



Hacettepe University Graduate School of Social Sciences

Department of Anthropology

**A STUDY OF THE COMBINATION OF POPULAR CULTURE AND
ISLAM IN TURKEY: THE CASE OF İLAHİ SANATÇILARI**

Mina EOM

Master's Thesis

Ankara, 2018

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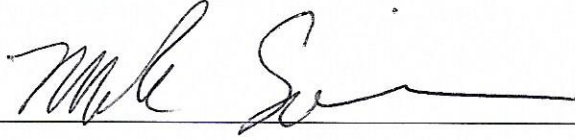
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ACCEPTANCE AND APPROVAL

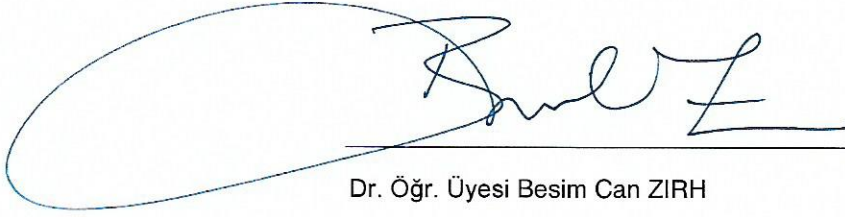
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ETİK BEYAN

Bu alıřmadaki bütn bilgi ve belgeleri akademik kurallar erevesinde elde ettiđimi, grsel, iřitsel ve yazılı tm bilgi ve sonuları bilimsel ahlak kurallarına uygun olarak sunduđumu, kullandığım verilerde herhangi bir tahrifat yapmadığımı, yararlandığım kaynaklara bilimsel normlara uygun olarak atıfta bulunduđumu, tezimin kaynak gsterilen durumlar dıřında zgn olduđunu, Tez Danıřmanının Do. Dr. Mark Lewis SOILEAU danıřmanlığında tarafımdan retilildiđini ve Hacettepe niversitesi Sosyal Bilimleri Enstits Tez Yazım Ynergesine gre yazıldıđını beyan ederim.



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ABSTRACT

EOM, Mina. *A Study of the Combination of Popular Culture and Islam in Turkey: The case of İlahi Sanatçıları*, Master's Thesis, Ankara, 2018.

Since Western societies have been regularly viewing Islam through an orientalist perspective pertaining to the Middle East and that due to the over-emphasis upon the existence of radical Islamist groups following the events of September the 11th, the dynamics displayed in the daily lives of Muslims worldwide have been silenced.

Actually, Muslims all around the world, individually shape the way of practices their beliefs in existed religious structure and by doing so they do not only accepting but also actively reforming the official symbols and dogmas of the religion in their everyday lives. Since the 1980s, the supply and development of media and internet, accelerated globalization, and the formation of the Muslim market have drawn a new cultural map on the Islamic World. Taking a view on Turkey, since the 1980s, the emergence of pro-Islamic political forces and liberal economic policies triggered the revival of Islamism in Turkey. As a sign of this, the new emerging Islamist elite class and Anatolian capitalists contributed greatly to the forming of an active Muslim identity in Turkey. This environmental change has provided Muslims with the atmosphere to be a producer of culture themselves. The phenomenon of İlahi artists is one of the results.

This study has been undertaken with a focus on İlahi artists (*İlahi sanatçıları*) in Ankara as a case of the combination of popular culture and Islam in Turkey. The debut of them date much farther than the early 2000s but soon they achieved their large popularity. As of January 2018, almost 380 solo and group İlahi artists are performing. İlahi artists strongly emphasize faith and religious intentions, while popular elements are actively used for İlahi music and performances in order to attract attention from the audience.

İlahi artists enable us to read Turkey's religious landscape. In the Turkey of today, the boundaries between political and religious are quite blurred since the state and Islam are intertwined and sharing their fates. On the other hand, with the increase in technology and the proliferation of capitalism in recent years, economic activities and the accumulation of wealth are coming to be viewed more positively in Turkish Muslims' Islamic lives.

Furthermore, İlahi artists' music activities and their attitudes dealing with their profession showed local diversity within Islam and the variability of 'Islamic', and Muslims' agency in trying

to maintain a balance between their daily lives and their faith by forming appropriate religious lives through socio-cultural changes.

Key Words

İlahi artists, Islamic popular music, İlahi music, Islamic life, Islamist movement



ÖZET

EOM, Mina. *Türkiye’de Popüler Kültür ve İslamin Birleşmesi Olgusu: İlahi Sanatçıları Örneği*, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Ankara, 2018.

Batılı toplumların İslam’ı genellikle Orta Doğu’ya özgü oryantalist bir bakış açısıyla ele alıyor olması ve 11 Eylül’ü takip eden süreçlerde radikal İslami grupların varlığına dair yapılan aşırı vurgular dolayısıyla, Müslümanların günlük yaşamlarında ortaya konan dinamiklere dair gözlemler susturulagelmıştır.

Aslen, dünyanın her yöresinden Müslüman tekil ve bireysel olarak inanç pratiklerine şekil vermekte, bunu yaparken dinin resmi sembol ve dogmalarını bir yandan günlük hayatlarına kabul etmekte ancak bir yandan da bu yapılarda aktif olarak reformlara yol açmaktadır. Medya ve İnternet gibi yapılarda yaşanan arz ve gelişmeler, ivmelenen küreselleşme, ve İslami piyasaların oluşumu gibi 1980’lerden bu yana yaşanan bazı gelişmeler; İslam Dünyası’nda yeni bir kültürel haritanın çizilmesine yol açmıştır. Türkiye açısından bakılacak olursa da, yine 1980’lerden beri, pro-İslami politik güçlerin ortaya çıkışı ve liberal ekonomi politikaların benimsenmesinin Türkiye’de İslamcılığın yeniden hayata geçmesine yol açtığı söylenebilir. Bunun göstergesi olarak, İslamcı elit zümre ve Anadolu kapitalist sınıfının Türkiye’de yeni bir Müslüman kimliğinin oluşmasında rol oynaması göze çarpmaktadır. Yaşanan çevresel değişiklikler Müslümanlara yeni bir kültürün bizzat mimarı olmaları için gereken atmosferi oluşturmuştur. İlahi sanatçıları şeklinde isimlendirilebilecek fenomen de bu durumun sonuçlarındandır.

Bu çalışma, Türkiye’de popüler kültür ve İslam kültürünün bir kombinasyonunu teşkil eden Ankara ilindeki İlahi sanatçılarını bir vaka olarak incelemektedir. Bu sanatçıların ortaya çıkışı 2000’li yılların başlarından çok önceye rastlasa da, ancak bu tarihlerden sonra halk arasında büyük popülerlik kazandıkları söylenebilir. Ocak 2018 itibarıyla ilde yaklaşık 380 adet İlahi sanatçısı bireysel veya grup halinde performans ortaya koymaktadır. İlahi sanatçıları inanç ve dini bakış açısını kuvvetli biçimde vurgulamakta, bir yandan da dinleyici kitlesinin dikkatini cezbetmek için İlahi müziğinde popüler kültür öğelerini aktif olarak dahil etmektedir.

İlahi sanatçıları bizlere Türkiye’nin dini toplum yapısını okuma imkanı tanımaktadır. Günümüz Türkiye’sinde politika ve din arasındaki sınır giderek incelmektedir, zira devlet ve İslam birbiriyle iç içedir ve müşterek bir kadere sahiptir. Diğer yandan ise, son yıllarda yaşanan teknolojik gelişmelerin yanı sıra kapitalizmin yaygınlaşması sonucu servet birikimine yol açan ekonomik

aktiviteler de Türk Müslümanlarının giderek daha olumlu olarak yaklaştığı mevzulara dönüşmüştür.

Dahası, İlahi sanatçıların müzikal faaliyetleri ve mesleklerine dönük tavırları İslam ve ‘İslami’ kavramları açısından yerel bağlamda çeşitlilik göstermekte; bu müslümanların günlük hayatları ve inançları arasında denge sağlama çabasında sosyo-kültürel değişimler sayesinde dine uygun yaşantılar ortaya koyma kapasitesi bakımından farklılıklar gözlemlenmektedir

Anahtar Sözcükler

İlahi sanatçısı, İslami popüler müzik, İlahi müziği, İslami yaşantı, İslamcı hareket

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INTRODUCTION

PURPOSES AND NECESSITY OF THE RESEARCH

This study begins with the explanation of a problem related to Islam that is observed to be under debate in the contemporary world. This problem can be explained as the way Islam is handled in social studies research as a concept constructed into a certain discourse, much like identity or ethnicity, and that it is under constant pressure of being standardized despite displaying the intrinsic qualities of neither a group nor a class.

Ethnomusicologist Wim Van Zanten has claimed that Western societies have been regularly viewing Islam through an orientalist perspective pertaining to the Middle-East, the region where the religion was born; and that due to the over-emphasis upon the existence of radical Islamist groups following the events of September the 11th, the dynamics, flexibility and regional characteristics displayed in the daily lives of Muslims worldwide have been silenced (2011:244). This has become the truth no matter how many different interpretations regarding the suitable way of religious practices exists in most Islamic societies.

It is possible to see the change, in the religious studies, researchers' interests moved to the religion as a way of life or religious practices by people from theological interpretations. In this way, the researchers emphasis how individuals shape the way of practices their beliefs in existed religious structure (existing frameworks for addressing Islam as a 'religion') and by doing so, how they do not only accepting but also actively reforming the official symbols and dogmas of the religion in their everyday lives.

To focus on practices in religious studies enables a researcher to bring his/her study to life by paying attention to how religious meanings are negotiated, compromised and used in the lives of believers.¹

¹ Courtney Bender, *Heaven's Kitchen: Living Religion at God's Love We Deliver* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 6-7. In this book, the interest to religious practices is

According to the theological definition, Islam is a religion based on the messages of Allah in the holy book Qur'an, the Hadith put forth by Prophet Muhammad and Sharia Law, which is a guide regarding human behavior. However, this study will offer an interpretation regarding the ideas and daily life practices of Muslims in Turkey under the influence of popular culture, without focusing on the qualities of Islam itself.

As pointed out by Talal Asad in his work "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam", Islam is not found in a "fixed stage of an Islamic theater". Viewing Islam as a "a drama of religiosity expressing power" disregards the local discourse on Islam and renders Islamic actions as "readable gestures" (1986:11). Therefore, this defies the school of thought that views Islam as an archetypal and unchanging concept by illustrating various meanings associated with a Muslim way of life tailored by people for themselves, which may at times be multiple or controversial. In other words, the aim of this study is to challenge the tendency to view Islam as monolithic, militarist and exceedingly Middle-Eastern concept.

Taking a view on the history of Turkey, it may be seen that culture in the Ottoman era has been perceived in a dichotomy of 'religious' and 'non-religious'. The long-term movement of secularization following the founding of the Republic has been adopted by many Turks and was reflected in their daily lives but; many religious communities in Turkey have been displaying a critical and rejecting view of popular culture up until the 1990s. A look at this criticism from the television perspective shows that, religious communities thought the TV displayed local content that is either indecent or were influenced too heavily by Western culture. In addition, even though concerts, even Islamic-themed ones are quite popular in Turkey, the appearance of religious individuals in concerts has been criticized by their peers who said, "Look at how people are spending their money, on what... we, the religious people, why shouldn't we spend money for our religion?" (Bilgin, 2003:209).

expressed as 'lived religion'. Nancy T. Ammerman, *Everyday Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). Her study shows the change of interests in the religious study world to the religion as a part of people's everyday lives very well.

However, a surprising change in the look of religion reflected by the daily lives of Turks can be observed with the turn of the last half of the 20th century. With the appearance of Anatolian capitalists, the Islamist high society represented by its Islamic fashion shows, luxury cars, extravagant outfits and holiday escapades at five-star resort hotels marketed as conservative family-oriented establishments was born. Other examples may include the increasing amount of female voice and popular music found in Islamic TV and radio channels, the arrangement and recitation of religious symphony '*Hira'dan*' (From Mount Hira) by the famous Cemal Reşit Rey symphony orchestra for the purpose of celebrating Prophet Muhammad's birth, commercial catalogues displaying product tailored specifically for 'covered ladies', the increasing amount of 'religious swimwear' in department stores and the rise of Islamic humor such as Yeni Şafak's "Müslim Show". Although considered non-existent or 'Haram' in the near past, today; these are Islamic vistas encountered frequently in the daily lives of Turks.

As Islamist parties have come to power since 1980s, Islamic economy gained momentum. On the other hand, Islamic music including İlahi music spread by religious media, which became available since the 1990 while secular media rapidly distributed popular culture. These landscapes during 1990s resulted in Muslims' new identities and consumption culture. Talip Demir has claimed that this kind of socio-cultural change in Turkish society is dominated by the religious and secular values coming closer, rather than pushing one another. According to him, this phenomenon may be interpreted as an effort to adapt with the requirements of the modern way of living (Demir, 2016:126). In other words, the intersection of Islam and popular culture may be understood as the unification of the Muslims' daily lives and socio-cultural needs in entirely new forms. Similarly, Ibrahim Yenen also suggests that in modern times, religion is represented through popular culture in new forms that are different than the traditional views and ways of life (2016:9).

Music is a point where Islam and popular culture meet the most actively. Slobin argues that it is possible to listen to the movement of 'landscape' by turning our

eyes to music (1993:16). Since the 1980s, the supply and development of media and internet, accelerated globalization, and the formation of the Muslim market have drawn a new cultural map on the Islamic World. Muslims started to expose their Muslim identity in the way of consuming and sharing of commodified Islamic products, and to create communities with other Muslims who have similar religious propensity. This environmental change has provided Muslims with the atmosphere to be a producer of culture themselves. The phenomenon of İlahi artists is one of the results.

The debut of religious musicians referred to as İlahi Artists (*İlahi sanatçısı*) that fall into the scope of this study date much farther than the early 2000s² but, it is precisely during this time they achieved their large popularity. They made their appearance in all venues of Turkish daily life, appearing in private occasions such as wedding and engagement ceremonies, circumcision festivities or shopping center openings, as well as performances in religious periods such as Ramadan festivities, celebrations of *Mekke'nin Fethi* (The conquest of Mecca) or the events during the month of Muharram. The performances of these artists usually consist of Qur'an recitations, prayer, and as the highlight, İlahi music concerts. Additionally, depending on the request by event's host, reading poetry, *sema* and strings ensemble performances or conversation (*sohbet*) on Qur'an may take place.

Demir describes the case of İlahi artists as an intermediate art form invented by religious folks who, on one hand, wish to enjoy their life and yet are concerned about how certain musical instruments are unwelcome by religious doctrines, on the other (2016:127). However, the issue of whether this art form may be considered religious by the believers in Turkey is still a controversial one. For example, although the music performed by these artists is considered to belong with the Islamic Popular Music and naturally referred to as Islamic, it is also claimed that this genre of music may not be considered among other 'religious' genres of music. On the other hand, it is said that this type of music is praxis

² Even though the first appearance of İlahi artists was observed already in the beginning of 1990s, it was the early 2000s that they began to perform under the concept of 'İlahi artist'. By that time, they only could name their music '*ezgi*', but not yet themselves.

that seeks to shape Muslim thought and way of life and that Muslims consider this music as a way of approaching Allah, and therefore see it as a religious form of music.

The main point of focus for this study is not investigating whether the art forms of Ilahi Artists are religious or even Islamic. Because, engaging in such an attempt at classification may lead to a disregard of active behavior that Muslims display in order to strike a balance between their daily lives and religious practices. Therefore, the notion of a unification between religiosity and popular culture is considered as an attempt by contemporary Turks, who are undergoing socio-cultural change, towards living their life in a religious way.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Much popular Islamic music shows very well the landscapes which are created by politics, media, economy, technologies in the Muslim societies and most importantly by Muslims' various identities. Nonetheless, most of the debates on Islamic music still focus on the issue of the permissibility of music in Islam, the technical form of music or sorts of the classical Islamic music which have mostly originated in the Arab World.

However, there have been some different approaches to the combination of Islam and popular culture focusing on music in a variety of geographies since the 2000s. Among the studies conducted in the West, it is prominently observed that Muslim youth, who have experienced marginalization, are actively revealed their Muslim identity to majorities through popular Islamic music. Morris (2013) found through her ethnographic work, that young Muslims in Britain, living unstable social, religious, cultural environments are shaping Muslim music culture as a reflexive behavior to the instability. She interprets their musical movement as a process of (re)negotiation of religious practice, identity formation and social/cultural relationships. Goshert (2007) tried to read the current status of American Muslims' identities through American popular Muslim music focusing on the production-consumption structure of the Muslim market.

She was able to discover why American popular Muslim could not be fully accepted in the American Muslim communities by doing a long-term fieldwork instead of a formal analysis.

On the other hand, Aidi's book (2014) shows us the self-consciousness of the urban Muslim youth through Muslim musicians from all around the world. His work which has tried to learn the relationship of music and political activism among Muslim youth around the world is quite impressive with scenes that young Muslims are united in their solidarity and take actions against world issues combining their religious music with various genres of popular music such as hip-hop, jazz and reggae.

Studies on Popular Islamic music in Indonesia and Malaysia are relatively common because it has developed in earlier periods in these countries. As one of them, particularly a study of Akmaliah (2014) gave me many ideas by focusing on how the Suharto regime, which obviously exposed its religious identity in political activities, has dramatically changed the terrain of media and Islamic art in Indonesia. Zaten's work (2011) on the music group, Ath-Thawaf who created a new genre of Islamic music with the basis of indigenous music culture in West Java, meanwhile, indirectly reveals the futility of the arguments among Muslims about the permissibility of music by repeatedly throwing a question of "what makes their music to be accepted as 'Islamic' even though it has a non-Islamic background". He argues that Ath-Thawaf was successful to read the preferred 'Islam' by contemporary Muslims in Indonesia and their music gained its legitimacy as an Islamic music by combining it with their sense of responsibility for spiritually inspiring the audience.

