

## **Work Ethic, Religion and Moral Energy:**

### **The case of Turkish SME owner-managers**

#### **Abstract**

This paper explores the hitherto neglected issue of how religious beliefs influence the work ethic of Turkish SME (Small and Medium-sized Enterprise) owner-managers. We draw on Weber's notion of *Lebensführung*, which captures the manner of living one's life, as a theoretical and explanatory lens. The research is conducted among religious Muslim entrepreneurs, which showed strong diaspora characteristics in its early emergence in 1990s. Based on qualitative research on Turkish entrepreneurs (SME owner-managers), we find that a new Islamic discourse –appearing as more liberal and pro market oriented- together with the Muslim work ethic, drive entrepreneurialism in Turkey. We demonstrate that the contemporary Muslim work ethic comprises a 'moral energy', which manifests itself variously as rational/secular, shared/communicated, and action-oriented driver for Muslim entrepreneurs, helping to sustain their entrepreneurial activities in the Turkish context.

**Key Words:** Work ethic, Moral energy, Islam, Turkey

## Introduction

Turkey is a unique context within the Islamic world with its predominantly Muslim population but secular governance mechanisms. Since early 90s, Turkey witnessed the emergence of a new business class that is well known by its religious characteristics. Afterwards, it did not take too long to see their business associations and establishments in many Anatolian cities in Turkey and they have become important players in the economy. Once the religious business people become a well-known phenomenon, they faced a strict reaction of the secular state. Business owners have been accused and blacklisted as being religious fundamentalists or financially supporting radical Islamic groups (Kuran, 1993; Arslan, 1999). The famous motto of the era (90s) was “being stranger in your native land” (an example sayings influenced by a Turkish poet, Necip Fazil). According to Cohen (1998:20), diaspora is “concerned with the way in which nations, real yet imagined communities, are fabricated, brought into being, made and unmade, in culture and politics, both on the land people call their own and in exile”. In this respect, Turkish religious business people in their early emergence present diaspora characteristics within the strict secular structure of the state that is aiming to be a member of the European Union. Considering the fact that Islamic moral principles are becoming more appealing topic in management studies (Syed and Metclafe, 2014), it becomes crucial to know how Muslim identity shapes work ethic values of religious business people in Turkey. Therefore, we discuss and position the Turkish context as peculiar, as it might add to our understanding of Islamic practices within Western diaspora.

This article sets out to demonstrate the influence of Muslim belief on the work ethic of Turkish SME (small and medium-sized enterprise) owner-managers. Understanding different work ethic perceptions, as a factor behind motivation, effort and employment related values, is an important concern particularly in today’s globalised business world. Work ethic has been defined as “a commitment to the value and importance of hard work” (Miller, et.al,

2002:452), or values, beliefs, intentions, and objectives that people bring to their work and the conditions in what is undertaken (Clarke, 1983:122). Max Weber in his well-known essay, the Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, argued that ascetic Protestantism, namely hard work, rational act and a disciplined life played a vital role in the formation of modern rational capitalism (Weber, 2004). The characteristics of the Protestant work ethic (PWE) have been widely used to conceptualise and understand the concept of work ethic in the management literature (i.e. Buchholz, 1976, 1978; Furnham, 1984, 1986, 1990; Jones, 1997; Niles, 1999) highlighting the importance of hard working and disciplined life as main characteristics of the PWE.

However, this body of literature is mostly concerned with measuring work related values and attitudes using quantitative scales so that, as Niles (1999) argues, the PWE has been ‘converted’ to a personality dimension separate from the socio-political and religious background that Weber proposed. Further, while PWE scales have been applied to different cultural settings, including some Muslim countries (Ali and Al-Shakhis, 1989; Furnham et al.; 1993; Arslan, 2001; El-Kot and Burke, 2014; Khan and Rasheed, 2015; Mohammad et.al. 2015), this literature tends to overlook the intrinsic significance of Islamic moral principles. Thus, drawing on Weber’s work, some Muslim scholars/academics have developed and applied “Islamic Work Ethic” (IWE) scales, with almost comparable characteristics to PWE (Ali, 1988; Ali, 1992; Yousef, 2001; Mohammad et.al, 2015). Taken together, the above-mentioned studies tend to overlook Weber’s central question - crucial to understanding religious influence on work ethic. This central question draws on Weber’s notion of *Lebensführung* as manner or conduct of one’s life (Hennis, 2000) to consider the implications of religion for how people live their everyday lives. This paper seeks to fill this research gap by demonstrating how Islamic moral principles as conduct of life construct work ethic values

of Muslim Turkish entrepreneurs, giving a particular emphasis on the newly emerging religious entrepreneurs of Turkey (Yavuz, 2003; Özdemir, 2006) and their way of life.

History demonstrates that the entrepreneurial spirit has not been a strong characteristic of Muslim countries (Ülgener, 1991; Arslan, 2001). Nevertheless, since the 1980s, Turkey's political economy has changed radically and shifted from a state-oriented to a free-market liberal economy (Bugra, 1994). This rapid liberalisation makes the concept of work and the meanings applied to it within the Turkish context a fruitful focus of inquiry. Turkey, as a Muslim country with secular institutions, has been going through a major transformation at both the economic and societal levels which have been accelerated by European Union reforms and structural changes within the last two decades (Yavuz, 2003; Polat, 2013). Recently, Turkey has also witnessed a newly emerging business class best known by its piousness and religious commitment (Yavuz, 2003; Özdemir, 2006). Simultaneously, perhaps more importantly, Turkey has produced a new moderate and liberal Islamic discourse, which could be considered as a contemporary interpretation manifested within civil initiatives rather than political Islam (Yılmaz, 2005). We characterise this new Islamic discourse as civil, liberal, and moderate; therefore compatible with Western influences of secularism and liberalism. Moreover, we are facing an irreversible change in Middle Eastern nations (Ottoway, 2013) from authoritarian regimes to strong democratic demands. Although it is too early to know the direction of the uprisings in the Middle East countries, it is usually predicted that this transformation will lead to a more moderate interpretation of Islam in the region, which is in peace with democracy and free market economy (Bayat, 2013). In this sense, the findings of this paper provide useful insights from a country that has gone through strong transformation. Therefore, studying the work values of this business class, and the relationship between religion and economic activities in the context of doing business, gain

special importance. Following this, and drawing on a Weberian perspective, this paper is shaped around the following research questions: How does Islam influence Turkish SME owner/managers' conduct of life (*Lebensführung*)? How does Islamic moral principles/ethic provide a driving force for entrepreneurialism in the Turkish context?

