

2nd Revised
Edition

THE WORK ETHIC AND AHI TRADITION OF TURKEY

Mahmut ARSLAN



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P R E S S



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| Mahmut Arslan

Mahmut Arslan was born in the small town of Muş in Turkey in 1967 and brought up in Ankara. He studied economics at Hacettepe University and graduated in 1988. He had his master degree in management in 1991 at Hacettepe University and he started his Phd program at Leeds University/UK in 1994. He got his PhD degree in 1999 and started to work at Hacettepe University as assistant professor, associate professor and full Professor until 2018. In 2018, he joined Ibn Haldun University, Faculty of Management, Department of Business Administration. He is also the initiator of Ibn Haldun University's Center for Ethical Studies. He conducted several cross-cultural research projects comparing Turkey, China, Denmark, Japan, Britain, USA and Norway in terms of work ethic. He is also the president of European Business Ethics Network Turkish Chapter.



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PREFACE

I have been studying on business ethics since my PhD thesis. Work culture and work related issues have always been attracting research topics to me. In my PhD thesis, I compared Muslim, Protestant and Catholic work ethics in Turkey, Britain and Ireland. After completing my PhD thesis, I continued to study work ethics in different societies, such as Japan, Denmark, Norway, China and Germany. I conducted several cross-cultural research projects and published some articles in scholarly journals. However, when I reviewed my previous works I noticed that a very important cultural element in Turkish work ethic was ignored. This important element was the Medieval Ahi Brotherhood and its Ahi work ethic. With this awareness, I decided to summarize my previous works about work ethic and connect them to the Ahi tradition of Turkey in a new book. Therefore, the aim of this book is to review different work ethics and Ahi tradition together.

Professor Mahmut Arslan (PhD)
Ibn Haldun University, Center for Ethical Studies
Istanbul/TURKEY
June, 2018

THE WORK ETHIC AND AHI TRADITION OF TURKEY

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this book is to overview the concept of work ethic based on Max Weber's Protestant work ethic thesis, and to reveal work oriented attitudes in Catholic and Orthodox Christianity, also in Muslim Ahi tradition of Turkey. Ahi tradition includes very strong work ethic with this-worldly ascetism which is explained in Weber's thesis.

"Ahi" is an Arabic word and means brother. However, in Turkish the word of "Ahi" only refers to a medieval brotherhood and its members. An Ahi is a person who is a member of Ahi brotherhood. The term of "Ahilik" in Turkish means "Ahi organization".

The Ahi religious order was established and developed by Anatolian Turks in the 13th century. The Ahi institution was a kind of guild organization which organized and controlled all commercial, cultural and educational activities in Turkish society. However, the Ahi organization was not only an economic organization but also a religious Sufi order that follow the ancient Futuwwat Order's principles as its moral basis. We do not have satisfactory information about Medieval Futuwwat Order. We only know that they had close relationship with the Ismaili Order and Ihvan-us-Safa Movement. Some argued that even their origin comes from Karmati Movement (Tokalak, 2017).

In addition to economic and religious aspects, Ahi organizations also had some kind of military functions, especially during invasion periods. Military branches of Ahi organizations were composed

of male and female military units. Male military units of Ahi organizations were called “Gaziyan-i-Rum” which can be translated as Knights of Anatolia. Female military units were called “Bajiyân-i-Rum” which can be translated as Sisters of Anatolia. In Seljuk Empire, Turkish people of Anatolia mostly used the term (Rum) means land of Romans or Anatolia instead of Turk for their ethnic identity. Because they were living in the territory of former East-Roman Empire. The term of Roman later was only used for Greek speaking Orthodox Christian subjects of the Ottoman Empire. Anatolia peninsula was known by Turks as country of Romans. The term of Roman does not refer any particular race or ethnicity but only a cultural and geographic identity. However, Ahi Movement was not a military order like Knight Templars. They just organized defense units against Mongol invasion of Anatolia and dissolved military units after the establishment of Ottoman State.

In sum, the Ahi institution was an economic, religious and military organization which shaped Turkish business and work ethic in the medieval times. The Ahi institution contributed to the Turkish settlement of Anatolia and development of Turkish moral values. During the 13th century, Ahi organizations played an important role in attracting of Turkish immigration to Anatolia. The Ahi convents (zaviye) provided accommodation for newly arrived immigrants and also work opportunities for the skilled ones. Ahi order has its own code of conducts. These ethical principles shaped Turkish commercial culture in the region and its ethical effects can be traced in modern Turkish small business.