In addition, McLaughlin (1997) made his study on the 'new tradition' of Islamic music in Senegal that appeared with the development of media, taking its inspiration from the culture of Griots and Sufi orders. Launay (1997) suggests the mechanism of how the electronic media won its absolute power as a messenger to deliver the spiritual messages of Islam in the Northern Cote D'ivoir.

As for studies on Islamic popular music in Turkey, there are Yenen (2016), Tas (2014) and Özel (2016). First, Yenen (2016) claims that Islamic popular music in the 1990s aimed to solve the conflict between tradition and modernity. By showing how the conditions to be accepted as 'Islamic' have changed according to modernization, globalization and environmental inner changes of Turkey. His study implied that Islam is not something absolute but a 'composition', which is in the adaptation process to the changes and in this point, it could be free from the familiar dichotomic interpretation in Turkey between 'Islamic' and 'non-Islamic'. Tas (2014), in his study, included the process of that Islamist music was popularized after it appeared as a means of resistance in the situation that politics define and control the identity of Muslims, and the music threw its resistance character away, as the identity found freedom due to regime change. Özel (2016) argues that the musical tastes and preferences of devout Muslims have changed with the political changes in Turkey since the 1980s and in this regard, most of religious music developed into Islamic music by artists. His study succeeded in exposing how social changes, religion, culture, and the mass are organically connected with each other by observing the works of Islamic music artists and characteristics of their audience.

However, none of these three studies examines Popular Islamic music since the 2000s in Turkey although there are some significant changes in it. In addition, in these studies, the agency of Muslims who play the most important role in Islam's self-change has faded, as they did not pay attention to experiences of Islamic popular music artists themselves and to their opinions not as an artist but as a Muslim.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE COMBINATION OF POPULAR CULTURE AND RELIGION

Popular culture is generally offered as a category as culture, along with folk culture and the high culture or the so-called 'elite' culture. However, its definition also varies according to the era, country or simply, the point of view. In the near

past, TV programs, motion pictures, various kinds of stage show, and popular forms of written press have all become widespread, in addition to the heavy use of information technologies and the Internet by the masses; and it could be said that new types of popular culture are therefore being born today. This leads to a prerequisite of being associated with mass media forms to be embedded into the definition of popular culture, but the truth is not necessarily so.

However, no matter how it is classified, popular culture is usually associated with consumption by a populace. There are two different views on the use of the root word 'populace' here, one arguing that it refers to quantity of people and the other arguing that it refers to 'popularity': a certain way of fondness displayed by a group of people. Even if the main element of popular culture may be the 'popularity' of an object, a human or an event, it should be considered that popularity is directly proportionate with the size of the group of people whose level of beliefs or values is reflected, and the concept therefore conveys the meanings of both etymological roots (Nachbar & Lause, 1992:5-6).

Usually by Western scholars, religions have been found to exist in a sacred domain whereas culture was found in a profane, 'worldly' domain where the individual is in the pursue of emotional pleasure. The way religion and popular culture may be evaluated as a dichotomy of sacred and profane, it has been believed that the two concepts are entirely different from one another and that they may not display an exchange relationship.

However, popular culture is a phenomenon that lives and breathes by people and is a part of their daily lives. The messages its elements convey is therefore not only reflects the facts about people but also significantly influences them. In other words, the values and desires of ourselves as individuals in a society are both reflected and shaped by popular culture, which affects our perceptions of reality (Chun, 2007:360).

Investigating religions in various historical contexts, R. Laurence Moore (1995) has claimed that religion is a communal form that reflects or reproduces the society. According to him, although religion may offer to humans a certain

inequality that manifests itself in the afterlife and in immaterial truth, it is not unlike other ideologies that guide and put meaning into human life when thought of as a socio-cultural product. If religion exists within culture, it must find a way to co-exist within other elements of culture. Over time, examples of these elements have shown themselves as feudalism, monarchy or Plato's philosophy, and today it shows itself as capitalism among others. In conclusion, Moore's claim was that popular culture is an object that religion would mandatorily interact and exchange with. Similarly, Saini explains that a religion is almost always "painted" by the era and local culture which its believers live in and that it is crucial to include popular culture in an attempt to understand religion (2004:25).

From this perspective, it can be understood that the relationship between popular culture and religion is a closer one than at first thought. Because religion encompasses institutionalized local beliefs in a wide sense, social behaviors or tendencies that allocate the highest value to holy things and authentic religious beliefs and practices displayed by individuals (Corbett & Hemeyer, 1999:7). In fact, most religions treat elements of the popular culture in a friendly way except in some very conservative or dogma-oriented religions. The biggest change in the religious world is the application of those elements for religious rites and events or even sermons because people seek something more sensuous and visible under the influence of media.

The intersection of religion and popular culture may not always be considered as religious. In order for this kind of form to be considered 'religious', the unique role assumed by religion should not be distorted and religion should not lose its status. Generally, the special role that only 'religion' may play is to show to an individual the importance of life and the right path to take through it. This is a role unique to religion, which is not assumed by its other functional equivalents. All religions include some form of universal values and ethical guidance to humankind in the ideological foundations of their doctrines.

On the other hand, the claim about the uniqueness of religion's role also may mean that, other than the unique role and function that it carries, all its

peripheral elements such as rituals and systems may be subject to change. Therefore, except for the practices shown by the very few radical fundamentalists, it is very natural for religious systems and rituals to change over time. Observing the facts would show that the habits, styles, tastes, et cetera of believers that participate in worship are constantly changing. Especially with the advances in information technologies and multimedia, the greatest change that is displayed in the religious practices of people is the growing amount of importance attributed to visual aesthetics. People, who act more sensually and emotionally in a search for pleasure, make use of elements of popular culture in their religious rituals, sermons, gatherings and festivities. In addition, it may be said that in popular culture, consumers may be perceived either as believers or potential believers and the adoption of popular culture by religion may be rooted in a kind of anxiety due to socio-cultural change being a threat against its own existence (Chun, 2007:365).

In fact, it is possible to say that religion and popular culture exist in a co-dependent relationship. Popular culture borrows many ideas from religion and turns them into products and religion, on the other hand, gains power to adapt in a new environment with the help of popular culture. Most of the time, religion does not disregard the acquired tastes of a society within which most of its believers exist. Popular culture, also, needs to always consider the population of believers, who are both its creators and consumers.

On the other hand, the way popular culture accepts religion may take place due to needs that may be met by the general characteristics, as well as the beauty of religion. Because, the religious themes or the promise of spiritual enlightenment offered by religion may guarantee commercial value depending on the depth of the message or the number of believers.

However, a certain phenomenon regarding the acceptance of religion by popular culture should be considered at this juncture. Although popular culture is in the position of a representative and religion in that of an object that is to be accepted, religion actively participates in the generation of popular culture products that conform with its own theories and ethics. In short, religion is an

object to be adopted but it assumes a dual quality in the process by acting also as a representative. This quality may be thought to arise from the responsibility or anxiety of religion due to a need of preserving its integrity to ensure its survival.

The methods of religion for the acceptance of popular culture are usually in three categories, namely; acceptance, rejection and acceptance through modifications. The art forms of İlahi Artists that fall in the scope of this study belong to the third among these categories. The American religion sociologist Donald Miller has discovered through the example of Protestant independent churches, which have shown the greatest amount of development within a certain historical period, that the common theme in all such places of faith is the worship over a new musical form that reflects the wide experiences of the middle class. These musical forms are composed in a modern and popular format (Miller, 1997:3, 80), showing that religion has accepted popular music by modifying its nature, in order to satisfy the strong desire of its believers towards popular culture. Whereas churches that insisted on continuing worship with traditional and conservative methods stayed behind, churches that use popular culture effectively within traditional ritual in order to meet the changing tastes of worshippers implies that it is crucial for a religion's survival to adopt popular culture.

This study is based on the assumption that popular culture and religion are in a co-dependent relationship that affects the existence of one another. Therefore, this study is trying to keep a distance from the theological debate on whether the art forms of İlahi Artists comply with the ethical aspects of the religion or not. In addition, the simplistic perspective that explains the relationship between Islam and the art forms of these singers in a 'representative – object' model has been avoided. Instead, the agency of İlahi artists who create a certain combinatory form of religion and popular culture without losing religious sentiment.

This study intends to initially read the socio-cultural change of Turkey through İlahi Artists themselves and their music activities. Secondly, it seeks what

makes İlahi artists' music activities look religious. Lastly, it attempts at interpreting a religious life suited for Turkish Muslims by discussing how İlahi artists deal with their works and their private lives.

METHOD OF RESEARCH

This research was carried out as an ethnographic field study, which is a method encountered often-in anthropological studies. The study took place in the Ankara Province of Turkey with a research permit by the governorship of Ankara.

The qualitative methodology focused on the works presented by İlahi artists, the holistic story of the performance displayed and also the characteristics of each piece that comprises the artist's repertoire in a given performance. Considering that İlahi artists work on a seasonal basis, the period for the field study was planned carefully to encompass the month of Ramadan (June 2017, May-June 2018), Islamic holy nights (*Kandil Geceleri*) and the day of the conquest of Mecca (*Mekke'nin Fethi*, December 31, 2017) to be able to observe İlahi performances. I also visited a number of weddings as well, to observe İlahi performances in private occasions. The observations on stage performances encompassed both the beginning and ending of the performances and these performances were recorded in writing and also on camera. I also observed the ambient details such as qualities of the performance venue and the audience reactions. Through this kind of participatory observation experience, I compared various details of the artists' performances, such as changes in the selection of songs depending on the specifics of the performance such as time and venue.

In the early days of field research, I had a difficult time finding research participants. As many as 6 İlahi artists whom I contacted didn't show up for the appointments. Three of them explained that their wives were unhappy at our meetings and they were too busy to come, while the others even did not answer after their no show even though I kept trying to get in touch. These passive attitudes of several İlahi artists may be relevant to their religious conservatism.

On the other hand, they might not be so interested in this study since it seems not beneficial for them. Most of İlahi artists asked me where my research will be published in and who is supporting my study while they hesitated to participate in this study. I tried to meet female İlahi artists as well. However, unfortunately, none of them showed up for the appointments. I think it happened because they are not used to participate in an academic research.

After experiencing many failures in finding research participants among İlahi artists, I decided to have help from İlahi organizations and several İlahi artists that comparatively showed me generous attitudes as key informants who able to put me through to other İlahi artists. I could receive recommendations from them on which İlahi artists are proper interviewees. As a result, a total of 9 İlahi artists fewer than planned, agreed to participate in the study. Information regarding the informants appear in Table. 1 bellow.

Table 1. Informants Information Sheet

No.	Name	Age	Debut Year	Group	Primary Job
1	Muhammed Taşdemir	28	2007	Tevhid İlahi Grubu	Private business (café) Producer & program moderator at Hedef Radio station
2	Mustafa Caymaz	48	2006	solo	Teaching Turkish language at a middle school
3	Ebubekir İpek	32	2008	solo	Private business (linen store)
4	Hakan Öztürk	47	2007	solo	Sufi & İlahi music trainer
5	İbrahim Cuşan	35	2006	solo	Public officer at Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı
6	İrfan Orhan	30	2006	Ankara İlahi Grubu	Ney trainer at Diyanet Vakfı
7	Naim Dilekçi	34	2010	Mina İlahi Grubu	Private business (<i>tesettür</i> costume)
8	Barış Yavuz	28	2016	solo	Teaching religious culture at private schools
9	Lütfi Doğan	37	2006	solo	Tailor

Before the study began, I visited their stages and backstage areas in order to establish rapport with them. Especially, informants learning that I am a Muslim positively influenced their receptiveness at this stage.

As for the field study, I employed informal discussions and in-depth interviews with those informants as per the qualitative research paradigm. I had planned to observe the rehearsal practices of artists prior to their performances. However, unlike my expectation, none of the informants did extra practices because they usually work with the same accompaniment teams on fixed repertoires. Therefore, I was almost not able to conduct informal interviews with artists. I interviewed informants during the İlahi artists' off-season between November and February so that they could spend enough time for our interviews and most of the interviews were conducted at their primary work places or quiet cafes. Each interview took between 2 and 3 hours on average. I prepared a questionnaire prior to interviews but some of them were never asked and other questions were added in the field, depending on informants' experiences. However, interviews were generally steered by me in order to find out which elements an artist is influenced by during the process of creating an artwork, as well as what their thoughts in and attitudes towards their profession are like. The questions included informants' private lives before beginning a profession as an İlahi artist, the reasons for becoming an İlahi artist and the meaning behind it, opinions on the performance programs, thoughts on what the important elements of their stage are to what they feel on stage. As 7 informants did not agree, only two interviews were recorded as audio. However, It was possible to type their answers immediately. Informal discussions between me and informants during interviews were not included in the recording.

During the study, I conducted literature reviews in order to better understand social factors surrounding İlahi artists' music activities. I also collected the data of İlahi artists throughout Turkey (including İlahi groups and female artists), İlahi organizations, İlahi music productions, İlahi albums and religious TV and radio stations, then compiled tables of each category.

CHAPTER 1

CULTURAL BACKGROUND FOR İLAHİ ARTISTS TO BE BORN

1.1. THE UNIQUE CHARACTER OF TURKISH ISLAM

Since Islam spread to Turkey, Islamic cultural traditions have taken an important place in Turkish society. The basic doctrines and values of Islam have played a role as a spiritual center to unite Turkish society and have provided the core values and ideals that define Turkish ethics and morality and furthermore, strengthen unity and ties among the Turks.

Meanwhile, in the context of the Islamic world, Turkey suggests that Islam can be in harmony with modernity rather than colliding with it. More specifically, Turkey has implied through its historical experiences that Muslims can accommodate the positivism, secularism, capitalism and individual autonomy based on trust in reason, which is a concrete expression of modernity, without abandoning the principles of Islam. If Turkey did not accept modernity, there would be no democratic development or economic growth today in Turkey.

“Modernization of Islam” or “Islamization of modernity”³ was possible in Turkey because of two historical factors. One of them is the acceptance of the Sunni Hanafi sect by the Turks during the process of embracing Islam. The Hanafi’ interpretation of Islam was well suited to the tendencies and temperament of the indigenous beliefs Turks had before Islam. Unlike other orders that literally interpret and apply the Qur’an and Sunnah, Hanafi emphasized that the Qur’an should be interpreted in light of its general spirit, not literary, and that the meaning behind the letters should be found. This means that the Qur’an is an open book, and Muslims of each age must find new meaning of the Qur’an according to their age and situation. In other words, Hanafi’s interpretation of

³ The term of “Islamization of modernity” means adapting of modernity to Islam while “modernization of Islam” means that Islam adapts itself to modernity conceding own principles. From Islamic perspective, the former has a more positive and active meaning than the later. Therefore, Muslims who pursue the harmony of Islam with modernity tend to prefer the term of Islamization of modernity.

the Qur'an opens the possibility that the holy book can be interpreted differently by Muslims not only depending on their historical or cultural background but also in the fields of faith, politics and law. Therefore, Turkish Muslims could harmonize Islam to modernity or modernity to Islam when they faced a new environment of modernity.

The other factor is the experiences of religious crisis during establishing the Republic. Said Nursi (1876-1960) was a person the most thoroughly concerned with the question of the acceptance of modernity from the Islamic perspective in the chaos between the last days of the empire and the foundation of republic. He was convinced that the only way to rebuild Islam in crisis is to keep pace with the flow of the world without being chained by the past tradition. It meant a renewal through the reinterpretation of Islam and reestablishment of the Muslims' intellectual world. Thus, he insisted that Islam cannot maintain its vitality with a Sharia-based political system in the era of Western modernism. It is because modernism challenged Islam, neither society nor state system. In this context, he worked on reconciling scholarship and religion, positivism and Islamic revelation. Nursi's ideas have had a considerable impact not only on intellectuals among Turkish Muslims but also on Kemalists.⁴

Another figure to look at is Hayreddin Karaman, an Islamic theologian who represents Turkish modern Islam and advocates modernity based on Islam. Karaman offered a definitive answer to Muslims in Turkey who were struggling between Islamic tradition and modernity. He said the fact that the civilization of technology arose in the West does not mean that it is against Muslims or abandons Islam. He exemplified the Prophet Muhammad to show that his claims are not against the Qur'an and Islamic traditions. According to him, the Prophet used the pagan's techniques and Islamized their institutions to serve the purpose of Islam. Thus, he argues that what Muslims today should do is not

⁴ For more discussion on Nursi's idea and its contemporary meaning, you may refer to Mardin's book (1989), *Religion and social change in modern Turkey: The case of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*.

to reject modernity, but to Islamize and use them for Islamic purposes just like the Prophet did.⁵ Karaman's argument is in line with the ideas of Nursi.

Likewise, Turkish Islam created a unique color by combining the crisis and desperation faced by Turkish Muslims with the open interpretation of Islam and it has shown to Muslims who wanted to harmonize with modernity without compromising Islamic principles that is possible.

1.2. MUSIC IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD

From a religious standpoint, the role of music has been controversial since the birth of Islam. This is because music is thought to inflict harm upon bringing people to, or strengthening the faith of Islam when it seeks pleasure rather than godliness, while music has at the same time contributed greatly to the spread of Islam. Therefore, the very beginning of religious authorities adopted a reserved attitude toward the overt use of music in worship. "There is no statement in the Qur'an explicitly condemning music. Though evidence in the Traditions of the Prophet Muhammad, 'Hadith', clearly demonstrates that on occasion he listened to music with pleasure, these texts are open to many interpretations" (Neubauer & Doubleday, 2001: 7). In other words, even if some Hadith quotations seem to defend music, they are not fully able to suggest a certain answer to the question about the lawfulness of music as well because the same Hadith is often used to prove a given point and also its opposite.

From the orthodox Islamic perspective, only music and dance performed in religious intent and context are lawful because it usually obstacles to faith.⁶ However, music that is generally allowed in the Islamic world falls into three categories: mosque music, Sufi music and secular Islamic music.⁷ Since the period of the Prophet Muhammad, Muslims have been learning to recite the

⁵ Hayreddin Karaman's claims are well addressed in his book, *Laik Duzende Dini Yaşamak*. (Istanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 1997). Karaman, as the title of his book implies, argues that Western modernity should be allowed from the Islamic point of view, and that a democratic nation of laws is an ideal form of government.

⁶ Orthodox Islam allows only two musical forms in religious practices: The Qur'anic recitation and ezan.

⁷ Secular Islamic music does not mean "şarkı" associated with secular contents and activities.

Qur'an, and to sing other religious musical genres with the language, melodies, rhythms, timbres, and musical aesthetics of the Arab world (Hamish & Rasmussen, 2001, 32). Especially Qur'anic recitation was advanced in a new genre in artistic performances by the mid-7th century. It was actively performed between the 9th and 12th centuries.

Hafiz, a term used by Muslims for people who have completely memorized the Qur'an. Thus, they are the object of veneration among every religious artist in Turkey including İlahi artists. The Qur'anic recitation has been the most fundamental step for the education of music to be religious artists in Turkey. The most prominent religious vocal artists (*dini ses sanatçısı*) in Turkey, were hafiz from the early 17th to the mid-20th century, such as Hafiz Burhan, Hafiz Osman, Hafiz Kemal, and Hafiz Sami. These artists are characterized to perform with a variety of makam and *gazel* style.

There is also some music associated with several important religious days of Islam, such as Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha or the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad. Unlike the Qur'anic recitation or *ezan*, this sort of music has more regional diversity in organizing musical instruments. However, generally, in the event for the religious days at a mosque or a village, more various forms of song are sung to instrumental accompaniments based to the recitation of the Qur'an and Hadith. During Ramadan, though it has been mostly declining with the development of audio equipment, instrumental music has been used to let Muslims know the time of iftar and sahur.

Sufi orders, meanwhile, have emphasized the important role of sound and music. Sufis' unique forms of religious practices such as zikr and hadra are a great combination of Sufi philosophy and musical elements. According to the philosophy, sound and music encourage spirituality and closeness to God. Different sounds have therefore been classified by Sufi scholars and placed into a spiritual hierarchy, such as by al-Maqdisi (13th Century), who wrote about forbidden, permitted, estimable and laudable sounds (Shiloah, 1997).

Music and musical performance are completely at the heart of complicated and various traditions within Islam. Music in the Islamic world has been developed by Muslims blending old and new musical experiences with Islamic music traditions, and thus, it shows a fairly wide spectrum. Nonetheless, music has been endlessly criticized and essentially denied by Islamic fundamentalists. To understand what music in the Islamic world is, we should focus on not the definition by theologians but how the Muslim public defines it. By doing so, we are able to rescue Islam from “fixed stage of a theater” (Asad, 1986:11) and discover its new face.

1.3. SUFISM AS THE SPIRITUAL BREAKTHROUGH FOR THE PEOPLE

If Islam followed only its religious doctrine without being influenced by local environments, it would take a common and standardized form everywhere. But it did not. Muslims around the world show various forms of religious belief based on their indigenous cultures. Some scholars define these forms as Popular Islam or Folk Islam. As a classic example to feature different colors of Islam according to the local context, dealing with Sufism in this study may contribute to understanding how İlahi artists appeared in Turkey.

Sufi orders were born not excluding indigenous cultures and beliefs, but rather inspired by them, and in this background, have practiced their faith as a Muslim to the present. Annemarie Schimmel praised the advent of Sufism saying, “it shows a new trend and a distinctive feature to the Islamic world, which was likely to be choked within the net of the doctrinal regulations and formalities”.⁸ I also agree that if there was no flow of Sufism in the Islamic world, Islam would end up remaining a legalistic and lifeless religion.

Sufism in Turkey was first recorded in the 13th century. At that time, the people spiritually suffered more than ever from the Crusades, the invasion of Mongolian armies and the conflicts over the throne. While all of these were

⁸ Schimmel, A. (1975). *Mystical dimensions of Islam*. Univ of North Carolina Press.

happening, Muhammed Jalal al-Din Rumi (Mevlâna, 1201-1273), the founder of the Mevlevi Sufi order, provided the spiritual breakthrough for the people. The Qur'an, the word of Allah written in Arabic, became too difficult for the people outside of the Islamic world. Moreover, as a result of the prohibition of translation of the Qur'an into other languages in order to prevent its misunderstanding and distortion, the Qur'an had a strong tendency to become merely a religious tool for the ruling elites among Turks from Central Asia and Iranians.

Jalal al-Din Rumi discovered a new way to enter the realm of God through constant spiritual training for the people without deep understanding about the Qur'an. It was Mevlevi Sufi order. Mevlevi (the Sufi members of Mevlevi order) denied all the idiocy, the ideological luxury, and pursued the unity of human being and God through meditation with mystical dance (*sema*) and musical prayer *zikir*.

Of course, Mevlevi order kept moral disciplines that was faithful to the fundamental spirit of the Qur'an and Hadith. His ideas, which respected indigenous religions and customs, brought a great response to the people, especially throughout Central Asia where outside of the Arabic World, in line with the times of the Seljuk Dynasty, where various beliefs and customs had clashed and were influenced by Greek philosophy and science. Although both the Bektashi order and Mevlevi order are among the most prominent of a number of Sufi orders formed in Turkey, Mevlevi order early settled in Anatolia and could grow into an urban Sufi group by digesting the culture of musical religious rites have come from the Roman Era.

On the other hand, it is not surprising when we remind the endless debate on permissibility of music in the Islamic World, that these unique religious practices of Sufism were constantly involved in heresy controversy and were also subject to persecution. Right after the Republic established, Ottoman classical music and Sufi's musical rituals were banned by the reformists as well as Sufi lodges and cloisters, including the Mevlevis and Bektash were forced to close. As the result, Sufi artists had either to flee abroad as several cities throughout Middle

East and the Balkans, and, even the officially unrecognized, Egypt or to look for alternative ways to express their religious identities with music so that they would not completely lose their music traditions. (Karahasanoğlu and Skoog, 2009: 55 as cited in Tas, 2014:371).

Since then, the musical rituals of Mevlevi order have been preserved in a closed form by Mevlevi and Muslims in Konya, which is the cradle of the Mevlevi order. The rituals started to be preserved in a delicate and systematized level when it was allowed with a special permission of Turkish government in the 1950s, to perform their rituals again in public (El-Fers, 1992:209), as the government realized *sema*'s potential for tourism.

SUFIS' AIM OF ACCOMPLISHMENT

Sufis seek to meet God and a union of the self with God in every moment in life, Whereas Muslims who practice their faith based on Islamic tradition want to meet God in the afterlife. In other words, the ultimate goal of Sufis is to have a relationship with God through the experience beyond the limit of their physical presence.

Sufism influenced by various ideas throughout Persia and Asia emphasized 'mahabba'. Orthodox theologians interpreted mahabba simply as 'obedience to God', but Rabiah Al-Adawiya, who was respected in the 8th century, characterized it as "a selfless pure love" saying "love is the only means for Sufis to unify oneself with God and Sufis separated himself from everything but God". (Bhatnagar, 1984:134 as cited in Kang, 2006:37).

In order to move to the world of God, first of all, Sufis must trust everything in God by practicing abstinence and secondly, they need to acquire Irfan (spiritual intelligence) from God. By doing so, finally, they enter the stage of love with God, symbolized by light. Hence, in Sufism, the love of Allah is highly emphasized as a part of Islam. As we will see later, 'pure love for God' is one of

the most important subjects in ilahi artists' performances and serves as a mission to the profession.

In the Islamic world, Sufi orders have been active the most in using the musical elements both for collective rites and individual religious practices. It is because, as described above, they have the belief that they can get closer to God through dancing and singing. Today, in various regions where Muslims music and musical rites have advanced, such as Turkey, India/Pakistan, Senegal, Cote D'ivoire, Malaysia/Indonesia, Morocco, and Egypt, it is observed that Sufi orders have existed among the people for a long time in common.



CHAPTER 2

SOCIAL CHANGES IN TURKEY SINCE THE 1980s

J. Stark explains that, since the 1970s, Islamic forces in the Middle East have played an important role in the road to democracy and the rise of civil societies (Stark, 2005: 307-327). Similarly, since the 1980s in Turkey, the resurgence of Islam in politics is very important in that contributed Muslims to express initiatively their faiths and political ideologies. Especially, newly emerged Islamist elite class led to forming Muslim identity independent from orthodox Islam and forced secularism, with the help of pro-Islamic political forces and their economic power. In addition, Turkish Muslims have created a unique consumption culture to express this new Muslim identity through Muslim market and religious popular culture resulted by liberal economic policies and globalization since the 1990s. These social changes became a direct impetus to the emergence and development of İlahi artists.

2.1. STATUS OF ISLAM ACCORDING TO POLITICAL CHANGE

THE EMERGENCE OF ISLAMIC POLITICAL POWER AND ISLAMIST MOVEMENT SINCE THE 1980s

The coup in 1980 brought significant change in the political landscape in Turkey, which had maintained the character of a secular state until then. That the military regime (1980-1983) blended nationalism and Islamism in order to neutralize the ideological polarization of the second Republic period of Turkey has created an atmosphere in which such themes as Islam, Muslim identity, and Islamic morality can emerge in the public sphere. Eventually, this resulted in the emergence of pro-Islamic political power in Turkish society (Güvenç 1994: 34-35). In addition, the doctrine 'Turkish-Islamic Synthesis' developed by Aydınlar Ocağı (Hearth of Intellectuals), that aimed to achieve political unity within the

right by creating a 'national front' against left, began to carry weight in politics. 'Turkish-Islamic Synthesis' supported to strengthen religiosity by the government authority whereas it opposed the politicization of Islamic states and religion itself (Tapper, 1994: 18-19).

The center-right ANAP (Anavatan Partisi)⁹ regime, which had close links with the Nakşibendi order (Zubaida 1996: 11), institutionalized as a cure to Turkey's social and cultural problems (Cetinsaya, 1999: 374). Later then, President Kenan Evren and Prime Minister Turgut Özal emphasized the friendly relationship with the Islamic world in public. Especially Özal, until he was elected as President in November 1989, formed a new modernization of Turkey with Islamic identity by the establishment of a Muslim network based on liberalism and conservatism.

Özal's ideological combination undermined the secularism of the state, whether intentional or not, and at the same time, made the people to recognize Islam as an important element of national identity. Turkey's liberal economic policies, which has newly participated in the global economy, earned new businesspersons among both of secularists and Islamists. In particular, the government's supporting policies for the economy of Islam enabled Islamists to accumulate capital. This capital played a significant role in establishing Islamic networks by linking to Islamic foundations and charities, schools and Islamic political parties. These Islamic networks have greatly expanded social roles of Islam, replacing the government's limited welfare budget. As the result, Islam in the 1980s was not only legitimized between political institutions, but also officially recognized as a decisive factor for national identity (Han, 2013: 68).

Under these circumstances, Necmettin Erbakan resumed his political activities and the Islamist party, RP (Refah Partisi) was founded. RP, which remained in a marginal position, succeeded in joining the National Assembly with 16.90% of the vote in the 1991 general elections, further, in the local elections in 1994, it occupied 28 mayor's seats in 6 major cities including Ankara and Istanbul. In succession, when it became the largest party in Parliament by obtaining 21.38%

⁹ This party became the first party after the transfer of military regime to civil government in 1983.

of the vote in the 1995 general elections (Moe, 2003: 127), the party leader, Erbakan became the first Islamic prime minister in Turkey (Sidar, 2014: 29).

Table 2. Election Results of RP in The National Assembly

Election date	Party leader	% of Votes	Votes
1995	Necmettin Erbakan	21.38%	6,012,450
1991	Necmettin Erbakan	16.90%	4,121,355
1987	Necmettin Erbakan	7.16%	1,717,425

Note. Retrieved from: <http://www.secim-sonuclari.com/refah-partisi.parti>

RP revived *Millî Görüş* (National Vision or National Outlook)¹⁰ revived keeping a certain distance from past fundamentalist Islamization. On the other hand, the party claimed Islamic modernization by applying universal values pursued in the West, such as capitalism, democracy, equality and freedom, not western modernization itself. This concept was highly trusted by urban Islamists and Anatolian conservatives. Erbakan continued to expand the Islamic system throughout the society, such as separating male seats and female seats on the bus, the ban on the sale of any liquor at state-owned restaurants, the abolition of the ban on headscarves in public spaces, and the expansion of the Qur'an schools. Regarding to foreign policies, he paid his efforts to integrate economically and politically with Islamic states, deviating pro-EU route, through a project called 'D-8' (Developing Eight nations).¹¹

On the other hand, there was a significant change in the elite structure as a number of new Islamist counter-elites began to emerge due to the expanded İmam-Hatip schools since 1975. Furthermore, a new class called the Anatolian capitalists or Islamic capitalists joined the group as the Islamic economy came to live again accompanied by globalization and became the driving force of the revival of Islamist movement. Religious media, civil societies and charities,

¹⁰ In 1975, Erbakan, in a statement titled "*Millî Görüş*", urged Turkish people in Europe not to lose their 'Turkish Muslim' identity rather than being infected by the European consciousness and fashion. He also declared that accepting Islam as a national identity means social justice and that secular nationalism and *Millî Görüş* are incompatible (Varol, 2015: 139).

¹¹ Erbakan's 'D-8' policy aims to a close economic relationship between 7 Islamic states (Iran, Egypt, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia and Nigeria) (Kramer, 2000: 95).

Islamic economic organizations represented by MÜSİAD (Müstakil Sanayici ve İş Adamları Derneği), religious education of İmam-Hatip, and most importantly the appearance and the winning in elections of the Islamist party, RP proved Islamic change and Islamic reform showing the relevance of Islam and modernization. The number of covered women with headscarves increased in urban and university campuses, and publications written by Islamic scholars such as Ali Bulaç, İsmet Özel, Adulrahman Dilipak have gained a great response (Göle(a), 1997: 56).

However, the RP regime's attempt to replace the Atatürk modernization with the Islamic modernization has necessarily formed a confrontation with secularist elites (Göle(a), 1997: 52-55). Because secularists felt obliged to keep Atatürk's secularism, at the same time, threatened by Islamists while Islamist elites strongly criticized secularists for claiming that the secularism of Turkish has marginalized them so far and, because of that, Islamists should be able to seek economic wealth and to lead socio-political change of Turkey (Göle, 2000: 116).

Secularists bought goods bearing the image of Atatürk and transformed the formal events on October 29th, Republic Day of Turkey into an arena bringing together secularists. By doing so, they could defend their ideology (Başkan, 2010: 179).

AFTER 'FEBRUARY 28th COUP'

As Islamist movements threatening secularism of Turkey were intensified, the military force took actions. As a result, RP was dissolved on February 28, 1997 and the core Islamist politicians' activities, including Erbakan were banned by the military force.

The February 28th coup (post-modern coup) is evaluated as a significant political event in the process of transition to political Islam in Turkey as the coup became a turning point for Islamists to challenge the Kemalism paradigm and the military who presents itself as the guardian of the secularism of Turkey. And

the 1997 military intervention has led Islamists to strengthen Muslim-centered civil societies and to choose a pro-EU route in order to secure political freedom.

After both of RP and FP (Fazilet Partisi) were dissolved by compulsion, AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi), established by Islamist elites including Recep Tayyip Erdoğan introduced itself as a moderate conservative party faithful to secularism (Grigoriadis, 2009: 1199-1120).

The party emphasized certain agendas of 'democratization', 'liberalization' and 'human rights' that EU attaches importance, instead of using Islamic terms such as 'Islamic justice' or 'social justice'. Especially, the '*Muhafazakar Demokrasi*' (Conservative Democracy)¹² platform designed by Yalçın Akdoğan contributed to win an absolute majority in the general election of 2002 by illustrating its character as a catch-all party (Rabasa & Larrabee, 2008: 49-50)

AKP does not expose religious color at all in their party programme,¹³ but rather implicitly recognizes the freedom of religious activities by using of universal vocabulary such as human rights, democracy and liberalism. (Rabasa & Larrabee, 2008: 53-56). From the conservative Muslims' perspective, therefore, it means that Islam and Muslims truly got free from fetters. In other words, what really AKP regime have done was expanding safe life spaces for Islamic identity.

2.2. RELIGIOUS CONSCIOUSNESS IN MUSLIMS' ORDINARY LIVES

Anna Secor has evaluated "Islamism, as a cultural and political movement, arises as a response to the postmodern culture of multinational consumer capitalism and reflects processes of reflexive identity formation under conditions of radical uncertainty and globalization" (2002: 5). It can be support her idea that since the 1980s, the consciousness of Turkish Muslims related to their

¹² The reason that Yalçın Akdoğan has chosen the word of 'conservatism' to replace 'Muslims' was because it was uncomfortable to cite 'Muslim' as a party platform in secular state. On the other hand, as 'democracy' means a tool to bring social problems to tolerance, dialogue and harmony, he argued 'conservative democracy' is a new and stable political idea to fill the gap between secular national state and Islamic societies. (Ümit Cizre, 2008: 221).

¹³ <http://www.akparti.org.tr/site/akparti/parti-programi#bolum>

identities has changed as a result of the revival of Islamist movement through Muslim networks and Islamist elites who pursue Islamic modernization. Saktanber explains ‘the revival of Islamist movement in urban might be attributed that Islamists elites seek the alternative moral and social order, being against the monolithic modernization follows the West’ (Saktanber(a), 2002: 2-7).

Since the late 1980s, the Muslims middle class was newly formed in Anatolia region due to the Islamic economy returned to life engaged with the liberalistic economy policies of President Özal and globalization. This class tends to have small-scale merchants in small and medium-sized cities and not to be under the leadership of secularist elites and to be conservative about their religion (Haynes, 2010: 316-317). They became important leaders of not only the development of civil societies and but also Islamic market while they actively involved in economic production and politics. One of Islamist scholar, Ali Bulaç called them “Protestant Muslims” and Yavuz, as well, pointed this new Islamist generation as a key force in political change. (Yavuz, 2009: 52-56 / Yavuz(a), 2003: 44).

‘MÜSİAD’, was founded in 1990 as an alternative to ‘Türk Sanayici ve İş Adamları Derneği: TÜSİAD’ which was representative of the economic organization of Turkey. MÜSİAD supported both of AKP’s conservative religious propensity and liberal market economy.¹⁴ Anatolian middle class demanded to consider the discrimination against Islamists and furthermore, to apply Islamic values to economic and social policies through the voice of MÜSİAD. Anatolian capitalists induced Islamist politicians to adopt liberal, market-oriented policies using their personal relationships and regionalism, while they tried to strengthen AKP’s position.

In this way, Islamists, who were able to accumulate wealth, gradually formed competitive composition with the secularists by imitating their propensity to

¹⁴ MÜSİAD is an example of the coexistence of Islam and liberal markets. ‘Islamic’ conditions by MÜSİAD are 1) belonging to Islamic orders and Islamic communities, 2) that Islam should be the most important criteria for its activities, 3) keeping its close relationship with the Islamist political parties represented by RP and FP from 1980s. (Özbudun & Keyman, 2002).

consume such as shopping at luxury goods store, owning a fancy house and a luxury car. Nur Vergin, a sociologist argues that Islamists no longer hide their religious tendencies, but rather express Islamic life style to the society with such a level of self-confidence based on their wealth¹⁵ as well as Keyman Fuat defined 'Islamist identity' at the time as 'to express their religiosity through the propensity to consume' (Keyman, 2007: 215-234). For example, Islamists creatively developed their consumption culture, attending Islamic fashion shows, spending their vacation in Islamic hotels with swimming pools and banquet spaces segregated by gender,¹⁶ using restaurants and cafes where do not sell any liquor and sticking to follow Islamic TV, magazines and radios (Saktanber(b), 2002: 254-276). Although that kind of consumption of the Islamist elites has generated extreme separation of classes among Muslims and criticism by Islamic fundamentalists, Erol Yazar, the founder of MÜSİAD countered the criticism by denying that Islam means sacred poverty. (Başkan, 2010: 174).¹⁷

Meanwhile, the emergence of 'Islamic women' after the 1980s brought a great change about what 'to be covered' represents. The headscarf in present became a symbol of an active urban elite woman who knows how to express her religious beliefs, whereas in the past, it was the standard for women's modesty and morality and symbols of women who live rural areas, the poor, the less educated, passive and devoted to her family (Saktanber & Çorbacioğlu, 2008: 526 / White(a), 2002: 191-217). According to a poll by KONDA, the number of covered women among the married has tripled in 2007 compared to 2003 (Haynes, 2010: 317-322, Erdem, 2007: 18-19). Similarly, the result of a survey in 2014 by Michigan University shows that 63% of Turkish women wear headscarves¹⁸ and according to a study conducted by UN, the rate increased to

¹⁵ Milliyet (2009, August 2). *Türkiye'de İslami burjuvaziden söz etmek mümkün mü?*. Retrieved from <https://goo.gl/ScQuE6>

¹⁶ The 'halal' hotel in Turkey was first opened in 1996. (Göle(b), 1997: 61-81).

¹⁷ The term of "*İslami burjuvazi*" (Islamic bourgeoisie) used by Erol Yazar became a controversy among many religious people and scholars at the time.

¹⁸ Sözcü (2014, January 9) *Dünya türban listesine 3. sıradan girdik!*. Retrieved from: <https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2014/dunya/dunya-turban-listesine-3-siradan-girdik-438516/>

67.8% in the following year.¹⁹

The '*tesettür*' style²⁰ of young Turkish women served as a symbol of Islamists as well and created a new Islamic consumption culture in the metropolis (Sandıkçı & Ger, 2007: 192-195). Although wearing *tesettür* meant to challenge not only secularism but also Atatürk, the number of women with *tesettür* in public spaces increased day by day. Besides, YÖK defined *türban* as a modern costume in comparison with *çarşaf* in its "High Education Institution Student Regulations" approved on August 13, 1985.

This period provided a good opportunity for Muslim women to define and to construct their own values. In this regard, Marshall described Islamist women in that time as orthodox Islamist women and reformist Islamist women according to their view of women's issue (Marshall, 2005: 104-120). The former recognizes the traditional roles of men and women in Turkish society, but denies Western feminism because feminism has implication rejecting the proposition that 'God is the master of the human body'. The latter thinks that gender equality can be achieved even in male-centered Islamic culture and that the role of Turkish women can be extended to the public sphere by reinterpreting of the Qur'an.

About the headscarf issue, these two groups also took different approaches. Reformist Islamist women say that they wear the headscarf because "it gives women freedom in social life" while orthodox Islamist women say that "if women do not wear the headscarf, morality might be weakened". Nonetheless, women both in two groups claimed together the right to wear the headscarf in public places and participated in the '*türban eylemleri*' (Turban actions) cooperating with Islamist movements and women's group because they have common sense of wearing the headscarf based on their religion. As an example, member of the National Assembly, Merve Kavakçı's action against the ban on

¹⁹ Miliyet (2015, July 12). *Kadınlar daha düzenli olarak namaz kılıyor*. Retrieved from: <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/kadinlar-daha-duzenli-olarak-namaz-gundem-2086644/>

²⁰ The *tesettür* style is characterized by *türban* with long coat.

headscarves in May 1999²¹ was evaluated as a courageous act claiming religious duty and freedom (Göle, 2002: 178).

On the other hand, commercialization of headscarves since the 2000s made it a symbol of a consumption culture instead of a political symbol. Mutlu Binark and Barış Kılıçbay claim that 'veiling fashions' created a consumption culture and is a side of sensitive fashion (Kılıçbay & Binark, 2002: 495-511). Gökarıksel and Anna Secor, in their paper 'Between Fashion and *Tesettür*: Marketing and Consuming Women's Islamic Dress', analyzed the changed meanings of the headscarf, arguing that the Islamist women in the present are figuring out a new compromise between the modesty of the *tesettür* and the glamor of fashion (2010: 118-148). Moreover, the combination of wearing the headscarf and consumption culture has created a distinction of headscarf consumption between Muslim women according to its brands, sizes and colors. Especially, as the high class's Islamist women such as Emine Erdoğan and the wives of AKP members started to show up wearing *tesettür* style, it became a trend and a basis for the formation of class communities using *tesettür* costumes.

Education also played an important role in the change of Turkish people's consciousness, as AKP has been strategically applied education to promote conservative Islamic values. For instance, the number of the Qur'an schools between 2002 and 2008 was more than doubled due to financial support by AKP regime for unaccredited Qur'an schools. In those schools, the age of students became younger than in the past and the proportion of female students is increasing. Besides, more parents encourage their children to take the Qur'an course (Baran, 2010: 86-87). Similarly, İmam-Hatip schools have attracted more students since AKP took power in 2002. The number of its students has been rapidly increasing as AKP allowed İmam-Hatip students to enter general universities since 2004 (Çakmak, 2009: 837-838). AKP regime even support İmam-Hatip graduates to be employed in religious organizations, and government institutes. İmam-Hatip schools are, so to speak, performing a

²¹ In 1999, the newly elected Turkish parliament Merve Kavakçı, of Fazilet Partisi (FP), appeared in the National Assembly with a headscarf. However, she was precluded from taking her oath in the swear-in ceremony by members of Demokratik Sol Parti (DSP) due to her headscarf.

function to cultivate Islamist elites in AKP regime.

Table 3. The Number of İmam-Hatip High Schools and Its Students in 2002-2017

Year	The number of schools	The number of students
2002-2003	450	71,100
2003-2004	452	90,606
2004-2005	452	96,851
2005-2006	453	108,064
2006-2007	455	120,668
2007-2008	456	129,274
2008-2009	458	143,637
2009-2010	465	198,581
2010-2011	493	235,639
2011-2012	537	268,245
2012-2013	708	380,771
2013-2014	854	474,096
2014-2015	1,017	546,443
2015-2016	1,149	555,870
2016-2017	1,452	634,406

Note. Ministry of Education of the Turkish Republic, Statistics of the İmam-Hatip Schools from 2002 to 2017

The influence of Islam has increased in public schools in Turkey (Arat, 2010: 873-877). The religious education in public schools which previously only dealt with Islamic principles and doctrines run parallel with the education about religious practices. All public schools now have prayer rooms and students are allowed to attend Friday worship if they wish. Even to place religious symbols in a class room of public schools has become a possibility.

I might be a first person who hang frames of a quote from the Qur'an and the name of prophets on the wall of a (government school's) classroom. I did it to make my students to remind the holy words from Allah and our prophets. It was 2 years ago (2015). Until the time, it was forbidden to place something religious in national schools. (Caymaz,²² January 2018, Ankara Keçiören)

The long-term efforts of AKP regime to cultivate 'Homo Islamicus' appear to be fruitful, as evidenced by the change in consciousness of the people based on

²² He is an İlahi artist who has worked as Turkish teacher in a middle school located in Ankara.

various surveys. As one of them, in a survey by World Values Survey (WVS), the average answer to the question “How important religion is in your life?” was 8.84 in 1990, 9.18 in 1996, 9.36 in 2007.²³ According to another survey of 2011 by the same organization, the answer based on gender to the same question was 9.17 by male, 9.34 by female. Based on the age of participants, the answer was 9.07 among the group of age under 29, 9.25 for the group of age between 30-49, and 9.47 for the group of age 50 and over.²⁴ It seems Turkish people generally recognize the importance of religion in their life regardless of age or gender.

The result of a survey conducted by Ali Çarkoğlu and Binnaz Toprak (2006: 27-29) with TESEV,²⁵ which of 1,500 interviewees from 23 provinces, shocked through the nation as 21.5% of the respondents answered that they wanted the country to be governed by Islamic law. And as more important point in the same survey, the rate of people who recognize Muslim as their primary identity increased from 36% in 1999 to 45% in 2006. It is higher than the rate of people who recognize themselves primarily as a citizen of Turkish republic or Turkish.

Table 4. What is The Primary Identity for Turkish People?

Primary identity	Response rate (%)
Turkish	19.4
Muslim	44.6
Citizen in Turkish Republic	29.9
Kurdish	2.7
Alevi	1.1
Others	1.3
Non-response	1.0

Note. Çarkoğlu and Toprak, 2006: 29

A survey by The Pew Research Center indicates that the favorable view of U.S. in Turkey rapidly downed from 52% in 2000, the time AKP did not take power

²³ The range of indicator is from 1-10. The closer the indicator to ten, the greater the importance of religion is. Retrieved from: <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSContents.jsp>

²⁴ <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV6.jsp>

²⁵ The Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation

yet, to 18% in 2017.²⁶ As for the favorability rate for certain religions, referring to the center's another survey (Carriere-Kretschmer, E., 2008), 76% of Turkish has unfavorable view of Jews and 74% of Turkish expressed negative view of Christians. These two rates are almost the highest level in comparison with the other 24 countries.

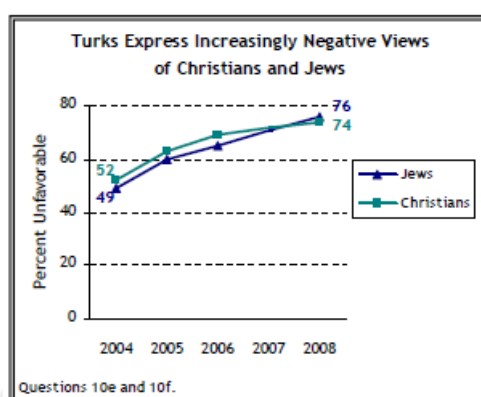


Figure 1. Turks' Views of Jews and Christians

Note. Carriere-Kretschmer, E., 2008

On the other hand, 86% of Turkish give Muslims a favorable rating which is a somewhat lower than Egypt, Lebanon, Pakistan and Indonesia.²⁷

2.3. RELIGIOUS MEDIA

During last decades, there were three of the most important factors which influenced popular culture in Turkey; first, the influx of American popular culture since 1950's, and second, privatization of the broadcasting industry since 1990, which had been monopolized by the government, and as the last, therefore, religion won a space in the media industry, a key producer of popular culture.

It was the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) established in 1964 that the first appearance of a media with modern equipment and system in Turkey. However, although TRT tried to produce programs in accordance with the taste of the public, religious music could be broadcast on a fairly limited

²⁶ Wike, R., Stokes, B., Poushter, J., & Fetterolf, J. (2017). *US Image Suffers as Publics Around World Question Trump's Leadership*. Pew Research Center, 26.

²⁷ Carriere-Kretschmer, E. (2008).

level because it was not allowed to broadcast outside the frame of secularism. The music that could be on TV and Radio was only few prominent Sufi artists who known as traditional Turkish art musician.

The privatization of the broadcasting industry in 1990 created one significant change. That was the emergence of spiritual medias. Religious channels that had been banned by the government have started to establish and to broadcast. Starting with AKRA FM, which was the first Islamic Radio station, during 1994, 19 of TV stations and 45 of radio stations were owned by Islamist private enterprises (Yavuz & Esposito, 2003: 104). Even though some of them have succeeded to build the Islamic media world by being equipped with modern media technologies, such as TGRT, Samanyolu and Burç Akra, they had to experience the lack of contents in the beginning. Then, since the mid-1980s, the popularization of the taped Islamist dramas caused to be born of new religious production companies such as Asır Ajans and Kunuz Ajans in the media market. Those companies shaped a new cultural map in Turkish society by using Fatih in Istanbul, where has a religious color, as a strategic position instead of Unkapanı, where the popular music companies were concentrated.

As a result, Islamic music, which had remained in a marginalized position, being spread in the form of recorded tapes, was also energized. Not only Sufi music albums but also quite a number of İlahi albums with melodies and playing of musical instruments were released to the market and its musicians performed on the stages of the spiritual media, in the intervals of the speech by Islamic scholars, an Imam or advertisements so that the viewers and audience will not be bored.

To listen to the Islamic music and to buy the albums took an important part of the consumption culture of the conservative Muslim middle class and, with the influence of Islamic medias, the class began rediscovering their religious and cultural identities. In other words, the private media and music industries, modern technologies, and the rapid urbanization and wealth accumulation experienced by people, who came to the cities, contributed greatly to the revival of Islamic music.

This new form of Islamic music has become an ideal means for the conservative middle-class Muslims in urban to fill their desire of distinction as *tesettür* did. However, because their taste remained in limbo between traditional and urban, Islamic musicians had to develop their music and performances in a way that would satisfy the new tastes of the new class. Meanwhile, in the late 1980s, the spread of mass media to local cities in Turkey led to shift where people communicate from real space to the modern media space and Islamic popular music was first observed throughout the world.

In response, from the second half of the 2000s, there were changes of use of instruments, audio and lighting systems, makam and repertoires in Islamic music performances. Ney, *ud*, violin and electronic keyboard were played together, the Qur'an or İlahi poems were recited in the reverent atmosphere, fancy lighting and for effects were used and even *sema* was included followed after Islamic popular songs during the performance.

Religious media and Islamic music, which experienced severe repression right after the February 28 Coup, gained momentum from AKP's socio-cultural policies. Because AKP regime supported conservative medias in order to revive the socio-cultural roles of Islam. In television and radio programs, anti-secularist contents have increased such as conservative values, knowledge of Islam, the Ottoman legacies, anti-Semitism (Baran, 2010: 82-83). In particular, the number of religious television channels which were established after 2002, when AKP came to power, is 29, representing 85% of the total 34.²⁸ In case of religious radio stations, 77 stations are operating as of 2018 however, most important information about their establishments and operations are hardly available to find. Reciprocally, some media organizations such as Star, Yeni Şafak and Kanal 7 also played a role as AKP regime's spokespersons, empowering the regime's political activities. On the other hand, 'Cemaat' led to the Islamist movement using the media. As a result, Zaman, Today's Zaman, Bugün,

²⁸ It compiles only TV stations established by permission in the RTÜK. Among them, internet TV channels are included as well. Some of them might be closed after the July 15 coup attempt, but it is difficult to confirm correctly.

Samanyolu, Ebru and Mehtap TV have grown into media organizations with considerable influence.

2.4. GLOBALIZATION OF ISLAMIC POP MUSIC

Since the 2000s, Islamic pop musicians such as Sami Yusuf, Yusuf Islam and Maher Zain have been performing in various parts of the world and affecting local artists and the audience there.²⁹ In Turkey as well, they were received by the people, for example, Sami Yusuf's 'Al-Mu'allim', which was released in 2003, high-ranked on the music chart for 20 weeks and 250,000 fans came to hear him in his Istanbul concert in 2013.³⁰ Maher Zain made a guest appearance on TRT World's Showcase after the release of this third album, including a duet with Turkish singer Mustafa Ceceli. The show emphasized that he became a world phenomenon, mentioning about his 1.8 billion views music videos.³¹ On the show, he explained what he does with his music:

Music speaks to us. It has an international language and a great impact. Thus, music is the most powerful medium I think. I want to convey the message that I believe and that I am proud. I always say (through my music) about Allah and the Prophet Muhammad that I am proud of. And I also clarify that Islam for me, means lifestyle. It is not something that I do in masjid, Ramadan or just reading in the Qur'an. It is center of my life. (Maher Zain, June 23, 2016, Showcase: TRT World)³²

In addition, by the same show, Islamic popular music was described as 'halal fun', which plays a remarkable role in bringing people together, sing love, peace, the belief and the only God.

There are some factors to explain their success; firstly, they properly used the internet channels such as Facebook, YouTube, Spotify and iTunes to promote themselves in the early days, secondly, due to their unique cultural

²⁹ Sami Yusuf had a concert in Taksim Square in 2013 and the next year Maher Zain performed as well in Konya.

³⁰ He had one more solo concert at Antalya in 2016.

³¹ This number includes views of Maher's official music videos as well as views of fan-made videos of his songs.

³² You can watch his interview on the show through this link: https://youtu.be/ryjlo8UzO_E

backgrounds,³³ it was available to record their songs in different language versions, as the last, it was easy to spread their music and to perform in various countries. The global success of Islamic pop musicians resulted a great number of religious music productions all around the world.

In Turkey, these Islamic pop music figures and local religious artists coexist quite favorably. Especially, from a position of religious artists in Turkey, their success meant an opportunity to revive Islamic popular music which had been stagnant since the February 28 Coup. Religious artists in Turkey were highly motivated to participate in the Islamic popular music industry. At the same time, they have built up an optimum level for that their music and performances are neither too secular nor too Islamic to their potential audiences. Their global successes demonstrated local religious artists that how their faith can be linked to capitalist activities without losing its essential meaning.

It is important point as well, that these global Islamic pop musicians are in common held in estimation both as a religious and humanitarian activist throughout the world. For instance, Yusuf Islam, after converted to Islam, received 5 humanitarian awards including Man of Peace Award, Global Islamic Awards for contribution toward peace through the Arts between 2003 and 2015. He also used his musical ability and influence for the Syrian refugee children in Turkey.³⁴ In recognition of his work to the children, he was introduced as a “political artist” by TRT World and invited as an honorary guest by Konya Metropolitan Municipality for the celebration the city as the capital of Islamic Tourism Maher Zain, meanwhile, took actions to support Palestine and performed in many concerts to raise donations. Similarly, Sami Yusuf participated in humanitarian activities releasing charity singles collaborated international organizations.³⁵ These activities are part of the practices of faith as a Muslim and are also a good influence of popular culture artists. They are believed to have contributed to offsetting negative views of Muslims and Islam

³³ Sami Yusuf is a British from Iran, Yusuf Islam is a British who converted to Islam in 1977 and Maher Zain is a Swedish from Lebanon.

³⁴ The music video for this charity album was taken in Konya.

³⁵ He released a charity single entitled "Hear Your Call" to raise funds for the displaced Pakistanis due to 2010 Pakistan floods. The single is performed both in English and in Urdu.

through this kind of music activities and there is no doubt that these activities have had a quite positive impact on their popularity. The respect the artists won from the Muslims all around the world motivates local religious artists for the life as a religious artist in a different way.



CHAPTER 3

THE DEVELOPMENT OF İLAHİ MUSIC IN TURKEY

3.1. APPEARANCE OF İLAHİ MUSICIANS

Turgut Özal's liberal policies in the 1980s provided opportunities for Islamists to expand their influence into all aspects of people's lives (Yıldırım, 2013: 323). Religious magazines, newspapers, media outlets, and other businesses have emerged in turn, and as a result, the visibility of Islam in society of Turkey has increased, and Islam started to try exposing itself in music as well.

Islamic music that existed in Turkey until that time was closer to traditional religious music for spiritual rites, inspired and developed by Sufi orders. Nevertheless, Turkish Islamists in 1980s were not accustomed to the *mehter* (Ottoman military band) or Sufi music, but rather to political and social concerns. Islam had to find a new way to express itself through music close to those concerns and the way was to combine itself to popular culture, which meets the public at a closes distance.

Who was responsible for this project was popular culture artists who tend to pursue a religious and pious life like Ulvi Alacakaptan. In 1985, Alacakaptan put the first Islamic rhetoric applied play, '*İnsanlar ve Soytarılar*' (Humans and Buffoons) written by İbrahim Sadri on his own theater, Çağrı Sahnesi and it was well received by religious groups and the audience from Anatolian regions (Tas, 2014: 372). He was the first person purely to use popular culture to express his religious beliefs and values as an artist. Since then, Alacakaptan brought a series of taped Islamic dramas, called *İslami Bant Tiyatrosu*, into vogue. The first Islamic taped drama, in 1986, was produced with the participation of religious production companies such as Zaman Yayıncılık and Azim Dağıtım in direction of Alacakaptan, Barbaros Ceylan, İbrahim Sadri, and Ahmet Mercan, Arkası Yarın. In fact, the taped drama was intended to promote a religious children's magazine Selam and was broadcast on the state radio, mainly describing the life of the Prophet Muhammad.

Another Islamic taped drama, “*Mute Destanı*” (Battle of Mu'tah), produced in 1987, contained the Islamic songs for the first time. Right after “*Mute Destanı*” was broadcasted, there was controversy as to whether the use of such music was reasonable in the Islamist communities. Some Islamists have expressed displeasure in a very aggressive way, especially in the use of saz in the drama. However, a few years later, another taped Islamic drama “*Mekke'nin Fethi*” contributed by group Selika did not see any negative reaction regarding to its use of an electronic keyboard, a *bağlama*, and wind instruments.

Since then, by listeners who have asked the music of taped Islamic dramas to release as CD albums, the albums of Taped Islamic dramas music titled *Gün Batıdan Doğmadan* (The Sun Moves from the East to the West) and *Adı için Yaşamak* (Live for the Name) came into the market and over time, along with this trend, other religious artists began to reveal Islamic popular music-themed albums on the market.

The first appearance of İlahi music dates back to the early 1990s.³⁶ The change of Turkey's overall elite structure by the success of RP and both of new opportunities and the sense of crisis of Islam due to globalization had major influenced on it. During the period, the Islamist movement was virtually resurrected by a large number of Islamist elites produced through İmam-Hatip schools and Anatolian capitalists while the media that carried Western popular culture was rapidly developing their influence, despite the government's control, as new media technologies and private radio and TV channels became more diverse.

In this situation, some people, who were trained with the Qur'anic recitation, İlahi or other Islamic poetries began to release musical İlahi albums, inspired both by Sufi music³⁷ and a variety of makam systems and wording styles (*üslup*). Those albums featured İlahi songs, İlahi poems with the makam system,

³⁶ By that time, İlahi was not sung but recited without any melodies. It is called ‘*müziksiz İlahi*’ (or *ezgisiz İlahi*). Even now *müziksiz İlahi* albums are being released in the music market, as there is always a group who prefers it.

³⁷ Konya Türk Tasavvuf Müziği Topluluğu (Konya Turkish Sufi Music Community), established in 1990, under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, started its regular performances in Konya and other cities in Turkey and even abroad.

melodies and instrumental performance such as *ney*, *def*, and *saz*. Some of them compose new İlahi poems for his own music. Dursun Ali Erzincanlı, Ahmed Muhammed, Abdurrahman Önül, Hasan Dursun, Abdullah Akbulak and, Cemal Kuru, who were among them, are considered as pioneers of İlahi music, which is a new genre of Islamic music in Turkey. Their albums have gained popularity among fairly affluent Muslims in urban who have chosen Islam as their way of life. In particular, conservative Muslim youth in the middle and high school, mostly including İmam-Hatip students was a group that felt a serious interest in İlahi music the most.

In their early days, İlahi musicians took the daily life of the Turkish people as their first stage, who believed that the culture of Turkey was based on Islam was completely faded by Western influences. Especially the wedding ceremonies became the most common stage to perform because, in the point of views of İlahi musicians who are mostly conservative Muslims, the scene in which women with dresses exposed their bodies and men are dancing together to the Western pops was to show the moral degradation of Turkish Muslims.

Bugünkü düğün salonlarında, çalgılı, danslı, kadınlı-erkekli düğün merasimleri yapılmaktadır ki, bunun ne dinde ne de sünnette yeri vardır. Ayrıca kutsal bir müessese olan aile; günah, hata ve yanlış bir temel üzerine kurulursa, doğacak neslin bundan etkilenmemesi mümkün değildir. Dinimiz Islama ve sünnete aykırı olarak yapılan düğün ve nikâhlardan da sünnete göre yetişecek nesiller beklemek hayal olur. (Burak Organization)³⁸

Wedding halls today typically house ceremonies where men and women gather together to dance alongside live music. This is a practice that's against both the religious and the traditional rules (Sunna). In addition, being a holy institution, in case family is based on a premise of sins, errors and mistakes; it is impossible for the next generation not be affected by this. It is useless to expect our young to follow the example of tradition if we fail to organize wedding ceremonies that violate tradition.

According to an interview for this study, most of the early İlahi musicians, performed at weddings by the late 1990s even tended to take no profit from their performances.

³⁸ <http://burakorganizasyon.com/hakkimizda-kurumsal.html>

My dad wanted people to have wedding based on religious elements such as the Qur'anic recitation and İlahi songs, not dancing to the culturally irrelevant music. He told me the wedding in the present starts with Haram. He performed for 5-6 years in a number of weddings in Sincan district where our family have been living without any benefit. In the end, he quit the job because he was struggling financially. He did not want a performance fee since, according to him, any personal gain in doing something for Allah is haram. (Taşdemir, November 2017, Ankara Sincan)

Since the mid-1990s, popular İlahi musicians such as Ömer Karaoğlu, Mustafa Özcan Güneşdoğdu, Erkan Mutlu, and Ender Doğan³⁹ actively performed throughout Anatolia and in some European countries where Turkish immigrants are concentrated. This period exactly coincides with the rise of RP. The events, which were organized primarily by religious organizations (some of which were officially associated with RP), began with the Qur'anic recitation and were filled with speeches by politicians or religious scholars and musical performances by İlahi musicians.

As the organizer, places and programs of those events imply, it is obvious that the performance of İlahi musicians in the period had political intentions. It was intended to link the religious preference of the people to support for a particular party through those public events. At the time of performances, the audience was not allowed to applaud after the performing of the İlahi musicians, so their performances gave a feeling of a prayer rather than art.

By that time, although the number of İlahi musicians and their opportunities to perform due to expanded Islamic media and the RP regime, they had yet to come up with a certain concept to introduce themselves. Then, the concept of 'ezgi' musicians has appeared because the performance of those İlahi musicians was a limited form of singing in the early days, and they wanted to make a distinction between 'şarkı' (song) and their music since *şarkı* is non-religion related and thus simply a song.

³⁹ Later, these popular İlahi musicians are considered as early İlahi artists.

3.2. SEARCHING FOR ALTERNATIVES FOR SURVIVAL DURING THE PERIOD OF RESTRICTION

However, February 28 coup, sparked by *Kudüs Gecesi* (*The Night of Jerusalem*), became an important fuse for the media landscape of Turkey where Islamic and secular media coexisted. The official statement announced by The National Security Council (MGK) stated that “Media groups that oppose the Turkish Armed Forces and its members should be brought under control” (Günay, 2001: 11). According to the recommendation by MGK, the investigation team, created by Prime Minister Mesut Yılmaz on March 24, 1998, informed the prosecutors and the Higher Council for Radio and Television (RTÜK) of suspected Islamist through monitoring radio station and TV stations.⁴⁰ As one of the result, FM (Marmara FM), a religious radio station was closed for one month.

In 2002 until AKP came to power, the use of words such as *şehit* (*martyr*), *mazlum* (*oppressed*), *zulüm* (*cruelty*), *başörtüsü* (*headscarf*), *İmam-Hatip*, *Ayasofya* (*Hagia Sophia*), and *Mescid-i Aksa* (*Al-Aqsa mosque*) in radio broadcasts was banned by RTÜK in the name of deepening religious divisions, besides, more than 70 Islamic music albums were prohibited on the airwaves. Özel FM was closed for 120 days because of broadcasting two songs of Grup Genç, one of well-known İlahi artists today, and Özel FM's producer Ünal Özyıldırım detained for 15 months (Bilici, 2002, as cited in Tas, 2004: 377)

Kudüs Gecesi had a negative impact on *ezgi* musicians' activities as well as the hosting of their concerts. Moreover, every content of their performances and the lyrics of their songs had to be reported in advance for the permission by local security forces. The Islamic music albums were also under the control. In the face of this all-out oppression against Islam by government, the people began to be reluctant to attend religious events or to consume and enjoy Islamic music.

⁴⁰ According to Günay, 46 radio stations and 28 TV channels have been warned about their 'fundamentalist' broadcasting since 1994 and 22 radio stations and 8 TV channels were suspended broadcast for 1,590 days and 22 days respectively (2011: 11). Furthermore, on March 20, 2001, MGK announced the establishment of Media Prosecutors' offices in Adana, Bursa, Malatya, Diyarbakır and Samsun (Çevikcan, 2001 as cited in Tas, 2014: 376)

These depressing situations made the development of Islamic popular music in Turkey almost impotent.

Although Islamist media groups opposed the government's repression by appealing to RTÜK's dispositions, most of the actions were dismissed. Therefore, some *ezgi* musicians ended up relinquishing their profession as an *ezgi* musician and returning to their existing business or exploring new career paths as their position became unstable and obscure.

On the other hand, there was a group of *ezgi* musicians who expressed their religious beliefs and ideas on popular music, but with erasing overt Islamic references. Pop melodies and Western instruments, such as a guitar, an electronic keyboard, were used and the materials of lyrics covered moral decay, individualism, urban life and even a man-woman relationship. The message implicated in these materials were not much different from the claims of Islamists, but they could be broadcast on popular music channels of TV and radio stations by cleaning the symbols of Islam. For example, Ibrahim Sadri, who has been respected as an important figure of Muslim youth during the Islamist movement in the 1980s with his works, which were employed Islamist rhetoric, since the late 1990s, has been a bestseller in the popular music category, releasing his albums dealing with the love between men and women.

The other *ezgi* musicians have tried to find alternatives to continue their Islamic music activities. One of the alternatives they found was to change their music concept with Sufi music, which was relatively tolerated by the Turkish government. As it happens, in the early 2000s, Sufi orders' artistic rituals were gaining popularity as a cultural product, as the public's preference for more visible and authentic increase. İlahi artists, who quickly changed their music concept to Sufi music, thus, had great success in the music market.

Mehmet Emin Ay is a good example of Sufi-concepted *ezgi* musicians. His album, titled *Taleal Bedru Aleyna* (1996)⁴¹ is a Turkish remake version of a same titled song, which was the first piece of Islamic popular music to achieve

⁴¹ "*Taleal Bedru Aleyna*" is about a story that is known as, when the Prophet returned to Medina through hicret from Mecca in 622, the people of Medina sang a hymn for him.

mass popularity all over the World. This Sufi-concepted album sold over 1 million copies in Turkey by including only the collective memory and a common history of all Muslim instead of political or Islamist messages.

3.3. POPULARIZATION OF İLAHİ PERFORMANCE

Meanwhile, *ezgi* musicians since 2002, when AKP took power, began to use the new concept of *İlahi sanatçısı*, as they became a sort of a composite artist who performs with not only singing but also playing instruments, recitation of the Qur'an or poems, giving a speech and hosting a quiz show for its audience. Namely, they were in need again to find a new term to define themselves. By its dictionary definition, the word 'İlahi' is purely religious. Turkish Language Society (TDK) defines 'İlahi' as "*Tanrı'yı övmek, ona dua etmek için yazılıp makamla okunan nazım*" (Poems which are written is to praise the God and pray to him and recited along with a makam) and about the word, TDK's another definition says "*Tekke yazınında din ve ahlak ile ilgili konularda özel ezgilerle söylenen koşuk. Yapı bakımından özel bir biçimi yoktur*" (In the dervish lodge literature, religion and ethic-themed poetries sung to the rhythm. There is no particular form regarding its structure). Similarly, the *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi (DİA)* defined İlahi as "*Dinî-tasavvufî muhteva taşıyan bestelenmiş şiirlerin genel adı*" (A general name for composed poems which have religious-Sufi contents). So, in sum, the compounding concept 'İlahi artist' guarantees the pure image of those musicians with the literal meaning of 'İlahi' and opens to possibility of transforming their music and performances. Hence the concept of *İlahi sanatçısı* is preferred by the artists themselves the most.⁴² Several artists who trained to professional Sufi music call themselves *tasavvuf müziği sanatçısı* (Sufi music artist) to keep the distance from other İlahi artists. In addition to these, there are some musicians who use the rather nebulous concepts such as *tasavvuf İlahi sanatçısı*, *İslami müzik sanatçısı* (Islamic music artist), or *şiiir-naat-söyleşi sanatçısı* (an artist who sings poem praising the Prophet

⁴² According to the İlahi group list which I created with collected data, 122 of 157 groups are using the term of 'İlahi' for the group name and only 2 groups used the term of 'ezgi'.

Muhammad). Nevertheless, these concepts including the İlahi artist have yet to be defined and agreed upon at the academic level.

The success of AKP was of great importance to İlahi artists. It is because Islam, which is the root of İlahi artists' activities and the source of their musical inspiration, finally could gain freedom in the universal ideology of democracy, human rights and liberalism, which AKP has put into its most imports values. İlahi artists indirectly revealed the violent and unfortunate experiences of Muslims through '*türban yasağı* or *başörtüsü yasağı*' (the ban on headscarves in the public sphere) which was the most influential action during the anti-Islamist process while they were spare of direct criticism of the February 28th coup due to their traumatic experiences associated with the suppress by the government. '*Örtü Uğruna*' (For the Headscarf), a song released in 1997 by Grup Genç is an example. The highlight of its lyrics:

*Biz Maraş'ta siper olduk
Erzurum'da düşman sürdük
Bir orduyu yola vurduk
Bayrak uğruna*

We acted as shields in Maraş,
Drove enemies away in Erzurum.
We have hit an army on the road
All in the name of the Flag.

- '*Örtü Uğruna*', Grup Genç (1997)

was used for the political campaigns in 2006 by sharing among the members of *AK GENÇLİK*. Similarly, today's another famous İlahi artist, Taner Yüncüoğlu emphasized that the headscarves are not the object of politics but a matter of identities and rights through his song, '*Başörtüsü*' (The Headscarf):

*Ne görür ne işitir,
Bu bir kimlik işidir,
Bir haktır başörtüsü*

Regards nothing, excuses none,
This case of identity,
A case of rights: the head scarf.

- '*Başörtüsü*', Taner Yüncüoğlu (2000)

Some İlahi artists gained great response with artistic metaphors to accuse the suppression of Islam in their music as that made the conservative Muslim groups feel consoled. As the best-known piece, Eşref Ziya's '*Ağlama Karanfil*' (Don't cry, Carnation), that symbolized a discriminated Muslim woman due to

her headscarf as a carnation became very popular among the covered girls and Eşref Ziya was invited to numerous concerts supported by Islamists.

İlahi artists continued to draw inspiration from Sufi music. Furthermore, the renowned İlahi artists contributed to bring Sufi music, which had been sealed in Sufi's rituals since the establishment of Turkish republic, into the public and to commercialize it. '*Salavat*', composed by Buhurizade Mustafa İtri, who was a Sufi musician and one of prestigious traditional Turkish art musicians in the early 18th century, was well received by the people since through the process of popularization by famous İlahi artists such as Mehmet Emin Ay, Zara, Murat Arslan, and Emrah Yardımcı.⁴³

Contrary to the case of '*Taleal Bedru Aleyna*', '*Salavat*' was commercialized by Turkish Islamic musicians and circulated to Muslims around the world by global Islamic pop musician like Sami Yusuf. The case of '*Salavat*' not only revealed the status of Turkish Islamic musicians in the global Islamic music market, but also implied the possibilities of Sufi music as popular music. There was actually a phenomenon has been observed that a number of Sufi musicians perform as an *ezgi* artist, but with Sufi concept.

As İlahi artists get into the mid-2000s, they became useful for political groups as they got into public favor both in local and global music market with their unique music and performances. Especially, the AKP regime was able to raise its support by reviving Islamic traditions, that celebrated sacred days with music, such as Ramadan, Islamic holy nights (*Kandil Geceleri*), Holy Birth Week (*Kutlu Doğum Haftası*), and Islamic holidays by İlahi artists' concerts. Because their concerts meet the public's desire for cultural life, while conservative Muslims interpreted it as an important change symbolizing the freedom of religious expression and moreover, the resurgence of Islamist movement. Therefore, municipal principals, mainly composed of AKP members, began competitively to hold religious events in their municipalities, casting highly recognized İlahi

⁴³ The song was titled "*Salavat-ı Şerife*" in Turkey.

artists for those events.⁴⁴ Especially during Ramadan, these İlahi artists perform almost every day in Ramadan events throughout Turkey. İlahi celebrities make a guest appearance on ‘İftar Saati’ programs of TV channels.⁴⁵ This trend has affected other organizations as well. In particular, educational institutions, religious organizations and Muslim associations began to include İlahi artists’ concert in their event programs.

TARİH	ANA SAHNE PROGRAMI	KÜLTÜR SANAT EVİ TASAVVUF DİNLETİSİ	AKŞAM	YATSI
16 Mayıs 2018 / Çarşamba	Ömer Faruk KESKİN / Tasavvuf Dinletisi	Mehmet İŞİK	20:04	21:40
17 Mayıs 2018 / Perşembe	Hakan ÇOLAK / Tasavvuf Dinletisi	Cengiz TAŞKENT	20:05	21:42
18 Mayıs 2018 / Cuma	Orta Oyun / Animasyon Gösterileri Dursun Ali ERZİNCANLI / Saat 22.00	Eyül İkim İLK	20:06	21:45
19 Mayıs 2018 / Cumartesi	Başkent Kültür Sanat / Tasavvuf Dinletisi	Mehmet İŞİK	20:07	21:44
20 Mayıs 2018 / Pazar	Hasan ÖZER / Tasavvuf Dinletisi	Cengiz TAŞKENT	20:08	21:46
21 Mayıs 2018 / Pazartesi	Grup Sufle / Tasavvuf Dinletisi	Eyül İkim İLK	20:09	21:47
22 Mayıs 2018 / Salı	Eyül İkim İLK	Mehmet İŞİK	20:09	21:48
23 Mayıs 2018 / Çarşamba	Ömer Faruk KESKİN / Tasavvuf Dinletisi	Cengiz TAŞKENT	20:10	21:50
24 Mayıs 2018 / Perşembe	Edebekir İPEK / Tasavvuf Dinletisi	Eyül İkim İLK	20:11	21:51
25 Mayıs 2018 / Cuma	Cüneyt ÖZGÜR / Tasavvuf Dinletisi	Mehmet İŞİK	20:12	21:52
26 Mayıs 2018 / Cumartesi	Orta Oyun / Animasyon Gösterileri Serdar TUNCER / Saat 22.00	Cengiz TAŞKENT	20:13	21:54
27 Mayıs 2018 / Pazar	Ziya UĞUR / Tasavvuf Dinletisi	Eyül İkim İLK	20:14	21:55
28 Mayıs 2018 / Pazartesi	Cengiz TAŞKENT	Mehmet İŞİK	20:15	21:56
29 Mayıs 2018 / Salı	Ömer Faruk KESKİN / Tasavvuf Dinletisi	Cengiz TAŞKENT	20:15	21:57
30 Mayıs 2018 / Çarşamba	Orta Oyunu / Animasyon Gösterileri	Eyül İkim İLK	20:16	21:58
31 Mayıs 2018 / Perşembe	Fatih Yardım / Tasavvuf Dinletisi	Mehmet İŞİK	20:17	22:00
01 Haziran 2018 / Cuma	Orta Oyunu / Animasyon Gösterileri Ömer Faruk ÖZCAN / Saat 22.00	Cengiz TAŞKENT	20:18	22:01
02 Haziran 2018 / Cumartesi	Altındağ Belediyesi K.E.K.M. Mehteran / Tasavvuf Gösterisi	Eyül İkim İLK	20:18	22:02
03 Haziran 2018 / Pazar	Orta Oyunu / Animasyon Gösterileri İbrahim SADRI / Saat 22.00	Mehmet İŞİK	20:19	22:03
04 Haziran 2018 / Pazartesi	Mehmet İŞİK / Tasavvuf Dinletisi	Cengiz TAŞKENT	20:20	22:04
05 Haziran 2018 / Salı	Orta Oyunu / Hacivat Karagöz Animasyon Gösterileri	Eyül İkim İLK	20:20	22:05
06 Haziran 2018 / Çarşamba	Ziya UĞUR / Tasavvuf Dinletisi	Mehmet İŞİK	20:21	22:06
07 Haziran 2018 / Perşembe	Hasan ÖZER / Tasavvuf Dinletisi	Cengiz TAŞKENT	20:22	22:07
08 Haziran 2018 / Cuma	Cüneyt Özgür / Tasavvuf Dinletisi	Eyül İkim İLK	20:22	22:08
09 Haziran 2018 / Cumartesi	Orta Oyunu / Animasyon Gösterileri Mustafa DEMİRÇİ / Saat 22.00	Cengiz TAŞKENT	20:23	22:08
10 Haziran 2018 / Kadir Gecesi	Ömer Faruk KESKİN / Tasavvuf Dinletisi	Mehmet İŞİK	20:23	22:09
11 Haziran 2018 / Pazartesi	Orta Oyunu / Hacivat Karagöz Animasyon Gösterileri	Eyül İkim İLK	20:24	22:10
12 Haziran 2018 / Salı	İbrahim ALTINIŞIK / Tasavvuf Dinletisi	Cengiz TAŞKENT	20:24	22:11
13 Haziran 2018 / Çarşamba	Grup Sufle / Tasavvuf Dinletisi	Mehmet İŞİK	20:25	22:11
14 Haziran 2018 / Perşembe	Arefe Günü		20:25	22:12

Figure 2. 2018 Ramadan Events Organized by Altındağ Municipality

Public awareness of İlahi artists has also risen as they have become more frequent in public. The performances of İlahi artists was attractive especially for the conservative Muslim middle class, who was seeking something sensible but religious to fill their family occasions. Burak Organization, who manages İlahi performances primarily in Ankara, suggest the class İlahi performance as an alternative choice, kindly pointing out what Muslims among the class concern.

⁴⁴ Almost every municipality plans the concert programs of İlahi artists in Muhabbet gecesi, Kutlu doğum, Mekke'nin Fethi gecesi, Kandil geceleri, Kerbela.

⁴⁵ Less-respected İlahi artists perform in local cities throughout Turkey during Ramazan.

*Muhafazakâr kesim dediğimiz dini hassasiyetlere dikkat eden insanlar ise düğünlerini hem özel olmasını hem de İslami usullere uygun olmasını isterler. İslami esaslardan taviz vermezler, vermek istemezler. Bu sebepten gelinlik seçiminden tutun da salon seçimine kadar seçici davranırlar. Bizler de Burak Organizasyon olarak dindar kesimin ihtiyaçlarını ve düğünlerde yaşamış oldukları sıkıntıları biliyoruz ve bu sıkıntıları gidermek istiyoruz.*⁴⁶

People who are sensitive to religious issues, those that we call the “conservatives”, wish that their weddings are special, but they also want these to conform to the rules of Islam. They do not want to compromise their Islamic tenets. For this reason, they are quite picky in matters such as choice of bridal gowns or wedding halls. We as Burak Organization, are aware of the needs of the conservatives and the problems they face during wedding organizations; We hope to meet these needs and solve these problems.

İlahi artists are invited to almost every occasion in Turkish people's lives, from wedding, engagement party, *kına gecesi*, *bebek mevlidi* to the ceremony of circumcision. Their performances make the client and his/her family look a devout Muslims, while they do not let the guests get bored by formal rites. The frequency of İlahi performance in Ankara ranges from 4 times to 8 times a week between April and October, which as there are many family occasions, whereas the frequency decreases by half during winter. This is an interesting point that there is a high percentage of İlahi performance in areas where denominational conservative middle class of Muslims such as Keçiören, Sincan, Altındağı, and Mamak.

It is also noteworthy that the increasing number of İlahi artists who perform in foreign countries mainly including Germany, Britain, Austria, and Netherland, where many Turks have settled. This means even the Turks abroad tend to prefer their identity of Muslim rather than just Turk. As public awareness grows day by day, İlahi artists expanded their stage to the events related Teacher's Day and Mother's Day, town events (*mahalle şenlikleri*) or even the opening ceremonies of shopping malls that are totally irrelevant to Islam.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ <http://burakorganizasyon.com/hakkimizda-kurumsal.html>

⁴⁷ During the participation observation for this study, İlahi artists performed in Teacher's Day events of primary schools in Kırıkkale and Sincan, in Faculty of Theology of Ankara University's Annual Reunion, in the annual event 'Mekke'nin Fethi' hosted by Anadolu Gençlik Derneği (AGD), in the graduation

I tried to collect the data of İlahi artists throughout Turkey in order to estimate the number of them. Since the internet is the most important resource they use to promote themselves, to begin with, I explored Instagram, Facebook, websites of İlahi artists and İlahi organizations. The keywords I entered to find them were *İlahi sanatçısı*, *İlahi grubu*, *ezgi sanatçısı*, *bayan İlahi sanatçısı*, *bayan İlahi grubu*, *tasavvuf sanatçısı*, and *tasavvuf grubu*. Then, based on the collected data, I made three lists of İlahi artists: a list of male solo İlahi artists; a list of male İlahi groups; and a list of female solo İlahi artists.

As the result, as of January 2018, the number of solo male İlahi artists around the country is about 190. About İlahi artists who perform as a group, there are only 28 female İlahi groups while the number of male İlahi groups is 157. As for the number of female İlahi groups is significantly less than that of male:

It is proper to use the word 'unaccustomedness' instead of 'discomfort' to explain it. There have been a large number of women who have been doing İlahi recitation. But few of them tries to be an İlahi artist. Because it is not their concern just like generally, women are not interested in boxing. And most importantly, 90% of the audience for our (İlahi artists') concerts. None of them prefers to listen to singing with a female voice. Most of Turkish people are not used to İlahi songs with a female voice. (Caymaz, January 2018, Ankara Keciören)

However, in *Kına Gecesi*, the female İlahi artists are more preferred. They tend to perform as a group usually made up of 4 members and wear whole covered, but colorful costumes. Additionally, it might be valuable to comment about the limited geographical sphere of female İlahi groups' activities. Almost every female İlahi group is based on Konya, Bursa, and Istanbul where have religiously, strong conservative inclination.

Taken together, in the 1990s, İlahi artists were able to appear due to the forming of religious media market and the conservative Muslim middle class's desire of distinction which are accompanied by political Islam in Turkey since 1980s, and in addition, the emergence of global Islamic popular music. However, due to the February 28th coup, İlahi artists entered the period of

restriction, not fully establishing their identity and position. They tried to find alternatives to survive, just like Islamic political power adopted the Western universal values, such as liberalism, democracy, and human rights, instead of Islamism for religious freedom. As the alternatives, some İlahi artists leaned on Sufi music and popular music, others used metaphorical and symbolic expressions in their music in order to indirectly criticize the religious suppression by the government. Today, these alternatives brought the richness of İlahi artists' music and performances in its train. Furthermore, the first generation İlahi artists who overcame the period of restriction gained a great reputation and success in AKP regime.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ The first generation İlahi artists include these names: Eşref Ziya Terzi, Taner Yüncüoğlu, Mustafa Demirci, Mehmet Emin Ay, and Grup Genç. They are now not only the most sought after İlahi musicians but also İlahi music producers and educators.

CHAPTER 4.

CHARACTERISTICS OF İLAHİ ARTISTS

4.1. BEING AN İLAHİ ARTIST

In the mid-2000s, it was the İlahi artist boom. Three-fourths of currently active solo İlahi artists have released their first albums since 2002. This was the period the Homo Islamicus, who received systematic religious education through İmam-Hatip schools and the Qur'an schools, grew up listening to the İlahi music albums in the 1990s, finally entered the world of the İlahi artists. Besides, as the global popular Islamic musicians began to gain popularity in Turkey, the conservative Muslim youth's interest in Islamic popular music increased even more. This youth made the average age of the İlahi artists significantly lower.

İlahi artists can be considered 'intellectual Muslims' who had already been trained in deep religious knowledge and religious music before choosing this profession.

Table 5. Informants' Religious Education Experiences

Name	Age	Religious Education Experiences
Muhammed Taşdemir	28	İmam-Hatip High school
Mustafa Caymaz	48	-
Ebubekir İpek	32	Private boarding Qur'an school
Hakan Öztürk	47	-
İbrahim Cuşan	35	Private boarding Qur'an school İmam-Hatip High school (Bachelor) Ondokuz Mayıs Univ. Department of divinity (MA) Yıldırım Beyazıt Univ. Turkish Religious Music & State Conservatory for Turkish Music
İrfan Orhan	30	İmam-Hatip High school Ankara Univ. Department of divinity
Naim Dilekçi	34	İmam-Hatip High school
Barış Yavuz	28	İmam-Hatip High school
Lütfi Doğan	37	İmam-Hatip High school Fırat Univ. Department of divinity

They do not drink but some of them smoke. They self-report praying five times a day, practice fasting during Ramadan and have been to Haji and Umrah. In this regard, the artists who participated in this study show that these characteristics are related to their family backgrounds. Most informants were influenced by their families who are very religious with a wealth of religious knowledge or have occupations associated with religion. According to informants, while growing up, they were surrounded by the environment full of Islamic elements because of their family members who served religion and they had a sense of awe toward the wealth of religious knowledge what those family members have.

I think I was influenced by my brother a lot. He knows everything about the Qur'an and he had a wealth of knowledge about the world as well. He was such a role model of me. Following him, finally I decided to work at something associated with Islam. I was only 12 or 13 years old at that time. My brother currently works as a manager at *Cumhuriyet Camii* (Republic Mosque) in Ankara. (Orhan, December 2017, Ankara Mamak)

Thanks to my father, I grew up listening to İlahi music since I was about six. There were more than 90 İlahi music albums in his room. He won first place in the Qur'an recitation competition, which was organized by the Turkish Government. And I won first place in Ankara as well. He might be one of the first İlahi artists in Ankara. I have dreamed of following in his work since I deeply admired my father. (Taşdemir, November 2017, Ankara Sincan)

My father is a *hafız alim*. Even though he did not give me any religious education individually, I should accept that he contributed me to explore the religious knowledge myself because he left me to ask and to solve questions about religion, instead of providing the certain answers. Moreover, thanks for him, I was able to approach almost to every religious book at home to solve my curiosity. (Öztürk, January 2018, Ankara Yenimahalle)

As these examples from informants show, İlahi artists are often encouraged spirit of religious inquiry by their families, and I guess, it has also relevance to that most of them were educated in religious schools. İmam-Hatip graduates are easier to become İlahi artists because they have been already trained as religious professionals there. In particular, İmam-Hatip high schools provide the basic education of religious music, which includes Qur'anic recitation, singing the *ezan* and classic information and practices related to Islamic music in Turkey, for their students to train as İmam, Muazzin, *Vaiz* (preacher), and

Qur'an teacher.⁴⁹ All of the 9 informants in this study debuted after 2006 as İlahi artists and 6 of them were from İmam-Hatip high schools. The education in İmam-Hatip schools has provided them with fundamental knowledge related to the Qur'an, Hadith and the history of Islam to be İlahi artists,⁵⁰ but most importantly, the education influenced them to recognize music as an effective element of Islamic practice. They became conscious of music in their religious lives, as education courses in İmam-Hatip schools taught them how to use music in Islamic religious practices.

During İmam-Hatip school, I learned how to recite not only the Qur'an and *ezan* but also İlahi with the makam system. It naturally made me realize that musical elements are essential to practice my religion. Especially when we recite the Qur'an, our teachers put us into competition with each other. Everybody tried to find a better makam system for the Qur'anic recitation. They showed us a lot about how music can be used in our religious practice. After graduation, I listened to a lot of İlahi music and started to write İlahi poems. I took a composing lesson as well. (Cuşan, January 2018, Ankara Çankaya)

Many of my teachers in İmam-Hatip encouraged me to sing İlahi music, saying that my voice is quiet ideal to do so. Therefore, after graduation of İmam-Hatip, I combined university study with vocal and *ney* training in TRT. Even there, I heard that I have a talent for İlahi music. My trainers often took me to İlahi artist concerts. (Orhan, December 2017, Ankara Mamak)

Although I grew up listening to İlahi music, I had never thought carefully how the music influences my religious life. However, through different classes in our school, I learned how music changes according to the makam system and what effects of music make on the listener's emotion. That was first time I began to be interested in İlahi music on a serious level. (Taşdemir, November 2017, Ankara Sincan)

As these examples from informants show, the education of religious music in İmam-Hatip schools affected its students' positive perception of music and made them interested in the use of the makam system, musical instruments and most importantly, vocals in religious practices. İlahi artists' voices count for much in their performances. The performances are basically made up of:

⁴⁹ However, the level of religious music education in İmam-Hatip schools is not enough to make them artists. Therefore, those who wish to be an İlahi artist take extra music education from universities or professional institutions, then finally, they start their life as an İlahi artist.

⁵⁰ The most important part of İlahi performance is to make a conversation with the audience in order to communicate Islamic knowledge, rather than just singing İlahi music.

- The Qur'anic recitation and an opening speech
- İlahi performance
- Storytelling about the time of the Prophet Muhammad
- *Sema* performance
- Poetry recitation
- Collective prayer and closing speech

Although this plan is susceptible to changes depending on conditions such as the budget suggested by a client, every İlahi performance must include the Qur'anic recitation and collective prayer. As symbolic elements marking the beginning and the end of İlahi performance, these transform the space and time that İlahi artists perform into a space of collective worship. Al Qiyamah, At-Tawba and Al-Baqarah are the most preferred Surah by İlahi artists. That İlahi artists sing İlahi music and give the audience a religious talk plays a role in enhancing the atmosphere of collective worship by strengthening the faith of the audience for a while. Reading well-known Mevlana's poetic works is added to this in order to keep audience interest. İlahi artists do not forget to make *dua* (prayer) audibly after all musical performance. By doing so, İlahi artists play a role as not authoritative, but respectable İmam during their performances.

Other components of İlahi performances are, in fact, very fluid. For example, instrumental accompaniments on the stage may include only *ney* or may combine *ney* with electric keyboard. İlahi artists tend to wear simple suits as well as Islamic costumes such as *takke*, *haydariye* or *cellabiye*. Besides, even though a necktie is a symbol of secularism, some of them seem unable of resisting wearing it in their performances. They more care about their decent appearances since some Hadith quotations emphasize on it in welcoming a guest and visiting somebody.

I do not add a religious meaning to my costumes. But, as I told you before, İlahi music has a special purpose. We (İlahi artists) should meet the audience with a neat and decent appearance. Hadith says that a Muslim welcomes his guest with his clothes. Once won the audience's favor with a decent appearance, I can approach them with my music that including Islamic thoughts and values. (Cuşan, January 2018, Ankara Çankaya)

However, it is also important that female İlahi artists come on stage wearing *tesettür* style without exception. İlahi artists' costumes are more likely to depend on individual choices to make themselves look more charming on stage rather than to display their religiosity.



Figure 3. İlahi Artists' Performance Costumes

Note. (Clockwise from left) İrfan Orhan, Muhammed Taşdemir, Tevhid İlahi Grubu, İbrahim Cuşan, Barış Yavuz



Figure 4. Female İlahi Artists' Performance Costumes

Note. Asır Organizasyon

Fees for İlahi performances range between 500-11,000TL for a solo artist and 5,000-40,000TL for a group. The amount varies according to the artist's prominence, the number of musical instruments, and performance programs.

Given that they perform at least four times per week during the peak season between April and September, they are more likely to earn better from İlahi performances than their primary jobs.

Despite the large amount of income from their performances, it is interesting that most of İlahi artists do not treat this profession as their primary job. A few of İlahi artists rarely do, but they never regard their İlahi performances as the source of income. It was informants' common opinion that religion-related work should not aim to make money, although it is obviously true that they take economic benefit from their performances. According to them, money cannot be the priority in any case for performing as İlahi artists, and therefore, it is impossible to depend economically on the profession. Actually, almost all İlahi artists have a separate job to make a living.

It is true that there is an İlahi market ("*İlahi piyasası*"). However, the market can never be a huge scale because this job does not make lots of money. Well... If İlahi music can be just a 'song', which simply means popular music, it might be. But, İlahi has different intentions. Except for the case of a few famous İlahi artists, we are not able to eat a bread with this job ("*İlahi ile ekmek yiyemiyoruz*") because this job is fully voluntary. (İpek, December 2017, Ankara Mamak)

A job associated with religion is a kind of free service. It is like you lead somebody to become a Muslim. Nobody does this for a reward. Thus, it is contradictory to seek money as an İlahi artist. (Doğan, November 2017, Ankara Yenimahalle)

As these informants mentioned, İlahi artists strongly argue that their work is never for money, but rather a religious service. They seem themselves as doing this work to practice their sense of mission and faith as a Muslim with the talents which God has given them. So actually, what really make İlahi performances religious are the İlahi artists themselves, full of religious intentions and mindset for their devotion to God. Informants show that they correlate their music activities with a sense of duty as a Muslim.

Our works belong to Allah. We belong to him as well. (Taşdemir, November 2017, Ankara Sincan)

My İlahi performance aims to win Allah's approval, to explain our religion (Islam), and to provide "*irşat*" (a spiritual and ethical guide). (...) The reason I released my first İlahi album was to use my special ability for what Allah

intended. I wanted to use the music in a halal way. (Cuşan, January 2018, Ankara Çankaya)

Currently, most İlahi artists are seeking to gain “şöhret” (great fame). But a real İlahi artist never reveals himself, because if he does, the important Islamic messages are reduced in his music. (Öztürk, January 2018, Ankara Yenimahalle)

Muhacir ve Ensar İlahi Group, which usually performs in Bursa and Ankara, explain that their goal is to contribute to the integration of Muslims by putting the morality of the Prophet's era into practice today in Muslim societies.

İlahi gurubumuzun kuruluş amacı; Efendilerin Efendisi Hz Muhammed S.A.V. Efendimizin Medine'ye Hicret ettikten sonra, Medine'nin yerli halkı (Ensar) ve Mekke Müşriklerinin zulüm ve baskılarından dolayı hicret eden (Muhacir)'lerin, Hz Muhammed S.A.V Efendimiz 'in vesilesiyle aralarında oluşan kardeşlik, sevgi, saygı, muhabbet, paylaşma, yardımlaşma, şefkat, merhamet, sadakat, samimiyet, affetmek, vefalı olmak gibi daha sayamadığımız, faziletli davranışlar bütününün günümüzde de yaşayıp yaşatma gayreti içerisine girip, bütün önyargıların ortadan kalkmasına vesile olup, Muhacir ve Ensar ahlakının yeniden doğup, doğduğu yerden doğuya batıya, güneye kuzeye, birlik ve beraberlik içerisinde yeni açmış bir gül ve envâr-i çeşit çiçek misali tomurcuklanıp filizlenmeyi hedefliyoruz.⁵¹

The reason our İlahi group has been formed is to help promote in today's world the virtues of brotherhood, love, respect, friendship, sharing, collaboration, mercy, loyalty, sincerity, forgiveness and faithfulness; which have formed among the Muhajir following their years of being exiled from Mecca to Medina under the leadership of the Prophet Mohammad, due to heavy oppression from infidels in Mecca. We wish to help eliminate all prejudice, promote the rebirth of the Muhajir and Ensar ethical values and their spread from East to West and South to North, acting in unity, budding and sprouting like a rose flower.

What informants mentioned show that İlahi artists regard their works as efforts to carry out Muslim's missions. On the other hand, İlahi artists' works are also an effort to return Islamic music back to life, which has been marginalized in the lives of Turkish Muslims. They believe that the music has a secret to more effectively communicate Allah and the Prophet's messages to Muslims, and especially İlahi is the highest level of art in the Islamic world that passed down since the time of the Prophet. Thus, from the viewpoint of İlahi artists, their

⁵¹ <http://burakorganizasyon.com/hakkimizda-kurumsal.html>

music activities are to revive the İlahi culture in Turkey, and according to İbrahim Cuşan, “to purify Muslim society with halal music”.⁵²

In the past, there was oral culture that Islamic musicians handed down Islamic knowledge and the stories of the Prophet Muhammad through İlahi recitation. Nonetheless, Islamic music in Turkey has been degraded by the claim of orthodox theologians and Islamic fundamentalists, that listening to music is a useless behavior of idleness, ignorant, and lack of occupation. Since the Turkish Republic, Islamic music was almost lost to history. But the human being has an atavistic need for music. İlahi music is a result of efforts by Muslims themselves to use music in a halal way. İlahi music aims to maintain the love for Allah and the Prophet alive (*“İlahi müziğinin amacı, Allah’a olan ve peygambere olan aşk muhabette, canlı tutmaktır”*). (Cuşan, January 2018, Ankara Çankaya)

The viewpoint of İlahi artists, who consider their profession as a part of religious practice, is more evident in their attitudes and feelings during performances. Interestingly, İlahi artists who lead the audience into collective worships become modest Muslims while they İlahi music on stage. According to informants, on stage, İlahi artists ask themselves about what they sing for and the thoughts remind them of their love for Allah. İlahi artists are the most deeply moved by their own performances than anyone else.

When I write the lyrics for my music, I imagine what I want to advise myself. For example, one of my works, which tells about death, made me look back on my life as a Muslim and reflect on myself. (...) The reason I write the İlahi lyrics is to grow myself as a better Muslim, rather than to be performed. (İpek, December 2017, Ankara Mamak)

There is nothing that makes me happy more than to be on the stage as an İlahi artist. My heart flies just like a butterfly there. I’m often moved to tears. But it is not because of the applause of the audience, but the İlahi sung by me is so touching and meaningful. (...) Every popular musician will be forgotten. But a music work filled with the love for Allah will never be. Mevlana’s works demonstrated this. Our (İlahi artists) works will not die because they are religious. We sing the love of our prophets and Allah. A truly valuable work is great and precious itself even if it remains unsold. (Caymaz, January 2018, Ankara Keçiören)

My İlahi music aims to recall and to understand our prophets. A person who sings an İlahi must be able to feel something deeply to move the audience. In other words, İlahi artists should be full of spiritual emotions and maintain them during the performance. (Cuşan, January 2018, Ankara Çankaya)

⁵² İbrahim Cuşan, January 2018, Ankara Çankaya

As what informants mentioned show, İlahi artists' music activities must be something that is meaningful to themselves as a Muslim and being an İlahi artist is a process of training to become a better Muslim. That is why the artists can feel satisfaction and happiness on the stage even if there is no response from the audience. In this context, that İlahi artists consciously reveal their Islamic lives off-stage and social networking services (SNS) grabbed my attention. Especially through SNS, the optimal space for this, they broadcast videos of their pilgrimages (*Hajji* and *Umrah*), Ramadan fast, iftar, and meetings with religious leaders. In addition, sometimes they appear with *takke* (taqiyah) and lead a prayer or religious conversations similar to a Sufi's *sohbet*, for their followers. During the conversations, usually the subjects are related to Hadith, the Qur'an, and the Ummah, or the moral issues of Turkish Muslims are discussed.⁵³ I received religious messages through WhatsApp, Facebook and SMS, from the participant İlahi artists every Friday and on Islamic holy nights (*Kandiller*). Those messages included a prayer, a verse from the Qur'an, or celebrations.

The reason why İlahi artists try to reveal themselves as 'exemplary Muslims' is that they assume the role of a spiritual leader on stage. Thus, it is above all important for them to be recognized as respectable Muslims, in order to carry out this unique job. In evaluating an İlahi artist, technical aspects of music such as music scales and the use of makam are of course taken into consideration, but the most decisive measure is whether the artist practices the 'Islamic life' (*İslami yaşantı*). Hakan Öztürk, one of the İlahi artists and an İlahi trainer, said that he tells his apprentices (*çırak*) "do not become a '*münafık*' (hypocrite)". In other words, he wishes them "to treat İlahi with integrity and to practice the philosophy of İlahi throughout their lives rather than just to show themselves as well-trained İlahi artists. What Allah expects is to see Muslims not only at

⁵³ *Sohbet* developed on the basis of Hadith which is describing that the Prophet Muhammad encouraged Muslims to gather together to talk, saying "The mirror of a believer is another believer". In other words, *sohbet* is a way of enlightening each other through conversation-in-companionship. Annemarie Schimmel defines this as "a spiritual conversation between a teacher and a disciple at a very high spiritual level. (Schimmel, 1976:366).

mosques but also in every aspect of their lives”.⁵⁴ The term of *münafık*, in an Islamic context, means a person who appears like a Muslim but who is in fact not a Muslim.

The audiences who meet İlahi artists in a very limited time and space do not know exactly whether the artists practice the Islamic life or not. But İlahi artists themselves evaluate each other and qualify artists who treat this profession only as a means to an end, as “*piyasa sanatçıları*” (market artists).

There are some İlahi artists who couldn't succeed to integrate their private lives with their İlahi artist lives. Ironically, these people are the most well paid İlahi artists. But we evaluate whether they deserve credit for a true İlahi artist. (Orhan, December 2017, Ankara Mamak)

There is an empty space for religious music. In other words, İlahi music or Sufi music has great potential in the market. But the people who only seek the money can be called unconscious (“*bilinçsiz*”). (Taşdemir, November 2017, Ankara Sincan)

As informants explained, those who are called ‘market artists’ are not directly criticized by other İlahi artists, nor are they restricted in their music activities. However, no matter how successful they are, it is impossible for them to be recognized and respected as an İlahi artist in a true sense. İlahi artists seem to keep market artists at a distance in order to maintain the purity of their music activities. As the informants have emphasized, the most fundamental motivations for this profession are the Islamic life and the mission as a Muslim to lead other Muslims and *kâfir*⁵⁵ to the right way. This is in line with their claim that İlahi artists’ works are a kind of religious practice and a process of self-training to become better Muslims.

However, frankly speaking, criticism of ‘market artists’ is quite subjective. In other words, reminding that informants emphasized the artists’ Islamic lives, faith, intentions, and what they feel from their own music and performances as the most important elements in their profession, the basis of the criticism is equivocal.

⁵⁴ Öztürk, January 2018, Ankara Yenimahalle

⁵⁵ According to one of informants, Cuşan, a *kâfir* means not only an unbeliever but also a lapsed Muslim. He claims that the latter is a more serious problem of Turkish society.

Perhaps, this division between İlahi artists may show us there are conflicts among them and more fundamentally, there are disagreements over secular and religious values in the current Turkish society. Informants have objection to İlahi artists chasing secular values, but at the same time, they express their desire for it, making efforts to be successful in the İlahi market, such as establishing close relationships with the AKP and the local governments' senior civil servants, making İlahi albums and its music videos, and caring about their appearances. To deeply understand this conflict among İlahi artists, it seems important that we listen to opinions both of İlahi artists based on Istanbul where the İlahi market is highly developed and the İlahi artists of mid-level based on the provincial cities.

İlahi artists' emphasizes on Islamic life, faith and intentions are also related to their tolerant attitudes toward the using of popular elements in their music and performance. Some criticize İlahi artists for using Western instruments such as electronic keyboards, cellos, and violins, and sometimes even for including *sema* or *mehter* performances that are totally irrelevant to Islam. But in fact, İlahi artists themselves do not give religious significance to these formal elements. According to informants, the elements considered 'non-Islamic' by orthodox Muslims and theologians, are merely a means to draw attention and to meet the needs of the audience.