We argue that the concept of 'moral energy' defined as 'stimulating action of society' by Durkheim (2001) captures the ways in which religion influences how Turkish SME owners live their business lives. Islamic Work Ethic (exemplified by hard-work, good intention, responsibility, generosity and balancing one's life) within the Turkish context becomes a driving source for Turkish SME owner-managers (Arslan, 2001; Karakas et al., 2014; Author, 2009). The main sources of the Islamic work ethic, as in many disciplines, are Qur'an and Hadith (sayings of the prophet). However, we are witnessing a contemporary understanding or interpretation of these sources. In this respect, the concept of moral energy appears as a rational/secular, shared/communicated and action-oriented concept in the Muslim Turkish context. We argue that this concept provides a more nuanced account for understanding the influence of religion.

### **Understanding work ethic and moral energy through *Lebensführung***

Work ethic is an ambiguous concept and should not be conflated with business ethics, although they are not entirely different entities. While some aspects of work ethic characteristics contribute to business ethics (i.e. the moral rules in use in business practice), work ethic mostly refers to approaches and attitudes towards work itself (Furnham, 1990). Therefore, in our study, work ethic is related to people's perception of what they understand from working and how they approach enterprise and 'money making' activities - rather than more abstracted business ethics values (such as social responsibility, environmental issues or corporate governance). The concept of work ethic has been used interchangeably with the Protestant work ethic in some studies (Jones, 1997; Niles, 1999), as it refers to some

particular attitudes, such as hard-work, honesty, frugality and productivity. In this respect, work ethic related studies often combine the concept with certain belief systems such as Christian, Muslim or Buddhist (e.g. Furnham, 1984, 1986; Arslan, 2001, Yousef, 2001; Ali and Al-Owaihian, 2008). Following these examples, we focus on a specific belief system (Islam) and draw on Weber's Protestant ethic thesis as a theoretical lens to make sense of the Muslim work ethic in Turkey. Weber's main concern in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* was not Protestantism or the nature of spiritual life; rather he focuses on people's conduct/manner of life as the term *Lebensführung* suggests (Weber, 2004). The German term *Lebensführung*, which is critical in Weber's theory of social stratification, means life conduct or managing one's life. Although the concept of *Lebensführung* was improperly translated into Anglo-American literature as 'lifestyle', it is important to emphasize that *Lebensführung* actually embodies choice and self-direction in behaviours; therefore it is theoretically distinct from 'Lebensstil' (lifestyle) (Abel and Cockerham, 1993). While the concept of 'Lebensstil' implies a lifestyle gaining its significance through external objects and services, 'Lebensführung' embodies an intrinsic focus on how inner life forms the essence of life conduct and how faith translates into action (Burke and Richter, 2012).

Hennis (2000) offers a distinct interpretation of Weber in this regard. According to this reading, every social order requires a certain type of individual. Consequently, as he claims, Weber's investigation centres around, not a 'spirit' at all, but a 'habitus'. Therefore, it is referring mainly to the non-discursive facets of culture that bind individuals to larger groups, particularly manner of leading one's life (*Lebensführung*) within the social orders of life, such as family, community and economic activities. Weber considered all these as 'spheres', relating to a particular aspect of life or activity. Hennis (2000) explains the ideas behind this term as follows:

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

Weber's central interest was the development of an ethical life-style adequate to emergent modern rational capitalism (Hennis, 2000). 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). This makes the Protestant ethic thesis a useful frame for studying the influence of religious beliefs on work ethic in different contexts.

Approaching Weber's work as a specific historical thesis, and claiming a correlation between Calvinism and entrepreneurial attitudes, it has been argued that Calvinism supplied "the moral energy and drive of the capitalist entrepreneur" (Giddens, 2004:xiii). Durkheim uses the terms 'moral force', 'moral power' and 'moral energy' interchangeably, regarding them as the 'stimulating action of society' that sustains individuals by uplifting their spirits and bringing them to maturity (Durkheim, 2001:158). As Collins (2007) argues, Weber's terminology ('ethic', 'spirit') conveys the sense that, through values such as hard work, frugality, self-discipline, innovation and honesty, successful businessmen possessed a driving energy that gave rise to a new form of work ethic in the West. Therefore, Weber's concepts of 'ethic' and 'spirit' may signify a form of 'moral energy', which is shared by individuals as a manner/conduct of one's life. Building on Weber's and Durkheim's conceptualization of ethics, we define 'moral energy' as the inner motivation and deep inspiration to apply

principles concerning the distinction between right and wrong at work. In this sense, examining *Lebensführung* in the Turkish context will help us to determine the sources of moral energy that stimulates entrepreneurial activities of devout Muslim business people in Turkey.

### **Work Ethic Literature within a Turkish Context**

As discussed earlier, work ethic literature has been mostly shaped around measuring work related behaviours and values using PWE scales – with many scholars focusing on secularised variables (e.g. personality) rather than religious values (e.g. Mirels and Garrett, 1971; Buchholz, 1976, 1978; Furnham, 1986, 1987, 1990; Jones, 1997; Niles, 1999). As a result, such work has overlooked Weber’s central question concerning the manner of leading one’s life or *Lebensführung*. The emerging, though still limited, literature on Islamic work ethic has followed a similar approach. Thus, Ali (1988) created a scale, comparable with PWE, to measure Islamic work ethic beliefs through hard work, commitment, self-satisfaction and self-respect, social welfare, unethical methods of wealth accumulation and creative work.

Some of this work has been conducted in the Turkish context. Bozkurt et al. (2010) found that Kyrgyz, Turkish and Australian students who define themselves as ‘religious’ possessed a Puritan ethic rather than Hedonism, as they show greater scores on PWE and consider work as meaningful in itself. In a cross-cultural comparison, using Mirels and Garrett’s (1971) PWE scale, Arslan (2001) demonstrates that religiously practising Muslim Turkish managers show greater scores on PWE compared to Catholic Irish and Protestant British counterparts. Similarly, a comparison of work values between American and Turkish university students showed that Turkish students score more highly in PWE related items (Aygün et al., 2008). Another study highlighted the concept of ‘Turkish work mentality’ (Aldemir et al., 2003) based on a distinctive profile of mystical values, including religion, traditionalism and

fatalism. Further, Askun et al., (2010) found, in another quantitative study, that Turkish managerial work values consisted of ‘proper’ (referring to Western or universal) and ‘improper’ (local, traditional and religious) values.

Other work has adopted a more theoretical approach (Turkdogan, 1998, 2005; Aksit, 2007; Özcan, 2003; Bikun, 2004) to assess the implementation of the Islamic moral values into the business world. However, these are not empirically founded and they address normative issues (of what should be) based on conceptualisations of idealised Islamic business ethic values. Generally, therefore, work ethic literature in the Turkish setting relies largely on an etic approach, which considers the PWE as a set of universal values that can be measured. Therefore, there is little emphasis on the intrinsic moral aspects of local religion and its transformation through time. Given the rise in the visibility of religious Turkish business community (Yavuz, 2003; Özdemir, 2006), we propose an emic approach to understand how Islam influences the Turkish entrepreneurs’ conduct of life. Exploring the moral energy through *Lebensführung* can help us draw an emic understanding, which emanates from the original framing of social phenomena drawing on local data, and freeing our theorization from etic, which draws on established frames based on Western concepts of work ethic (in particular the PWE) which may not be so suitable in the case of Turkey. Obviously we in no sense claim that an Islamic ethic produces more ethical people as ethics does not necessarily signify a transcendental ‘good’ at all (Carr, 2003).

## **Methodology**

This study adopts an exploratory approach to understand the influence of Islam on the way in which Turkish business entrepreneurs conduct their business lives – i.e. the meanings they attach to work and religious values. In particular, it is informed by social constructivism, which suggests that social phenomena develop in a social context and that meanings are continually produced by social actors through practices and social interactions (Berger and

Luckmann, 1967). In the context of this paper, we consider Weber's *Verstehen* approach in line with our constructivist positioning. Weber's notion of *Verstehen* takes actors' own conception into consideration while examining a social phenomenon (Weber, 1968). His 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, 2011). Wittgenstein (2001), in his notion of 'forms of life' argues that the meanings of words are hidden in the context. This argument is akin to life embedded in the values system as understood by Weber. In the context of Islam and entrepreneurship, we have adopted a qualitative thematic analysis to reach meaningful patterns. Fundamentally, this research seeks to understand the SME owner-managers' points of view on the manner in which religious beliefs shape the work ethic in the Turkish Muslim context.

SME owner-managers are thought to be in a better position than large business owners to bring their ideas, norms and values to bear on their business activities as SMEs are legally independent and ownership and control usually coincide (Author 1999: 164). In general, as in most countries, in Turkey SMEs are regarded as the main carriers of the economy and their owner-managers as embodying entrepreneurship. The data gathered constitute semi structured in-depth interviews conducted with 21 small and medium-sized enterprise owner-managers aged between 30-59. The data gathering and analysis were carried out by the first author, a native Turkish speaker. The interviews, which were completed in Turkish, were transcribed in full and translations were checked for accuracy. To strengthen the validity of translations we used 'back translation technique' (Brislin, 1970).

Another Turkish academic translated the English translation of the transcripts without seeing the original Turkish version. Although the results were highly satisfactory, we did some modifications based on the back translations. An anonymous notation accompanies the quotations presented here for the speaker.

The sample was selected based on theoretical sampling method which enabled us to reach particular people representing religious business people phenomena in Turkey. In particular, they are the entrepreneurs who undertake daily religious practices and have connection to

certain Islamic communities. In other words, these entrepreneurs provide financial support to contemporary Islamic communities and participate in the religious circles or meetings ('sohbet') of these communities. Two business associations (TUSKON and MUSIAD), known for their religious leanings, gave access to 21 respondents. MUSIAD (*Association for Independent Industrialists and Businessmen*) is a confederation of businesses known for their close ties with the conservative government (pro-AKP business owners) while TUSKON (*Confederation of Industrialists and Businessmen of Turkey*) is known for its close links with the *Gülen movement*, the largest faith-based movement in Turkey. TUSKON is the largest SME-sized business network with more than ten-thousand members.

Important gender and sector differences were not the focus of this study so they have been set aside for the purposes of our research though we support their further consideration in future studies. All of the interviewees were male entrepreneurs. For practical reasons gender differences are omitted, since SME owner-managers are overwhelmingly male in Turkey. Interview questions were formulated in line with the findings from the literature review and developed through two pilot studies. Interviews started with some introductory questions (main line of business, number of employees) and inquiries as to how the business was set up. Following this, respondents were asked to recount a typical business day from early morning to the evening. The work ethic characteristics were explored through questions relating to religious beliefs and how these influenced their business lives; the motivating factors behind the decision to join the aforementioned business association. As the main concern of this research was to understand the conduct of life, asking questions in an open-ended way was particularly helpful for hearing their stories drawing on participants' own words and definitions. In other words, we let them construct their own reality without strict limitations. Data were analysed using techniques based on qualitative thematic analysis. This interpretivist methodology allowed us to understand the influence of religion in a

constructivist way. First we analysed the data to identify the common codes and patterns frequently mentioned by all or majority of the respondents (i.e. importance of education, working hard, pleasing God, charity, alms giving). Then these codes and patterns turned into several themes with broader meanings. These themes (i.e. hard working, good will/intention, responsibility, generosity and balance in one's life) appeared as the main characteristics of the Muslim work ethic. Then we moved to a more holistic approach to interpret the meaning of these themes in the context of a country with a secular state and a Muslim majority population. This led us to capturing the development of 'moral energy' in work ethic literature.

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Insert table 1 (participants' profiles) here

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## **Findings**

In this section we develop the notion of the Islamic work ethic and its teachings as a source of moral energy that sustains religious entrepreneurs in Turkey. Particularly, five distinguishing themes emerged as main characteristics of Islamic work ethic, namely, hard work, good will/intention, responsibility, generosity and balance in one's life. These principles develop a notion of moral energy that emerges as a stimulant for Muslim entrepreneurs in the Turkish setting. The concept of moral energy manifests itself as a rational/secular, shared/communicated and action-oriented notion in the Turkish context.

### **Moral Energy: a rational and secular concept**

We begin this section by defining what we call 'contemporary Islamic understanding' in Turkey, which, as we will describe, evokes a rational and secular form of moral energy for entrepreneurs. We define contemporary Islamic understanding to refer to the hybridization of

Islamic virtues and liberal capitalist values in contemporary Turkey. Turkish SMEs, even in Anatolian cities, operate within a business context heavily influenced by the global capitalist system. We argue that this influence is so strong in the fabric of everyday life that the Turkish business context can be characterised as displaying the qualities of Western diaspora contexts. As Turkish cities are transformed by the rise of skyscrapers, luxurious residences, and shopping malls, urban residents demand more choices in high end products and services. As Western chains such as Starbucks and Burger King dominate high streets and international brands enjoy rising popularity and market shares in Turkey, local Turkish firms face an ever-increasing pressure to conform to global business strategies and practices. Even though most entrepreneurs who established SMEs in Turkish cities are religious in their private lives, they largely follow secular principles in their businesses. Consistent with their ambitions of going global and making international investments, Turkish firms have developed contemporary middle ground strategies to balance principles and practices of Islam with those of neoliberal capitalism. Popular manifestations of the unfolding of the synthesis between Islam and global capitalism in everyday life include alternative holiday packages and Islamic resorts for conservative families, veiled fashion shows, Islamic baby showers, and Islamic matchmaking websites and TV shows. A whole range of new sectors, products, and services emerged as a result of the rise of contemporary Islamic understanding, which made neo-liberal Islamic lifestyles and related forms of imagination possible.

Contemporary Islamic understanding within the Turkish context emerged as a stimulating force in terms of creating a new type of entrepreneur whereby emphasis is placed on behaviours that enable effective business practices rather than a didactic teaching of Islamic principles. Here, the Islamic notion of ‘being in God’s service (*hizmet*)’ can be seen to have been re-interpreted within a contemporary framework, and business itself, as a rational and secular concept, is positioned as a way of acquiring God’s consent.

In the religious circles of Turkey, entrepreneurship and business activities are strongly encouraged. As Arslan (2001) points out, traditional Sufism (the main stay of Islamic mysticism) has become an entrepreneurial ideology that underpins the emergence of a new business class. Even traditional discourses of Sufism are being re-interpreted in this way. For instance, an important Sufi concept ‘zikr’ (remembrance of God) is interpreted by R15 as follows:

If helping an unemployed person in society is a form of worship according to my belief, and if you are really convinced and take every step for the sake of Allah, this is the remembrance of Allah in my opinion. (R15).

Helping an unemployed person and providing job opportunities could be regarded as virtuous action regardless of religious context. However, this secular action is linked to religious belief. As Yousef (2001) indicated, Islamic work ethic puts more emphasis on the intentions (good will) of the people, compared to the PWE. This elucidation can open new horizons for religious entrepreneurs, creating flexibility in their business practices. This can be seen in the emphasis placed on secular premises of business – indicative of how this group is broadly pious in their personal lives but secular in business and other worldly activities. Thus, when asked about the recruiting criteria in their respective organizations, all entrepreneurs distanced themselves from religious principles:

Let me make it clear. I like seeing religious people/employees in the trading and business world. It boosts confidence. But, we don’t treat religiosity as a hiring criterion. We try to apply business rules. You know, when it comes to money, people might change...so we look for qualifications and meritocracy first (R13).

Respondents often drew on ‘rational’ discourse of profit maximization and productivity as a priority and made reference to professionalism, qualification and meritocracy as recruiting

criteria. However, religiosity is still regarded as a virtue and as a desirable characteristic. Moreover, the definition of religiosity was interpreted to include work-based entrepreneurial values ('Muslims must be hardworking and honest anyway'). Notions of religious behaviour therefore go beyond 'worshipful' activities such as daily praying to include being an honest person, doing one's job well, working hard, and committing to the goals of the firm.

Respondent interviews seemed to have focused on implicit discursive practices adopted while conducting business to ensure a healthy combination of rational and moral concerns. These discursive practices were aimed at maintaining moderation and balance between the worldly (embracing worldly dynamism, pragmatism, and prosperity) and the otherworldly (believing in the hereafter and accountability). While religious principles guided behaviour and actions and were seen as the source of good manners, honesty and ethics, a distinction was drawn between religious and business life. In this way, religious beliefs were embedded and guided behaviours but not in any overt or explicit sense. This is captured in the following quote:

No, I never mix up my religious beliefs with my business practices. For example I do not make a show of my daily prayers. Personally, I feel uncomfortable with the people who are too forward with their beliefs in business. Therefore, I'm against doing business with religious factors at the forefront in one's business life. We all saw what happened to the holding companies in Konya [that were managed by people who overly emphasized religiosity] ... For us, as a principle, the message should be in the behaviour [as opposed to being conveyed through direct religious communication]. This [honest behaviour] is one of the most sought after traits in trade, that is, honesty, producing good quality products, and delivering on time, with fair price (R16)

Ethical principles (of honesty, hard work) in business therefore may be religiously inspired but conveyed through business practices rather than specific religious observances or

communications. It is therefore a 'duty' to become involved with the secular business world to deliver a religious message by providing good examples of appropriate behaviours and attitudes. The above participant made comparisons with the religiously-inclined holding companies, which were once a phenomenon in the 1990s Turkey. Those companies were well-known by their religious characteristics but also for claims of fraud and corruption directed at them (see Özcan and Çokgezen; 2003). Arguably, this demonstrates a re-interpretation of religious principles and their influence on day-to-day life. Newly emerging religious entrepreneurs do not put traditional religious rituals in the forefront of business life. Instead, secular virtues and rational acts, such as doing honest business, producing good quality products, delivering it on time with a fair price are seen as prerequisites of being religious – attitudes and behaviours which are often justified through religious sources such as Qur'an or the life of the prophet.

In this respect, Prophet Muhammad's life and teachings were frequently referred to as a source of business guidance. As one entrepreneur commented: "...well, Prophet Mohammad was a merchant too" signifying a business oriented attitude towards Islam rather than simply seeing it as source of political or administrative power. This can also be considered as reflection of changing attitudes from the political, radical Islam towards a somewhat moderate one in Turkey. The most common example given by the respondents was the importance of the written contract/agreement in business recommended by the Prophet:

There is a hadith (Prophet's saying) that says 'do not operate your business with people according to people's piousness in religion, but tie it (your business) on written agreements'. This is what we are trying to do. (R13)

... Islam doesn't promote such a thing (referring to hand shaking agreements without signing a formal contract). There is a Quranic verse or hadith (prophet's

sayings) [that goes]: Muslims should do his business with written contracts. You can't give [your money] to others just because they are religious (R18)

Although in decline, in Turkey most people do business without any sort of written contract i.e. business practice based on mutual trust, which is not quite in line with the religious teachings in the matter, as lamented by some of the respondents. The traditional partnerships of this type have been common among religious conservative circles and have often led to controversies and disputes. Historically, this traditional work ethic, defined as 'mystic-rooted work mentality' (*mistik kokenli isgorme anlayisi*) by Aldemir et al. (2003) and embedded in the *Ahi-Futuüvet*<sup>1</sup> tradesman community, helped to rebuild a social order in Ottoman society - organizing tradesmen and promoting strong business ethic values. Over time, this led to an 'otherworldly' and strong fatalist mindset (Aldemir et al., 2003). As Ülgener (1991) has argued, this mindset is out of step with modern business: it does not promote competition and is not open to renewal or modification according to the demands of a rapidly changing world. This shift away from traditional trade practices can be illustrated by the number of participants who routinely do business with non-Muslims and foreign societies - drawing on prophet's sayings as above and claiming to work with anyone who meets their business rules, attending the relevant business expositions in different countries, following the recent developments in their sector and applying all the necessary means to do successful business.

Taken together, this suggests a transition towards greater rationality in business ventures where secular, or more 'worldly' aspects of the religion are becoming apparent in contemporary understanding of Islam in the context of business activities in Turkey. As

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<sup>1</sup> Ülgener defines *fütüüvet* as the principles of these small communities in very similar manner with that of *Sufi* organizations. *Ahi* is the name of the members of *fütüüvet*. This community functioned according to the principles called *fütüüvetname*, and they promoted strong business ethic values among its members, such as honest trading, not producing flawed products and being fair to all customers and not cheating them (Ülgener, 1991).

Ülgener (2006) predicted, Muslim traders of the past who did not like rational thinking are shifting towards a new type of Muslim trader who acts in a more systematised way. Hard work, honesty, responsibility and good intention emerge as key characteristics of work ethic that are grounded in religious values. However, rather than drawing on didactic teaching of religious principles, entrepreneurs reinterpret Islam within a contemporary framework to include rational, secular values that enable effective business practice. These principles can be seen as a driving force behind entrepreneurialism for this group.

The intensity with which rational and secular values dominate everyday life and managerial decisions demonstrates how moral energy is enmeshed with the messy realities of business life. The subtlety of overarching religious values encouraging hard work and justice at work, along with a manifest struggle to adapt to the competitive demands of the neoliberal capitalist system produces a robust combination of Islamic entrepreneurialism and mercantile dynamism. Interview data demonstrated evidence for such integration between Islamic principles and modern business practices; often in the form of navigating worldly affairs through reflexivity, practicality, and wisdom. Some of the visible outcomes of this synthesis are observed in the dynamic emergence of new sectors and forms of Islamic capitalism in Turkey; including Islamic banks, Islamic holdings and media channels, conservative fashion shows and magazines, and ‘tesettür hotels’. Some of the respondents mentioned how they wanted to enter into these sectors and markets to get on the bandwagon; as these markets present niche opportunities for entrepreneurs who target the demands of the rising Islamic bourgeoisie in Turkey.

### **Moral Energy: a shared/communicated concept**

The concept of work for religious entrepreneurs in Turkey goes beyond the boundaries of the organization to encompass values and activities of the community. As we argue, this forms

the basis for a moral energy, acquired through networks such as business associations and religious circles, which also appears as a shared/communicated concept. For example, evening gatherings to communicate and share ideas are common rituals among religious entrepreneurs – referred to variously as ‘akşam oturması (evening sitting)’, ‘çay (drinking tea)’ or ‘istisare (consultation meeting)’. These meetings are common practice and regarded as a way of recapturing a religious dimension to their lives. The quotation below emphasises the nature of such meetings.

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. (R3)

Interview data has uncovered recurrent patterns of practices and rituals that Turkish entrepreneurs regularly engage in their everyday lives; including holding ‘istişare’ meetings (traditional Islamic consultation meetings conducted in the presence of stakeholders and decision makers who form up a circle) to maintain a sense of community and unity; pursuing halal enjoyment through sharing food and laughter; and revitalising the self through group-based business trips. All these were shared activities that were organized regularly and they were particularly aimed at increasing the moral energy of the entrepreneurs in the course of their daily lives. Accordingly, they embodied a conscious effort to activate moral energy as a precursor to *Lebensführung*. The more entrepreneurs increased their moral energy through their participation in these activities, the more they were able to find ways to translate their faith into actions in the fabric of their daily lives.

The emphasis on a ‘balanced life’ (referring to the balance between this world and the hereafter) was another frequently mentioned issue during the interviews. More than just

relaxing and chatting at the end of the day, these meetings are regarded as a spiritual rest. One of the authors of the present study had opportunity to observe the nature of such meetings. First, the moderator of the meeting, who is usually a young college graduate, reads some religious passages from a book. Young moderators are chosen because they are respected as knowledgeable and devoted members of their religious communities. Generally, writings of either Said Nursi or Fethullah Gülen, both prominent Turkish Islamic scholars, are interpreted in the light of contemporary issues (see Yavuz, 2003; Yilmaz, 2003; Author 2014). Then the group starts to discuss the items on the agenda. These include philanthropic and charity activities, such as providing support and scholarships for needy students, building new schools and student accommodations. During subsequent interviews, participants rarely drew directly on religious principles or phraseology when discussing these activities— instead references were made to civil society, and the organizational and commercial aspects of these activities. This supports the idea that contemporary understanding of Islam in Turkey borrows from Western notions of secularism, civil society, and neoliberal capitalism synthesizing these with Islamic principles.

... 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 that I have. If one feels responsible, especially while complaining about something not being right, one develops the urge to find a solution. (R16)

The above quote, referring to a typical working day and after talking about daily routines such as meetings with the employees, calling/visiting customers and doing paper work, indicates that work does not end when the office is closed. A considerable amount of time is spent on out-of-hours discretionary activities which are considered to be part of the workday ('then the evening part comes'). This is linked to a 'feeling of responsibility'. Although these

activities are referred to in relation to civil society (in a national context characterised by limited civil society initiatives), the main motivation for this sense of responsibility comes from their faith whereby Muslim entrepreneurs are regarded as responsible for the other human beings. As Robinson (2008) argues, it is this responsibility, as accountability to God and liability for His creation, which sets up an ethic of endless service, set in relationship with God, but genuinely for others.

Another forum for communication and community are business associations known for their religious leanings. All the business people we interviewed were the members of MUSIAD and TUSKON. Most entrepreneurs referred to their faith when asked about the reason for being a member of such civil society organizations.

First of all, establishing civil society organizations has been neglected for years in Turkey. The civil society must have a word in the goings on in the country.

Recently, I needed to go to Egypt (for business). I called the society (TUSKON) and said I'm going to Egypt. They arranged an interpreter for me. When I got there, he (the interpreter) hung out with me for two days. I was happy. Not because of having an interpreter arranged, but I experienced that civil society meant solidarity (R3).

Established with religious motives in mind, these organizations have facilitated a more global business orientation, providing opportunities for growth – especially for SMEs.

Before being a MUSIAD member, how would I have managed having a business trip abroad? Before the membership, I didn't know anything about exporting. Now they organise educational seminars and meetings [for the members]. It used to be beyond my horizon. I mean it contributes to the country (R15)

While holding onto religious values, these organizations have helped over the last two decades to transform traditional trades people with small sized workshops into internationally focused entrepreneurs. As the above quote indicates, new “horizons” have opened up for entrepreneurs enabling them to compete globally (most of our respondents undertook more than one business trip a year) by arranging foreign travel and facilitating business networks abroad. In terms of profile, only a half of our respondents were college graduates, many had been brought up in small villages and few had travelled abroad or could speak a foreign language. Business seminars and other educational activities of the associations were therefore highly valued. Thus, through these religiously driven business associations, traditional Islamic understanding can be seen to be gradually shifting towards a more entrepreneurial ideology – demonstrating how religion can be a resource for entrepreneurship in the Turkish context. This is underpinned and facilitated by Turkish understanding of Islamic moral principles (which is strongly influenced by Sufi mysticism of Anatolia) that, in business, translate into hard work, responsibility and solidarity. This enablement occurs through strong sharing mechanisms namely the above mentioned religious circles, evening gatherings, and business networks that have helped in the emergence of an enterprise culture in Turkey. Therefore, sharing and communication appear as another dimension of ‘moral energy’ in this context.

### **Moral Energy: an action-oriented concept**

We have classified the third dimension of moral energy as an action-oriented concept. This section chiefly demonstrates how religious beliefs are realised in entrepreneurs’ actions, not only in business but also in social responsibilities and discretionary activities. For example, religious entrepreneurs regard their ordinary business activities as a way of acquiring merit in God’s sight. A kitchen appliance producer tells us about how his business activities make him happy and satisfied in a religious sense:

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 you start thinking how I can be more helpful to another five [unemployed] people, how I can 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. (R15)

Religiosity therefore is seen to translate into practice and to shape action 'in every single task'. We define religiosity as encompassing diverse aspects of religious activity, dedication, and belief. While the interpretation of religiosity may be becoming more secularised, as discussed in a previous section, it is still defined largely as spiritual satisfaction. Being helpful to others, providing job opportunities and contributing to the country are regarded as actions required by religious beliefs. This is consistent with the writings of contemporary influential Islamic scholars, such as Said Nursi, who suggests that, according to Islamic teaching, believers' ordinary activities between two praying sessions will turn into good deeds provided that the intention is sincere (Nursi, 1978). Seemingly rational and non-secular business activities (such as that from the above quote, new product development) can therefore be legitimised by this contemporary understanding of religion and transformed into religiously inspired acts. Interview data foregrounds the importance of such transcendent aspects of secular business activities that are woven into and that sustain the day-to-day beliefs and practices of entrepreneurs in Anatolian tigers. We have found that entrepreneurs in Anatolian tigers in Turkey are guided by a distinct sense of hope and purpose to implement change and leave the world a better place. This hopeful purpose that created meaning in their work and sustained their enterprises is deeply spiritual. Our respondent entrepreneurs reported that their meditation practice enabled them to cultivate inner experiences, which led

to enhanced intuition and to broad awareness that embraced the wider interests of their communities.

As such, all entrepreneurs had strong involvement in voluntary civil society activities. As previously shown, these activities are regarded as a responsibility, which is related to the Islamic notion of *zekat*, the alms-giving. All respondents declared that they pay a considerable amount of money to these civil society activities and fieldwork observations indicate enthusiastic involvement. The main motivation behind these activities is their religious faith that affords them moral satisfaction. Therefore, doing business and making money become a way of serving God and of fulfilling their religious duties and responsibilities.

Here, we need to see what favour or good deed 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 to support these educational activities within the country and abroad (R16).

This feeling of responsibility and taking initiative appear as a basis for actions in business and social life. Influenced arguably by the well-known *Gülen movement* with its emphasis on education, this manifests in high levels of support for educational activities - not only in the form of providing bursaries and scholarship, but also through actively supporting the establishments of private schools and universities in Turkey and abroad. It is estimated that more than one thousand private schools and five private universities in Turkey, and more than a thousand schools in more than 120 countries have been established by entrepreneurs (Yavuz, 2003; Yılmaz, 2005) signifying a gradual shift away from political Islam towards civil society organizations.

Civic responsibilities to give to and support others are helping to challenge traditional religious principles such as common sayings that “A Muslim should not be rich and should instead think about the hereafter”; or “avoiding ambition for worldly gains beyond what one needs”. In this respect, the meaning of *zekat* (alms-giving or charity as a religious obligation) was reinterpreted by some respondents to legitimise the accumulation of money. Here, giving back to the society, considered an important virtue, is motivated by the religious beliefs:

Of course, I have a motivation to do that (alms-giving). It's for the sake of Allah. 1 out of 40 is really nothing (talking about *zekat* or alms-giving 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 had 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. (R5)

Even though the religious obligation for *zekat* is 1 out of 40 of one's wealth, all respondents implied that they gave much more, displaying great enthusiasm when they talked about the educational activities and charity organizations which they financially supported. While donations and alms-giving were traditionally confined to supplying poor people with food, now it has extended in a more systematic way to include providing bursaries, establishing charity organizations, building schools and other educational institutions. As in the above quote, these activities were given a religious basis and often linked to the life stories of Islamic saints. As one respondent commented, by giving and spending money for the sake of God, “God will give back even more” (R10). In sum, taking initiative, realising Islamic

principles throughout actions appear as an important dimension of the concept of 'moral energy'.

## **Discussion**

Drawing on Weber's notion of *Lebensführung*, this paper set out to explore the influence of Muslim belief on the work ethic of Turkish SME owner managers in terms of how they live their lives as entrepreneurs. In the context of wider struggles over the meaning and influence of religion- particularly Islamic religion- in culture, politics and social relations, and against a background of an increasingly competitive globalised world, the issue of how religion influences the values, beliefs and objectives that people bring to their work is a pertinent one. In focusing on a group of 'pious entrepreneurs' seen as a newly rising group in Turkey (Yavuz, 2003; Özdemir, 2006), we have highlighted the intersection between religion and entrepreneurship in a context characterised by increasing secularism and by a new and moderate Islamic discourse. Moving away from earlier orientations towards the development of quantitative scales to measure Islamic work ethic beliefs (e.g Ali, 1988; Bozkurt, 2000) and drawing on Weber's notion of *Lebensführung* as manner of leading one's life, we have shown through in-depth interviews the intrinsic significance of Islamic moral principles and how they construct work ethic among this group.

We find in accordance with other work in the area (Yousef, 2000, 2001; Özdemir, 2006) that hard work, good intentions, responsibility, generosity and balancing one's life reflect a religiously inspired driving force behind day to day business activities. This force, we conceptualise as a 'moral energy' that, from our data, is founded on several principles. Firstly, it is based upon a reinterpretation of Islam that is more in tune with (rational, secular) entrepreneurial ideology. Here religiosity is conveyed through elementary business practices such as honesty, timely delivery, effective recruitment practices, rather than in the face religious preaching or observances. Religious entrepreneurs can accordingly be seen to be

reproducing existing work ethic values while reshaping their mindset towards business activities. Secondly, this ethical lifestyle is shared by the group and communicated through networks and other forums that go beyond the boundaries of a 'normal' nine to five working day. Thirdly, moral energy is action oriented with tangible outcomes that relate, in this context, to contributions to civil society. Grounded in religious principles and values, moral energy therefore emerges as a driving force behind entrepreneurialism- manifest when religious and business discourses coincide, when its principles are communicated and widely shared and when there are collective, tangible outcomes that justify, through altruistic acts, the business activities that support them.

This paper has shown how Turkish entrepreneurs activate moral energy to balance their worldly and ethical concerns in the course of their daily lives. Moral energy lies at the heart of *Lebensführung*; as embodies re-imagining the self in relation to other or in relation to community. From an anthropological perspective, ethical undertakings of these Anatolian entrepreneurs signify a resetting of horizons and the possible start of something heart-warming and exciting for them and for their employees. The passion, idealism, and commitment expressed by the respondents are linked to profound feelings of hope and aspiration: the desire to make the world a better place through charity, benevolence, and compassion. In this respect, moral energy is linked not only to personal hopes and aspirations; but also to the commitment to respond to the wider issues of injustice and poverty in society. *Lebensführung*, therefore, embodies the human capacity for ethical imagination and moral energy. It underlies all everyday moral actions to achieve a better self, a better organization, and a better society. It is woven into the fabric of daily life and it is the fuel of entrepreneurial creativity and social innovation across Anatolian cities including Kayseri, Konya, and Gaziantep.

In this respect Islam can be seen as a catalyst creating a driving force behind a newly emerging enterprise culture in Anatolian cities. Contemporary understandings of Islam can accordingly be seen to be facilitating entrepreneurial activities by providing a moral energy for pious entrepreneurs. Moreover, these entrepreneurs may have become a key carrier of Turkey's transformation towards a more liberal economy. As Bugra (1994) pointed out, Turkish bourgeoisie for a long time were a state-supported business class and could not therefore be seen to contain entrepreneurs in a real sense. The rise in business associations referred to earlier in this paper and their engagement with civic activities may be symptomatic of an increased autonomy from the state. Therefore religious movements in Turkey have found a way of practising religious activities that are more business oriented and separate from radical or political Islam. This, arguably, has played an important role in the empowerment of entrepreneurialism in Turkey. In this way economic liberalism and a reinterpretation of Islam can be seen to have come together to support new business practices on which the enterprise is based.

The findings of this paper also provide helpful insight that can predict the possible changes in the economic and entrepreneurial aspects of post-Arab spring era in the Middle East. In the era of protests occurring across diverse corners of the world - including Occupy movement, Gezi movement, and the Arab Spring - there seems to be an ever-increasing hope for social mobilisation and social innovation through civil society initiatives. Within this wider context, the moral energy activated by Anatolian tigers signify a new form of social innovation where Turkish entrepreneurs engage in everyday ethical and benevolent actions that produce virtuous cycles of growth, charity, and entrepreneurship. These everyday actions and ethical practices form the basis of *Lebensführung* as they reflect Turkish entrepreneurs' new ways of

thinking about themselves, about their roles in society and about how they relate to employees and other stakeholders. The Turkish example of Anatolian tigers indicates how Muslims can express themselves through secular civil initiatives and how they can play a catalytic role in entrepreneurial activities; as opposed to a reactionary stance of demanding an Islamic state and protesting against Western influences.

The secularisation referred to in this paper must not be confused with secularism in the West. Secularisation in the Turkish business context refers to the contemporary Islamic understanding characterised by flexibility and implemented through middle ground solutions that build bridges between Islam and global capitalism. Turkish entrepreneurs still largely place value on religiosity as a grounding principle in their lives (which differentiates their stance from a Western understanding of secularism); but they devise flexible strategies to cope within the global capitalist system. As French philosopher Gauchet (1997) points out, Western secularism can only be understood through the historicity of Christianity. In a similar vein, Asad (1993) claims that every religion produces its own specific form of secularism - seen as an unfolding of the 'essence of religion' (Martin, 1978). The transformation of Islamic principles highlighted in this study can therefore be seen as part of a religious renewal or unfolding as these principles are read and reinterpreted through contemporary lenses.

As we argued earlier, globalized capitalist system, which is mainly based on rational thinking, innovation and hard work, is the by product of Protestant reformation in the West, as Weber puts it. Secularization can also be regarded in this respect. Therefore, in a global scale, capitalist economic system and secularism are quite influential not only in the West, but also in many Eastern and Muslim countries context. In this respect, we treated the

emergence of the religious business people phenomenon presenting diaspora characteristics in the context of secular Turkey. That is why the concept of *Lebensführung* appeared as a handy tool for understanding how religious Muslim business people in Turkey construct their own reality influenced by Islamic teachings. By drawing on Weber's concept of *Lebensführung*, as a manner of leading one's life, this paper has provided a more advanced basis for understanding the influence of religion on the practices and values of entrepreneurialism that go beyond constructions of Islamic work ethic scales. Just as Calvinism supplied a driving force and energy underpinning capitalism (Giddens, 2004), Islamic principles that are reinterpreted according to different contemporary circumstances can be seen to form the basis of a moral energy that in Durkheim's terms (Durkheim, 2001), sustains individuals and stimulates action. This provides an original perspective from which to understand the relationship between religion, entrepreneurship and work ethic in a Muslim context.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has indicated how moral energy represents a new type of capital - rationalised, shared, and action-oriented - that provides a virtuous circle of hopes and aspirations to achieve and sustain common good. Moral energy opens up new creative and practical possibilities of relating to self and other in different ways. In doing so, it builds up positive examples of social and economic progress and inspires new capacities of ethical imagination across individuals and communities in social systems (Moore, 2013). In the fabric of daily life, moral energy represents a form of quintessence or aether ingrained in everyday actions and interactions of entrepreneurs. In other words, moral energy underlies and shapes entrepreneurs' conduct of life (*Lebensführung*). It evokes entrepreneurs to imagine new

possibilities about themselves, their employees, and other stakeholders; triggering them to envision new ways of ethical thinking, doing, and being at work.

At a time we are witnessing globally linked social movements such as Occupy Wall Street, we are reminded of the significance of sustained moral and social engagement in creating and inspiring positive change in human systems (Moore, 2013). Within this wider context of the global quest for equity, sustainability and prosperity, entrepreneurs – as agents of history - have a greater role in creating spaces and forces of social change. At the root of change lies moral energy: the inner motivation and deep inspiration to apply principles concerning the distinction between right and wrong. Turkish entrepreneurs in Anatolian tigers are inspired by Islamic virtues as they activate their moral energy to make a difference in their lives and in the lives of their employees. While they are designing and activating new configurations of resources, structures, and power (Moore, 2013), they are also bringing new possibilities for positive change in Anatolian cities. In doing so, they aspire for new beginnings towards greater democracy, prosperity, equity, and collective wellbeing. This paper has underlined the significance of moral energy as a rationalised, shared, and action-oriented concept in designing and envisioning such spaces of possibility and change.

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Tables:

**Table-1 List of participants and the number of employees**

	<b>Participant</b>	<b>Main line of business</b>	<b>Number of Employees</b>
<b>1</b>	R1	Steel and Metals	9
<b>2</b>	R8	Construction and Petrol	11
<b>3</b>	R9	Accounting and Insurance	5
<b>4</b>	R10	Construction	56
<b>5</b>	R11	Textile	7
<b>6</b>	R12	Furniture	400
<b>7</b>	R13	Cooling Products	150
<b>8</b>	R2	Leather and Shoes	60
<b>9</b>	R3	Chemicals	35
<b>10</b>	R4	Hardware Supplies for Construction	30
<b>11</b>	R5	Printing	11
<b>12</b>	R6	Construction Materials Trading	20
<b>13</b>	R7	Plastic and PVC	10
<b>14</b>	R14	Meat Products	100
<b>15</b>	R15	Metal Products and Oven	175

<b>16</b>	R16	Steel and Metals	45
<b>17</b>	R17	Steel and Metals	12
<b>18</b>	R18	Machine Replacement Parts	8
<b>19</b>	R19	Glass and Framing	15
<b>20</b>	R20	Industrial Engineering & Consulting	17
<b>21</b>	R21	Mechanical Engineering	11