Ahi spirit and principles of Ahi movement has many common roots with modern business ethics. Ahi spirit strongly encourages work ethic. Ahi people do not believe in personal salvation in an isolated other-worldly ascetism. Like Protestant Puritans, they believe that work and profession are sacred activities to please God. When Max Weber wrote his famous “The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism” he argued that only Protestant and particularly

Calvinists societies can develop the spirit of capitalism or work ethic. He only analyzed other-worldly Islamic Sufism of the 19th century. If he had the opportunity to analyze the Ahi movement, it is very likely that he would have had different views about Islamic work ethic.

We can see a considerable similarity between the altruist nature of Ahi movement and the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) of modern business ethics. According to CSR business firms have an obligation to society that extends beyond its narrow obligations to its owners or shareholders. Two actions are encouraged in CSR. First business should protect, which avoiding negative impacts on society. Second, business should improve the welfare of society which implies creating positive benefits for society. The idea of social responsibility supposes that the corporation has not only economic and legal obligations, but also certain responsibilities to society which extend beyond these obligations. Business has an economic obligation to society. Business has a responsibility to produce goods and services that society wants and to sell them at a profit. Unless a business is economically viable, its other responsibilities become moot. To achieve its economic responsibilities, business must be effective, efficient and make wise strategic decisions.

FIRST CHAPTER

THE PROTESTANT WORK ETHIC



Weber's thesis was used by social historians in order to explain whether, and if so how, ascetic Protestantism had started and motivated the growth of capitalism. It was also used by sociologists of religion in order to construct universal laws of development which could be used in developing countries to advance the work ethic and capitalism (Lehmann, 1993).

As C. Hill states, in his 'Reformation to Industrial Revolution'

"It is impossible to discuss economic and social history without discussing religion" (Hill, 1969:109).

It should be noted that Calvinism created a psychological environment in which the spirit of capitalism was developed. As Weber (1985) argued, Calvinistic belief engendered inner-worldly asceticism, and this asceticism, based on a belief of predestination and social loneliness, prepared an appropriate environment for the development of the spirit of capitalism. However, Weber did not claim that there was a rigid deterministic relationship between religion and the development of capitalism.

Weber argued that Protestantism, especially Calvinism, was a very important motivating factor in the development of capitalism. He believed that work oriented behaviours, known as the PWE, is peculiar to Protestants or Protestant societies. His ideas inspired various social scientists and can even be seen in various management textbooks. For example, the following passage from Frederick et al.' (1992:160) 'Business and Society' recognises the role of Calvinism in work-oriented attitudes.

“Most Americans believe that work is desirable, good for one’s health and self-esteem, necessary if society is to achieve high levels of productivity and even a fundamental right that should not be denied. This ‘work ethic’ has fluctuated from period to period but remains an important part of free enterprise ideology. In the older Calvinist version of the work ethic, work was considered to be a way of using God-given talents to improve oneself. Eventually, this quasi-religious notion of work helped to justify the pursuit of worldly wealth merchants, financiers, and others in business” (Frederick et al., 1992).

Similarly, historian D. Landes (1998) highlights the role of Protestantism in the advance of Northern Europe over Southern Europe. He argued that the doctrine of predestination could easily have encouraged a fatalistic attitude, but, the belief in predestination was eventually converted into a secular code of behaviour: hard work, honesty, seriousness the frugal use of money and time. Landes stated that Weber was right on the empirical theoretical level:

“The heart of the matter lay indeed in the making of a new kind of man - rational, ordered, diligent, productive. These virtues, while not new, were hardly commonplace. Protestantism generalized them among its adherents, who judged one another by conformity to these standards” (Landes, 1998).

He agrees with Weber that culture makes all the difference in the history of economic development.

J. Viney (1997) noted that there was a link between Protestantism and the consumer society. Although consumerism represent the opposite pole of the PWE he stated that over time, paradoxically, the aspirational element of Protestantism fed the development of a consumer society

Fukuyama (1996) believes that the PWE increased the high level of trust in a society. Like Landes, Fukuyama argues that culture changes the political and economic environment. He cites Catholicism as evidence for this idea, Catholicism being hostile to both capitalism and democracy. He agrees with Weber that the Reformation was a precondition for the Industrial Revolution and there is a strong correlation between Protestantism and capitalism. He stresses that many of the empirical findings confirm the broad outlines of Weber's thesis. For example, conversions to Protestantism in Latin American countries significantly increased hygiene, savings, educational achievement and ultimately per capita income.

1.1. What is the PWE?

Would it be true to claim that there has been a particular work ethic called the 'Protestant Work Ethic'? Max Weber and his followers argued that Protestant societies had a particular work ethic which was quite distinct from non-Protestant societies. There has been a controversy about the roots of capitalism in economic history. Weber made an important contribution to this controversy with his famous book 'The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism'.

Despite all the arguments and all the research on the PWE there is no well-defined statement of the actual dimensions of the PWE. The broader meaning of the PWE typically refers to one or more of the following beliefs and attitudes: