work ethic’ – following the particular interpretation by Wilhelm Hennis of Max Weber’s familiar ‘Protestant ethic’ thesis. Rather than looking for mechanical causal relationships, this paper focuses on life goals and ways of living and discusses the Gülen movement’s contribution to the way of living related to economic activities. (The movement is considered as a new interpretation of Islam – Turkish and strongly influenced by Sufism.) Next, the institutional and moral sources enabling an enterprise culture are discussed. This paper considers the transformation in Turkey to be securely founded on the moral sources and suggests that Turkish Islam might be considered as a source enabling a particular type of entrepreneurs, and that this type is helpful to Turkey’s modernisation project as it anticipates membership of the European Union.

Introduction

Lately, it has been discussed that religious people in Turkey are in transition. This paper will be stressing on the economic aspect of this transition, particularly focussing on the emergence of religious businessmen, and the contribution of the Gülen movement to this transition. We argue that Turkey's effort of economic development can benefit from this transition. In order to support this argument, we intend to explain the religious businessmen phenomenon with a Weberian approach. In this respect, first, the study evaluates the emergence of religious businessmen in Turkey. Then, Max Weber's Protestant ethic thesis and its different interpretations will be assessed. We intend to explain the above-mentioned phenomenon with a distinctive Weber reading which is made by Wilhelm Hennis. Hennis's Weber interpretation, in terms of the relation between religion and economic activity, focuses on how a religion shapes individuals' way of living rather than suggesting any causal relation between religion and economic development. This particular interpretation seems a useful instrument to explain the economic impacts of the Gülen movement. At the same time, this study intends to clarify probable misunderstandings and concept confusion regarding the using of such terms as "Muslim Calvinists" or "Islamic Puritanism" in the relevant literature.

The Emergence of Religious Businessmen in Turkey

Turkey has been facing a significant transformation in its social structure for two decades. This transformation process might be classified under several subheadings; however, we intend to focus in this piece on the emergence of religious businessmen and their economic activities and dynamics. Newly emerging religious business people and SME (small and medium sized enterprise) owners, and their new entrepreneurship culture seem quite unique, especially in the Muslim world. This new entrepreneurship culture has been considered as a new attitude concerning worldly activities, particularly in business circles. It is considered as new because religious people were not for a long time interested in doing economic activities in a rational and modern way. Consequently, the development has been the subject of a heated debate in Turkish intellectual and economic circles. The controversy has been intensified, especially after a recent report entitled "Islamic Calvinists" by European Stability Initiative (ESI)¹.

The report has focused on the central Anatolia, Kayseri a city known for its conservative and religious leanings. Basically, the report has attributed the business boom in Kayseri to the "protestant work ethic" values of its people (esiweb.org). In turn, such terms as "Muslim Calvinists" or "Islamic puritans" have been frequently used by some journalists and academics alike, to describe the business elite of the region. This transformation process has been considered as a struggle for creating an indigenous Muslim ethic (Ozdemir, 2006). This opinion also claims that it is a unique and yet highly compatible step for Turkey's ongoing modernisation project. In this sense, this new development has been argued to be creating a new Turkish bourgeoisie and an enterprise culture in Turkey.

Obviously, in the context of this controversy, the concept of enterprise culture gains special importance. According to Keat (1991) and Carr (2000) creating enterprise culture has two dimensions. First, it requires institutional and structural changes, such as changes on regulations, privatization, encouraging private business sector, reducing taxes, etc. But, these changes are not sufficient as such. Creating enterprise culture also requires moral foundations.

¹ For more information and the full text of the report, see <http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=117>

As it is seen in the example of the United Kingdom (UK), Thatcher's endeavours were covering both, namely institutional changes on one hand and moral foundations of the country's enterprise culture, on the other. Thatcher frequently stressed the importance of UK's historical moral values, principally the Protestant ethic, to facilitate creating enterprise culture. In fact, what is at issue here may be claimed to be a long term struggle to modify people's way of thinking and transform their 'souls' (Roberts, 1992:15). In short, religion may be argued to be a source of creating particular type of individuals in terms of economic activities and enterprise culture.

In this piece, we will focus on the Gülen movement in Turkey that emerged with its flexible ideas to stimulate a patriotic, global and free market orientation with an emphasis on the spiritual and intellectual consciousness of the individuals (Yavuz, 2003: 19, 29). Fethullah Gülen is a well known Islamic scholar in Turkey. His ideas have inspired many people in Turkey to establish educational institutions that integrate modern science, ethics and spirituality. Berberoglu (2000), a Turkish journalist, describes him as an opinion leader, and Aras (1998) sees him as "a most likely candidate for religious leader of the new Turkey". Besides educational institutions, he gives special importance to inter-faith dialogue activities in Turkey and all over the world by stressing the significance of cultural and legal plurality of societies (Unal and Williams, 2000). It is claimed that "Gülen's discourse has had and will have major influences on the future shape of Turkey and the region" (Yilmaz, 2005:394). Probably, the biggest difference between other Islamic movements and the Gülen movement is that his movement is a civil one, rather than a political. As previously mentioned, his main concern could be summarised as ethics and individuals. Considering the institutions and activities of his sympathisers; such as hundreds of schools along with seven universities all over the world, media institutions, inter-faith dialogue centres, college preparation courses; it can be claimed that it is a successful civil initiative. Therefore, this successful movement might be a proper example of how a civil society acquires its autonomy from the state. In other words, the movement plays a crucial role in the empowerment of civil society, which is very important for Turkey's democratization process.

As known, the population of Turkey is overwhelmingly Muslim and the state is strictly secular. From the very beginning of the Turkish republic, the state chose a strict secularism as a lynchpin of its project of modernization. It can be said that it has been successful to some extent. However, the recent emergence of religious businessmen as a phenomenon has been argued by some to be a possible threat for the secular structure, who have dubbed the phenomenon as an attempt by the green or Islamic capital to form an Islamic state, oblivious to the apparent contradiction represented by the combination of capitalist greed and ideological orientation. This contradiction appears to be resolved by an understanding that the Gülen movement uses democracy not out of a normative commitment, but rather instrumentally, as a useful tool for seeking power to establish an Islamic state (Baskan, 2005). Yavuz (2003), away others, considers this sort of readings as superficial. On the contrary, some studies have showed that the religious people in question are well adapted to the rational way of doing business and show strong "Protestant work ethic" values (Arslan, 2001; Ozdemir, 2006).

However, in this paper, we are not interested in the work ethic values of the people in question; whether they are hard workers, or whether they are honest or not. Rather we intend to focus on the dynamics of the emergence of this phenomenon. According to the Weberian reading of society, every social order requires particular type of individuals. In the Turkish context, we propose that Anatolian Islam, in particular the Gülen movement as the typical representative of it, plays a vital role in creating a certain type of individuals. However, the

role of this new approach is not only in creating sympathisers of a particular movement, but it also shapes a new interpretation of Islam which is more suitable for worldly activities and, a more rational way of living. In a sense, it might be considered as combining secular and religious values together. For example, educational institutions inspired from Gülen's ideas are not traditional medrese schools; rather they are secular institutions that meet the necessities of the modern world. According to Voll (2003: 243), "it is a new synthesis of elements of the older modern secularism and religion". Therefore, it can be claimed that the new generation religious people grow up within this particular interpretation of the religion. We argue that this new approach, in other words the transition, can also affect the understanding of business and economy. In order to understand the religious businessmen phenomenon in Turkey, we will draw on a particular interpretation of Weber's Protestant work ethic thesis. Then, the phenomenon will be evaluated within that particular interpretation.

Max Weber's Protestant Ethic Thesis

Max Weber's "Protestant work ethic" thesis has been a widely studied subject for many years by considerable amount of researchers from a variety of fields. Naturally, we encounter many different interpretations of Weber's study with different perspectives. Most of the researchers agree about his claim: that ascetic Protestantism played a vital role in the formation of modern, rational capitalism (Weber, 2001). However, this claim might seem vague in itself, and may need to be elucidated by the question how? For this reason, we face many different interpretations explaining how Protestant ethic shaped modern capitalism, and under what circumstances it happened. In this respect, it is extremely important that we use a proper interpretation to explore resembling developments or changes in different cultural settings, such as religious businessmen activities in Turkey.

It is a gripping point that Weber stresses: all of the economically developed countries have already done a series of requisite reformations in relation to the Catholic Church (Weber, 2001). When we examine ascetic Protestantism, we can easily see that ascetic Protestantism shaped a frugal life style, strongly encouraging people towards hard work. Studying Weber on Protestant work ethic (PWE), we encounter two main aspects: one that in psychological, and another that in sociological. In management and psychology literature there are plenty of studies regarding psychological aspect of PWE. This body of literature is mainly about work related values, attitudes, job satisfaction etc. In this respect, the PWE seems to have been converted to personality dimension separated from its socio-political and religious background that Weber proposed (Niles, 1999). In other words, we can assume that the PWE has become secularized, and it can be considered as "work ethic" itself without its religious aspects. Furnham (1990:32) explain this situation as follows: "...so it could be claimed that the PWE is not exclusively Protestant, about only work, nor exclusively concerned with ethics. It may therefore be more accurate to talk about work values and beliefs rather than the PWE itself". Therefore, in a sense, it is understandable that some use such terms as "Muslim Calvinists" or "Islamic puritans" while studying different cultural settings, such as Muslims, in the academic literature. But, of course, it does not suggest any correlation between different religions or social settings. For instance, in an insightful study, Mahmut Arslan (2001) compares work ethic values of Protestant British, Catholic Irish and Muslim Turkish managers in terms

of PWE. According to his research, Muslim Turkish managers (specifically selected from the Nur movement²), show higher PWE values than their Protestant and Catholic counterparts (Arslan, 2001). 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). In another important study utilising a qualitative and hermeneutic perspective, Ozdemir (2006) focuses on the members of a religious businessmen association, MUSIAD (Association of Independent Businessmen). She interprets this phenomenon as an attempt towards creating an indigenous Muslim ethic compatible with the necessities of the modern world (Ozdemir, 2006).

It is a very common opinion that the Gülen movement is the largest faith-based movement in Turkey, with a strong influence on the mainstream religious way of living. Here, this paper proposes that Gülen's new interpretation of Islam promotes a particular type of individuals; and in so doing, it might assist Turkey's efforts towards economic development. We presume that PWE values such as thriftiness, hardworking, honesty are also important values for secular businessmen in Turkey. Therefore, it is hard to claim that religion, in particular "Islamic work ethic"³ (if there is such a thing), is the only reason for the emergence of successful religious businessmen. However, doing business in a rational and modern way is a new attitude for religious people in Turkey, and this is what we really need to explain. In this regard, we intend to focus on Hennis's interpretation of Weber on the influence of religion on individuals' way of living in terms of economic activities.

Understanding Weber's Main Concern (Hennis's Interpretation)

As a starting point, we should be able to distinguish between personal change, social change and social development, due to the fact that Weber's study concerns the changes in the social order by individuals' particular way of living. In this respect, personal changes should be considered within the social context. Therefore, we intend to take individuals within the social order, because every social order requires a particular type of individuals (Hennis, 2000). However, there is a nuance between social change and social development. According to Schluchter (1981), social changes occur when a social order is transformed into another, but still manages with the same basic social configuration, such as from patrimonialism to sultanism. On the other hand, social development occurs when the basic configuration changes, for instance transition from tradition to modernity (Schluchter, 1981). Gülen movement should be considered within the concept of "social development", because it seems that the main concern of the movement is not to achieve changes in social order, but in relation to individuals.

When examining PWE, Weber's historical problem should be underlined by distinguishing between Western capitalism and Western rationalism. From the very beginning, Weber takes capitalism in historical perspective. He copes with the origin and organizational structure of

2 The Nur (Light) movement is an influential Islamic movement guided by Said Nursi (1878-1960) in Turkey and all over the world, from which the Gülen movement sprang. "It differs from other Islamic movements in terms of understanding of Islam and its strategy of transforming society by raising individual consciousness." (www.religion.info, 2007)

3 According to Yousef (2001:154) "both the Islamic work ethic (IWE) and the Protestant work ethic (PWE) place considerable emphasis on hard work, commitment and dedication to work, work creativity, avoidance of unethical methods of wealth accumulation, cooperation and competitiveness at the work place. However, unlike the PWE, the IWE places more emphasis on intention than on results. For example, Prophet Mohammed stated 'actions are recorded according to intention, and man will be rewarded or punished accordingly'".

legal institutions that shaped the development of a specific form of capitalism, which is the modern production-oriented capitalism (Schluchter, 1981). According to Weber, the main characteristic of the capitalism of the modern business firm is driven from a separation of business and personal assets and on an arrangement of risk and responsibility (Weber, 2001). These peculiarities of modern capitalist firms differ from the traditional medieval trading companies. He notes that only this differentiation between types of assets made possible the organizational separation of household and enterprise (Weber, 2001). On the other hand, according to Weber, rationalism is not limited to the West, like capitalism. He claims that rationalisation has existed in all civilizations in very different forms with very divergent viewpoints. Therefore, Weber takes the Western rationalism in its specific manifestation and seeks to explore its distinctiveness. In this respect he tries to explain the historical origin of the Western rationalism by indicating “who rationalizes which spheres of life in what directions and which historical kinds of social order result there from” (Weber, 2001). In other words, Weber tries to explain the emergence of a new bourgeois class based on the Western rationality by specifically emphasising on individuals and their particular way of living.

Obviously, the Western capitalism and rationalism are key terms. However, we should go further to understand the spirit of modern capitalism, and how it is related to religion in particular the Calvinist puritan sect of Protestantism in 17th century Europe. Probably, the first things we could notice, when we look at the Western capitalism as it historically unfolded are legal and commercial transformations such as new types of organizational structures, the development of double entry bookkeeping or newly emerging mechanical techniques. However, Weber does not accept that capitalism is the only reason for these transformations. He tries to show how the way of life shaped by Calvinist puritans “based on rational, legal acquisition through individual endeavour and self-discipline revolutionized the European economy” (Lewis, forthcoming). According to Giddens (2001:xviii), the “emergence of modern capitalism was an outcome of historically specific conjunction of events”. Clearly, we could say that Weber’s intention is to explain the historical genesis of “the manner of leading one’s life” (Hennis, 2000), rather than develop a causal relationship between religion and modern capitalism. Weber explains his real concern as follows:

In order that a manner of life so well adapted to the peculiarities of capitalism could be selected at all, i.e. should come to dominate others, it had to originate somewhere, and not in isolated individuals alone, but as a way of life common to whole groups of men. This origin is what really needs explanation (Weber, 2001:20).

Hennis (2000) appears to offer a distinct interpretation of Weber in this regard. According to this reading, every social order requires a certain kind of individuals. Consequently, Hennis claims that Weber’s investigation centres around, not a ‘spirit’ at all, but a ‘habitus’. Habitus is a complex concept “referring primarily to the non-discursive aspects of culture that bind individuals to larger groups” (wikipedia.org, 2007), particularly manner of leading one’s life (*Lebensführung*)⁴ within the social orders of life, such as family, community and economic activities in life. Weber considered all these as ‘sphere’ which means a particular aspect of life or activity. Hennis explains the ideas behind this term as follows:

The ‘sphere’ which Weber stressed was that of the ‘vocation’ of acquisitive activity (*Erwerbsleben*).

4 The German term ‘*Lebensführung*’, which is critical in Weber’s theory of social stratification, inspires various ideas among English speaking sociologists, as Abel and Cockerham (1993) argue. According to the authors, *Lebensführung* means life conduct or managing one’s life; applied to the individual; it refers to the self-direction of one’s behaviour, not life style.

The puritans had brought the great 'internal tensions' between vocation, life and ethics into a 'characteristic equilibrium'; for them there was no 'on the one hand and on the other', 'theory and practice', they rather conducted lives 'totally', harnessed, consciously, 'methodically', at one with their God and themselves – presupposing the corresponding *Lebensführung* (Hennis, 2000:17).

Similarly, creating an Islamic ethic as a manner of conducting individual's life is the main objective of Gülen and his close circle. According to Özdalga (2003:61) his goal is to promote an ethic that is very close to what Max Weber defined as worldly asceticism, "an activist pietism with a tendency toward the rationalisation of social relationships". It is also possible to see noticeable similarities between the activities of Gülen movement and those of Protestant missionaries. Özdalga (2003:66) summarizes these parallels in the following manner:

...belief in the individual study of holy scriptures; the urge to live a life of piety and self-sacrifice; the enthusiasm for knowledge in general and knowledge of the natural sciences in particular; the urge to carry this knowledge to others through various educational projects; an enterprising spirit; the urge to do good deeds (activism); and a strong impulse to break open the borders of one's own national milieu to reach out to other countries and places around the globe.

Weber also states in an earlier debate with Fisher, that his "investigations concern only the analysis of the development of an ethical life-style adequate to emergent modern capitalism" (cited in Hennis, 2000:14). Therefore, it could be concluded that his central interest is the development of modern rational capitalism and how it was most deeply influenced by a particular combination of circumstances (Hennis, 2000). As it is clearly seen, there is no direct link between modern rational capitalism and Protestantism. The primary issue here is how a certain kind of belief system determines the lives of individuals who are born into a particular society. With this point in mind, we can talk about the assistance of Protestant asceticism in building the tremendous cosmos of the modern economic order (Hennis, 2000).

Unlike many others, Hennis (2000) suggests that we must see Weber's starting point first, which is the 'economic ethics of world religions'. In his short life time, Weber tried to look at the world's different religions and their influences on economic activities. He examined, for instance, the religion of China and its effects on economic activities, beside his studies on Protestant ethic in Western Europe. For him, therefore, Protestantism, especially its Calvinist branch, was just a sample of his argument, rather than his central question or focal point. As a common opinion, Weber's fundamental problem was the question of 'what is the meaning of rationality?' However, according to Hennis (2000), it was just an introduction and does not cover everything; and he argues that Weber's thesis has been misunderstood for a long time as a causal hypothesis on the origin of capitalism. To see the process of rationalization as Weber's fundamental theme is certainly not incorrect, he suggests; but, he also adds that it is misleading to read everything in its terms and see it everywhere (Hennis, 2000:7).

Today's prevailing opinion is to focus on the term Weber frequently used: "selective affinity" between 'Protestant ethic' and the 'spirit of capitalism'. Turner (1974) also argues that Weber was not saying that Calvinism created modern capitalism in his study, the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism. By contrast, he claims that one can find many evidences supporting the idea that Calvinism did not create capitalism (Turner, 1974). In this respect, some scholars think that it is also possible to interpret Weber's study in an economically determinist way. Aktay (2004) proposes that it is all about the coexistence of 'Protestant ethic' and 'spirit of capitalism'. This simultaneous meeting of the protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism together helped for development of modern capitalism. For this reason, Weber might have used the term 'selective affinity' to explain the relationship between Protestant

ethic and capitalism. Weber offers a clarification by stating:

I therefore take no responsibility for the misconceptions upon which in my opinion the foregoing 'criticism' is based. I will, however, try again on occasion of a separate edition of the essays, which for technical publishing reasons cannot be long postponed, to remove each expression which could be misunderstood in terms of derivation (falsely attributed me) of economic forms from religious motives, and to make it if possible even clearer that it is the spirit of a 'methodical' Lebensführung which should be 'derived' from 'asceticism' in its Protestant transformation and which then stands in a cultural-historical relation of 'adequacy-equivalence' which is in my opinion very important. I am grateful to my critic for this stimulus [(PE II, p.31) cited in Hennis (2000)].

In a sense, Weber's study might seem similar to Sombart's important book *The Genesis of the Capitalism*, which first appeared in 1902⁵. In this study, Sombart explains material developments as the result of an ethos, for instance, the role of Judaism in the development of capitalism (Sombart, 1902-2001). Hennis argues that "if Weber wished to present something new then it could not be in terms of the significance of Protestantism for the rise of capitalism" (Hennis, 2000:14). Considering the fact that, at that time Sombart had already characterised that Protestantism, especially in its Calvinist version had played an important role in the development of capitalism; Weber's problematic must be something quite different (Hennis, 2000). As Weber states, his whole investigation involved, not a 'spirit' at all, but rather a *Habitus*, in other words, the unfolding of a particular kind of Lebensführung 'within the orders of the world: family, economic life, social community' (Weber, 2001). Therefore, his only concern is the analysis of the development of an ethical life-style adequate to an emergent modern capitalism, according to Hennis (2000). In other words, he is interested in the emergence and development of a Lebensführung (conduct of life) which made modern capitalism achievable, stressing the relationship between a specific type of individual and a specific form of social order (Lewis, forthcoming). Therefore, it can be said that the Calvinist sect was only a sample of Weber's study. In Weber's reading, it provides the moral power and drive of the capitalist entrepreneur, according to Giddens (2001).

In the Turkish context, we can claim, at the most, that the Gülen movement supplies a similar moral energy and drive for Turkish entrepreneurs. The perception of religious people towards worldly, in particular economic, activities seems have been transformed into a more rational and modern way by the new interpretation of Islam in Turkey. Arguably, it can be said that this new approach has similar effects on Anatolian society, as in the effects of Protestant reformation over the Western Europe. It is only because of this theoretical similarity, such terms as "Calvinism" or "Puritanism" are sometimes being used to describe resembling developments in different cultural settings. In a sense, some aspects of the Gülen movement, with their focus on hard work, a disciplined life motivated by traditional and religious values, make comparing it to Protestantism⁶. Therefore, we suggest that in the relevant literature, such concepts as "Muslim Calvinists" or "Islamic puritans" should be read in this perspective. Therefore, interpreting these developments as a Protestantisation of Islam would not correctly be reflecting the transition in question, we propose.

A New Form of Sufism and Economic Activity

Religious sphere, although traditionalist and conservative, has the potential for change and innovation through interaction between its doctrinal dimensions and social reality (Worsley,

5 It was before Weber published his study, *the Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

6 See Aras, 2000; Ozdalga, 2003; Yavuz, 2003 and ESI's report on www.esiweb.org

1969; Ozdemir, 2006). Protestant reformation is a good example of a religion's transformative potential. As known, Protestant reformation had played an important role in creating a particular way of living in Europe. It was that particular way which had important effect in the emergence of modern rational capitalism.

According to Ozdemir (2006), the growing number of religious businessmen in Turkey is a sign of the rebirth of an indigenous Muslim ethic which was suppressed for a long time after the establishment of the Turkish republic. It can also be described as struggle for creating an internal code of ethics for all aspects of the local life. As in Calvinism, it is not only related to religious individuals, it also affects many different aspects of the public sphere. In this context, the emergence of religious businessmen could be considered as carriers of a new indigenous ethic. Gole (1997) considers these businessmen as a newly emerging secondary elite group. Whether they are named a secondary elites or a new bourgeoisie, we propose that they could play a vital role in Turkey's development process.

In a sense, some studies (Rodinson, 1973; Arslan, 2001; Turkdogan, 2005) seem to prove that Islamic values and capitalism are not incompatible. However, it is a paradoxical situation as well. It does not explain the underdevelopment of Muslim countries, considering the fact that these values have existed for fourteen centuries. Kuran (1997) suggests that the reason for the underdevelopment of Muslim countries should be sought internally rather than externally. By saying internal reasons we understand the different perceptions and interpretations of the religion. For a long time, in Turkey among the other Muslim countries, Western civilisation and rational values were seen as non-compatible for the Muslim societies. Gülen and his close circle "go a step further accepting Western civilisation as a suitable foundation for material life while considering Islamic civilisation suitable for spiritual life" (Aras, 2000:39). For this reason, this paper focuses on a particular interpretation of Islam in Turkey.

Presumably, local and traditional values should shape the understanding of religion. As known, Sufism has had a crucial impact on Turkish understanding of Islam. Spiritual teaching of Sufism can be expressed as: "to help to refine the individual's consciousness so that it may reach the Radiances of Truth, from which one is cut off by ordinary activities of the world" (Shah, 1990:1). The most common motives of Sufism could be summarized by the following terms: "*tevekkul*" (reliance; putting oneself in God's hands), "*dunya*" (worldliness) and "*zikr*" (remembrance of God). However, the perception and the interpretation of these terms have changed over time. Regarding the relations between Sufi ideas and economic activities, Sabri Ulgener is the first scholar, that comes to minds. He is also known as the "Turkish Weber". According to Ulgener (1991) the concepts mentioned had separated from their original meaning as being otherworldliness. In the early years of Turkish republic, many Sufi institutions had been closed by Atatürk on the ground that those institutions (*Tekkes*: Dervish schools) were encouraging laziness, indolence and were open to abuse. At the same period, Turkey chose a strict form of secularism for its development and modernization project. Ulgener finds understandable the reasons for closing *tekkes* down. The misinterpretation of Sufism which defined the late Ottoman *tekkes*, according to him, was one of the reasons for the economic disintegration of the Ottoman Empire (Ulgener, 1991).

However, Ulgener (2006) also stresses the necessity of investigating the main concern of Sufi ideas. He claims that Sufism is not necessarily against worldly activities. The concept of "*dunya* (worldliness)" is a key notion in Sufi literature. In many Sufi sayings and poems we can see that a negative meaning applied to the concept, in terms of leaving everything in the world. In general meaning, Sufis define the concept of "world" as everything in the world

except the love of God. According to Ulgener this is what people misunderstood for long time. He proposes that the meaning of “*dunya*” should be sought within individuals’ intention, rather than within the material dimensions of the world (Ulgener, 2006). As Ulgener explains, Sufis consider the “*dunya*” as nothing else than forgetting of devotion to God. In this respect, Sufis claim that none of the usual suspects such as women, money, or business career, are the “*dunya*”. Ulgener makes his argument stronger by citing some sayings of the prophet: “The world is something that keeps you busy from remembrance of God” “Work for this world as if you will never die; and work for the other world as if you will die tomorrow” (2006: 64). Therefore, it can be said that the crucial thing for Sufism is not the worldly activity itself, but the intention of the individual. Engaged in work overall, Ulgener’s studies show his optimism regarding a regaining of the power of Sufi ideas in an economic sense.

In this regard, it can be said that Gülen has also been reinterpreting Sufi teachings within the contemporary framework⁷. The ideas of Ulgener, who is an historian of economics, show high compatibility with those of Gülen. When explaining such Sufi terms as isolation (*tecrid*) or asceticism (*zuhd*), Gülen stresses that these terms do not mean that one should leave worldly activities; and he puts great emphasis on rearing Muslim individuals not isolated from the world (Gülen, 2004). Unlike political Islamic movements in Turkey, the priority of the Gülen movement is education towards a reconstruction of the daily lives of people in Turkey (Piricky, 1999). Thus, it can be claimed that his tenets influence many aspects of daily life, including economy and business. In an interview Gülen, gives us some evidence regarding how this new interpretation of Islam contributes to a more rational way of living in terms of economic activities:

Today, our troubles are ignorance, dissension and poverty. The solution for these problems is organizing rich people and learning how to conduct work. ...Even today, I definitely wish them (Turkish entrepreneurs) who come to see me, to do something (in business sense) here. And, I ask them: Have you done a proper market analysis? Do you know about your competitors? (Akman, 2004:52)

As it is seen, rather than direct relations between religion and economic activities, such as Islamic business principles; his contribution very much values the secular premises of business. In this respect, just as Protestantism in shaping a capitalist entrepreneurial mentality within the Christian world, Gülen is thought to play a comparable role within the modern Turkish society (Piricky, 1999). Therefore, the phenomenon of religious businessmen in Turkey should be explained within the social context which that particular way of living shapes. However, the emergence of religious businessmen in Turkey should not only be applied to the new interpretation of Islam. After 1980s, Turkey’s economy politics changed radically and it was shifted from a state-oriented economy to a free-market liberal economy. It can be said that this transformation in economy politics has encouraged private business sector and it has facilitated the emergence of enterprise culture. Historically, the transition both in economics and religion has occurred at the same time period. Aras (2000:40) summarizes it as follows:

In the 1990s, however, policies oriented towards greater liberalisation and a shift to export-oriented industrialisation have led to the emergence of new, dynamic, export-oriented, small and medium-sized business, many based in traditionally conservative Anatolian cities. This segment of society has been mobilized by Gülen’s movement. The newly emerging export-oriented economic class is likely to challenge the existing economic structure and pressure the state bureaucracy to

7 For further information about Gülen’s reading of Sufi terms, see: Gülen, F. (2004), *Key Concepts in the Practice of Sufism*, The Light Inc: NJ.

end the unequal treatment. It might also be said that the economic activities linked to Gülen's movement as well as the educational activities of Gülen's community have become part of an alternative economy.

In almost every Anatolian city, Gülen's sympathisers have established local businessmen associations. Among these local institutions, they have also established two national businessmen associations: TUSKON (Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists of Turkey), and ISHAD (Business Life Cooperation Association). These associations work as NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) and aim to provide suitable atmosphere for gathering Turkish private business sector together and stress the importance of cooperation and ethics. They arrange business trips all over the world to seek new opportunities for Turkish entrepreneurs. The businessmen of these associations are also financing the educational institutions of Gülen Movement, considering it as a social (or, in a sense a religious) responsibility of their own. In this respect, we can claim that religious businessmen in Turkey have started to work in a more rational way which requires full adaptation to free market and the capitalist system.

Purportedly, we can assume that combining traditional values and modernity might assist Turkey's modernisation project. Talal Asad, in his insightful study entitled *Genealogies of Religion*, notes that tradition and modernity are not entirely different entities, and he claims that modernity emerges out of tradition (Asad, 1993). In the Turkish context, the Gülen movement seems a new paradigm for acquiring the level of modern developed countries. According to Yilmaz (2005:400) the movement "is generally deemed to be moderate" and it "can be considered 'modern' in the sense that it espouses a worldview centred around the self-reflexive and politically participant individual's ability to realise personal goals while adhering to a collective identity, and seeks to shape local networks and institutions in relation to global discourses of democracy, human rights, and the market economy" Yavuz (1999:195).

Conclusion

It is a common opinion that Muslim world is in transition. As previously mentioned, this paper's focal point is economic aspects of this transition, in the case of religious businessmen in Turkey, and the contribution of the Gülen movement to this transition. While evaluating the emergence of religious businessmen in Turkey we tried to use a Weberian approach by distinguishing the different interpretations of Weber.

In short, this paper proposes two major points. First, we suggest that the phenomenon at issue should be read in the way that, following Hennis, Weber's central concern is all about (which is the conduct/manner of one's life), as opposed to setting up causal relationships between religion and economic activity. We suggest that Gülen's new interpretation of Islam has crucial impacts on mainstream understanding of Islam in Turkish society. In particular, it seems that religious people in Turkey has modified their views towards business activities into a more rational way. Secondly, we suggest that the new interpretation of Islam with its flexible ideas and its high compatibility with the modern world might come handy in Turkey's modernization project that the Turkish state has been trying to achieve from the very beginning through an uncompromising secularism inimical to religious sentiments. Additionally, we propose that this new interpretation of Islam which integrates modernity with tradition might set up an example for the other Muslim countries.