

From Islamic Radicalism to Islamic Capitalism: The Rise of Neo-Islamist Bourgeoisie in Turkey

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The rise of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) to power in Turkey in 2002 marked a beginning of a new era in Turkey and Islamic world, in terms of enduring debate between Islam and Democracy and that of Islam and Capitalism. One of the significant outcomes of this politico-economic development was emergence of a new neo-Islamist bourgeoisie in modern Turkey. The aim of this paper examine intellectual, social and economic developments which led to the rise of neo-Islamist Bourgeoisie and political, intellectual and economic transformations of Islamist actors over the last three decades in Turkey

As a result of very complex and interconnected developments, a neo-Islamic bourgeois class and resultant political, civil and economic associations emerged in Turkey in the 1990s and 2000s. The major question for this burgeoning class was “how to earn” and “how to consume” within a capitalist system, while not transgressing Islamic boundaries. Challenges of the discursive and ideological tension between Islam and capitalism, I argue, were eliminated over time, not through creating an “alternative Islamic economic system”, but rather through the introduction of Islamic morality into capitalism by these Islamic actors. Overcoming the challenges, and decrease the ‘discursive tension’ between Islam and capitalism, in this process, these Islamic actors defined and redefined Islam, secularism, capitalism, consumption, and luxury in such a way that both Islam and capitalism became to be seen flexible enough to accommodate each other. The forces of capitalism triggered a process in which Islamic identities were reformulated to the extent that even the most radical and puritan Muslims redefined their Islamic values, norms and ethics.

As a case study, I examined vision, mission and activities of Islamically oriented Association of Economic Entrepreneurship and Business Ethics (IGIAD), which was an offshoot of the first Islamic organization called Independent Businessmen Association (MUSIAD). The reason I chose to work on IGIAD is twofold: a) the organization has never been studied from an academic point of view; and b) it is an organization which makes a more (even more than MUSIAD) concerted and self-conscious effort to reconcile capitalist business principles and Islamic ethical values.

Methodologically speaking, my dissertation will integrate my analysis of secondary and primary sources that I have been studying at Bilkent and Harvard libraries last three years; Islamic media (newspapers, journals, TV channels); and more importantly in-depth interviews with members of neo-Islamic bourgeoisie class in Turkey.