Right after my İlahi performance, I call *semazen* (whirling dervishes) to the stage. It is only for the audience, who desire to take pictures and videos. Otherwise, the audience must be bored. (Caymaz, January 2018, Ankara Keçiören)

The most important thing is the atmosphere created by İlahi music because the atmosphere is linked directly with what the audience feel. Thus, in my opinion, if an İlahi artist can create a proper atmosphere in any way, it doesn't matter. (Orhan, January 2018, Ankara Mamak)

Sema in İlahi performance is more related to Turkish tradition, not Islam. The *semazen*'s colorful costume already implies that their performance is not authentically Islamic. (Yavuz, February 2018, Ankara, Yenimahalle)

When a society changes, its every element changes as well. Religion, thus, should follow the social change. In today's Turkish society, traditional instruments address nothing about Islam. People desire something modern and there is no way not to listen to the desire because we, first of all, need

to make the audience to focus on our stage. (Doğan, November 2017, Ankara Yenimahalle)

As Informants' opinions show, İlahi artists care about effectiveness rather than lawfulness in choosing the elements for their İlahi performances. Furthermore, İlahi artists have a strong sense of pride in their music activities because they believe that they have a much more extensive and professional knowledge of Islam and that they lead the people toward exemplary Islamic lives. Therefore, speaking as an İlahi artist, such criticism or negative views saying their performances are non-Islamic, are pointless.

4.2. POLITICALLY CONSCIOUS ARTWORKS

The greatness and love of Allah and the Prophet are still important motivations for İlahi artists and main themes of their music. *Gül* (rose), *anne* (mother), *zalim* (cruel), *Medine* (Medina), *Mekke* (Mecca), *Allah*, *Muhammed*, *cennet* (the heaven), *zikir*, *Kerbela* (Karbala), *Sultan*, *aşk* (love), *dua* (prayer), *ay* (the moon), and *güneş* (the sun) are the most commonly used words in their music. However, since the mid-2000s, it is observed that İlahi artists consciously reveal their propensity to support the AKP regime in their music activities and private lives. Images of the national flag of Turkey, The President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, AKP's corporate identity stand out from their SNS spaces. They pray for the representative political figures of the AKP regime as well as their homeland and set out an argument that government policies contribute to both Turkey and Islam.

Some İlahi artists dedicate tribute music to the AKP regime, especially in important election seasons. For example, Anka İlahi Grubu, based in Kocaeli, announced '*Yar Davutoğlu*' (Evet, Davutoğlu) ahead of the general election in 2015 and it was officially used as the official campaign music of the AKP election camp. Davutoğlu refers to Ahmet Davutoğlu who was the Prime Minister of Turkey and leader of AKP from August 2014 to May 2016. In the referendum season of 2017, Ender Tekin revealed a solo single *EVET*, which

was the AKP regime's official election campaign slogan. Similarly, Grup Dergah produces a music video of their İlahi work '*Hep Birlikte*' (*All Together*), which combines the voice of speeches by President Erdoğan on '*Hedef 2023*' (The 2023 Vision) with images of the Turkish flag and rallies of the people. These Works feature the political figures of AKP as capable, God-chosen, and destined for the Turks. Murat Belet's '*Erdoğan*', which was popularized with 90 million YouTube hits, was written by another well-known İlahi artist, Dursun Ali Erzincanlı. In Ali's lyrics, President Erdoğan is portrayed as a sacred figure chosen by Allah.

*Bayrağının Rengi Kandır
Hilâl Yıldız Sana Şandır
Dünya Duysun Sancı
Her Doğan Bir Erdoğan'dır*

Blood is the color of the flag,
Crescent and star your medal.
Let the whole World hear the cry:
All that is Born is Erdoğan:

*Yıldız Yıldız Ziyâ Ziyâ
Ecdât Gibi Süreyyasın
Ne Garipsin Nede Parya
Kıyâm Eden Sakarya'sın*

Star of stars, light of lights,
like our ancestors, you are a constellation,
Neither stranger, nor outcast,
You are River Sakarya, kneeling for prayer.

'*Erdoğan*' - Murat Belet (2017)

Table 6. Political-themed İlahi Music during the AKP Regime

Artist	Title	Release	Main Subject
Metin Aslan	<i>Recep Tayyip Erdoğan</i>	2018	Recep Tayyip Erdoğan
Murat Belet	<i>Erdoğan</i>	2017	Recep Tayyip Erdoğan
Grup Dergâh	<i>Hep Birikte</i>	2017	Hedef 2023 (of AKP)
Ender Tekin	<i>Evet</i>	2017	"EVET" Campaign for 2017 Referendum
Anka İlahi Grubu	<i>Yar Davutoğlu</i>	2015	Ahmet Davutoğlu
Anka İlahi Grubu	<i>Erdoğan</i>	2014	Recep Tayyip Erdoğan

In fact, the existence of the AKP regime is significant for İlahi artists. One of informants, Orhan says the current regime makes both the people's Islamic lives and İlahi artists' works easier.

The AKP regime provided the background to make our work easier. What the regime really emphasizes is not Islamisation but that everybody has a right to the pursuit of comfort and freedom. During the time of the socialist regime,

something Islamic was a sin and social suppression was everywhere. But, we are free now. (Orhan, December 2017, Ankara Mamak)

Moreover, in the AKP regime, Muslims in Turkey have experienced dramatic changes related to the expression of Muslim identity and the development of Muslim markets. As a result, the Islamic consumption culture, in which Muslims consciously began to reveal their classes and identities through the consumption of religious goods including İlahi performances, has been highly differentiated and advanced. Currently the AKP regime is leading government institutions to organize religious rites and events. In other words, the current government plays roles both of a guardian and an essential customer, so it has become more important for İlahi artists to reveal themselves as fervent supporters of the AKP regime. One of informants who didn't want to reveal his name pointed out the situation that İlahi artists prefer to perform in events hosted by government institutions, even if these events are just showing off.

Municipalities organize religious events merely to dance to the government's tune. It makes our concerts low quality. The audience is usually not ready. The situation is better in conservative regions such as Bolu and Amasya, because we are well received by the audience at least. Nonetheless, every İlahi artist desires to perform in the concerts hosted by municipalities since they pay well. (Unnamed, February 2018, Ankara Altındağ)

Performing at government events becomes not only a high profit for İlahi artists, but also a good reference for their success. An İlahi artist,⁵⁶ whom I met at a Ramadan concert held by a municipality in Ankara, was constantly visiting mayors. He recently distributed his new PR brochures with his career listing of 24 performances at municipalities. Furthermore, he entered the political arena by standing as a candidate for the presumptive AKP nominee in Ankara for an early general election in June 2018. According to him, since the July 15 coup attempt, as some İlahi artists associated with the FETO were revealed, government institutions became very sensitive in casting İlahi artists for their events.⁵⁷ Therefore, the situation that the governments' sponsoring of religious

⁵⁶ He did not want his real name is mentioned here.

⁵⁷ Personal interview, January 2018, Ankara Altındağ

events and the recent hypersensitive domestic political environment are further fueling İlahi artists' politically conscious behaviors, whether they want it to or not. In a word, İlahi artists' supporting the AKP regime is deeply involved with their job security.

Meanwhile, as the AKP regime entered its second term after the 2007 presidential election,⁵⁸ a new discourse on nationalism seemed to have a considerable impact on İlahi artists' works. In the discourse, a new nationalism based on the Turkish nation and Sunni Muslim was discussed along with the claim that it is true democracy to reflect Islam in politics since Islam is the value system required by Turkish society where 99% of the population is Muslim (Han, 2013: 101) Çınar differentiates AKP's Islamism from the 'Turkish Islam' in the past, calling it "Islamic nationalism" which aims to replace ethnic Turks with Muslim Turks (2011: 540). Similarly, White labeled AKP's new discourse on nationalism as "Muslim Nationalism". According to his claim, the new Turkish identity built by the AKP regime means "a faithful Muslim Turk who has disconnected from the Kemalist state project, but cultivated in the frame of the republican state, and has a future vision and subjectivity shaped by the Ottoman imperial past" (White, 2013: 8).

The AKP regime wants to build a Turkish society where Islam takes effect (Özçelik, 2013: 88). It means the construction of a society inhabited by the people with the right Muslim mindset, not merely a Muslim population: so, to speak, the reconstruction of the Ummah. This new interpretation by the AKP regime of the 'Turkish nation' places equates Turkish people with Sunni Muslims. In this structure, a Turk's support for Islam means the support for the Turks, and vice versa. Ateş argues that Muslim nationalism will proceed in a way supporting the sanctity of the nation with the sanctity of Islam (2011: 198). In the meantime, incidents which threaten Turkey's national security and the Ummah, such as a number of terrorist attacks, July 15 coup attempt, PKK attacks, and the Syrian Civil War have occurred in succession. These unstable

⁵⁸ On August 28, when one month later from AKP's returning to power, the previous Foreign Minister, Abdullah Gül was elected as the first pro-Islamic president since the Turkish Republic's foundation.

circumstances inside and outside the country with the idea of nationalism by the present government had a strong influence on the consciousness of the nation, the Islamic world and Muslim identity in the people's daily lives as well as İlahi artists' music activities. As a result, both nationalist-themed works featuring *şehit*, *millet* (nation), *vatan* (homeland), and *asker* (soldier) and Ummah-themed works dealing with symbolic events for Muslims' solidarity such as the *Kudüs* (Jerusalem) issue have newly appeared.

Table 7. Nationalist and Ummah-themed İlahi Music Since 2008

Artist	Title	Release	Main Themes or Subjects
Grup Genç	<i>Şehitler Ölmez</i>	2018	Zeytin Dalı Harekâtı, Şehit
Anka İlahi Grubu	<i>Afrin Türküsü</i>	2018	Zeytin Dalı Harekâtı, Asker
Murat Anlar	<i>Afrin Destanı</i>	2018	Zeytin Dalı Harekâtı, Asker
Kürşat Biçici	<i>Mehmedim</i>	2018	Zeytin Dalı Harekâtı, Asker
Hasan Kılıçatan	<i>Vatan ve Kardeşlik</i>	2018	Millet
Grup Dergâh	<i>Şehitler Ölmez</i>	2017	Şehit
Grup Dergâh	<i>Unuttun mu kardeşim?</i>	2017	15 Temmuz, Şehit
Osman Öztunç	<i>Şehitler Ölmez</i>	2017	Şehit
Mustafa Kamacı	<i>Bu Bayrak</i>	2017	Vatan ve millet
Kürşat Biçici	<i>15 Temmuz Destanı Marşı</i>	2017	15 Temmuz, Şehit
Abdurrahman Önül	<i>Türkiyem</i>	2017	Vatan ve millet
Anka İlahi Grubu	<i>Şehitler</i>	2016	Şehit
Ender Tekin	<i>Gül Kırmızı Olur Anne</i>	2016	Ümmet
Bekir Köse	<i>15 Temmuz Şehitlik Marşı</i>	2016	15 Temmuz, Şehit
Grup Tillo	<i>Ortağız Bir Namusa</i>	2015	Millet
Ender Tekin	<i>Suriye</i>	2015	Ümmet
Eşref Ziya Terzi	<i>Şehadet Uykusu</i>	2015	Şehit
Celaleddin Ada	<i>Şehitler Ölmez</i>	2014	Şehit
Eşref Ziya Terzi	<i>Asker Duası</i>	2014	Asker
Eşref Ziya Terzi & Taner Yüncüoğlu	<i>Ana Ben Şehadet İsterim</i>	2014	Şehit
Grup Dergâh	<i>Çanakkale 1-4</i>	2012-2014	Çanakkale Savaşı, Şehit
Dursun Ali Erzincanlı	<i>Şehadet Uykusu</i>	2012	Şehit
Grup Yürüyüş	<i>Ey Şehid!</i>	2011	Şehit
Ender Tekin	<i>Gazze</i>	2010	Ümmet
Ömer Karaoğlu	<i>Kudüs</i>	2009	Ümmet
Taha	<i>Şehadet Uykusu</i>	2009	Şehit
Abdurrahman Önül	<i>Şehitler Ölmez</i>	2008	Şehit
Yunus Meral & Abdurrahman Önül	<i>Filistin</i>	2008	Ümmet

'*Şehit*' has been one of the most common words in politics in Turkey in recent years. In the Islamic context, '*şehit*' means martyrdom for religion which is regarded as the best form of devotion man can perform for God. As intensified disputes with the PKK since the 2000s, terrorist attacks, the dispatch of troops to Syria and the 15 July coup attempt caused heavy military casualties, the government has used this concept to sanctify the loss of lives soldiers and their families have, and İlahi artists have also joined in this movement. Güner Kaymak's poem '*Şehitler ölmez*' (Martyrs do not die) was made into İlahi music by various İlahi artists such as Mustafa Yıldızdoğan, Abdurrahman Önül, and Celalettin Ada. Their music works have re-emerged after the 15 July and the sending of troops to Afrin. As *ezan*, *bayrak* (flag) and *şehit* are portrayed as eternal in the second verse of its lyrics, it implies that religion (Islam), nation (Turkey) and the people (Turks) have the same value in the lives of Turks.

*Önce vatan millet
Sonra ana ve yar
Bu yolda savrulan
Birileri var*

Nation, homeland First
Then mother and lover
Skittes on this road
Ones that say

*Ezan dinmez diyen
Bayrak inmez diyen
Şehit ölmez diyen
Birileri var*

Do not stop the azan
Flag doesn't come down
The martyr doesn't die
Ones that say

Şehitler ölmez

Martyrs do not die

'*Şehitler ölmez*' - Mustafa Yıldızdoğan (1995)

Furthermore, İlahi music which supports the government's diplomatic and military policies are noticeable as well. For example, Anka İlahi Group announced '*Afrin Türküsü*' (Ballad of Afrin) after the launch of *Zeytin Dalı Harekâtı* (Turkish military operation in Afrin), supporting '*Mehmetçik*' (soldiers), that put into action and received media attention. In this music, the soldiers sent to Afrin are portrayed as sacred and determined, just like leaving for jihad.

*Afrin'de hainler, kalleş mi kalleş
Yenilmez ordular gönder ya Rabbi
Gökler kızıl, dağlar, taşlar leş mi leş
Hedefi onikiden vurdur ya Rabbi*

Traitors in Afrin, vile scoundrels,
Send you mighty armies oh Lord,
Let skies paint red, hills and rocks black
Let them strike true the enemy oh Lord

'Afrin Türküsü' - Anka İlahi Group (2018)

Ahmet Kurt, who is a lyricist in the group, explained the background of the announcement of 'Afrin Türküsü' through an interview with Anadolu Ajansı.

Hepimiz vatan uğruna ölmeye hazırız. Vatan topraklarına uzanacak namahrem elini kökünden koparacağımızı herkes bilmelidir. Bu anlamda Rabbim, Afrin'de mücadele veren kahraman ordumuzun yardımcısı olsun. Bu bölgede Türkiye'yi esaret almak isteyenler aslında dünyadaki Müslümanlar'ın yeniden filizlenen birlik ve beraberliğini bu terör örgütlerinin eliyle baltalamak istiyorlar ama artık çok geç, bu millet uyandı, bu ümmet oyunun farkına vardı. (...) Kimileri askerimiz için kurban kesiyor, kimileri de elleriyle yaptıkları yiyecekleri onlara götürüyor. Halkımız yaptıklarıyla ordumuzun arkasında olduklarını gösteriyor. Biz de ne yapabiliriz dedik, elimizden gelen eser yapmak. Böyle bir eseri besteleyip Mehmetçikimize hem destek hem de moral vermek amacıyla halkımızın, askerlerimizin beğenisine sunduk. Bu yönde bir mücadelemiz, çalışmamız, katkımız olsun istedik.⁵⁹

We are all ready to die for our country. Everyone should know that we are ready to sever an unholy hand that will reach out to our lands with ill intent. In this sense, may our Lord help our army fighting gallantly in Afrin. Those who wish to pull Turkey into an entrapment in this region actually wish to damage the reigniting fire of unity among Muslims worldwide; but it is too late because our nation has woken up and realized the dirty game. (...) Some of us offer sacrificial livestock for the soldiers, some of us deliver with their own hands the food they prepare. Our nation is showing with their actions that they are in full support of our army. We asked ourselves what we could do, and realized that the best we can do is to create works of music. Therefore, we composed this piece and offered it up both for our sons in the army and the nation in general, so that their morale could be improved. We wished to aid the struggle somehow.

He is saying that he reflected his sense of responsibility both as a Muslim and as a Turk in the music. In other words, he believes that he has to defend his Muslim brothers and to support the armed forces in order to protect not only Turkey but also the Ummah.

On the other hand, Syrian Civil War and the recently intensified Israeli-Palestinian conflict became important occasions for the value of the Ummah to rise again, based on Sunni Islam. Some İlahi artists emphasize Muslims'

⁵⁹ Haberler (2018, February 7). *Afrin'deki Mehmetçik İçin İlahi Bestelediler*. Retrieved from: <https://www.haberler.com/afrin-deki-mehmetcik-icin-ilahi-bestelediler-10537701-haberi/>
You may also refer to: <https://dai.ly/x6ede7n>

brotherhood (*Müslümanların kardeşliği* or *İslam kardeşliği*) and the Ummah, taking a humanitarian approach to the tragedy of Muslim brothers over the border. For example, Ender Tekin condemned the collapse of the Ummah in the context of the Syrians' destroyed lives due to the civil war through his music 'Suriye' (Syria) in 2015.

*nerde ümmet neferleri nerde o mücahitleri
yetmedi mi suriye'nin bebek kadın şehitleri
peygamberin kardeşleri ahir zaman ömerleri
yetmedi mi suriye'nin bebek kadın şehitleri
haydi akşam oldu uyan ey müslüman ölüleri*

Where are the soldiers of Ummah, where are the Mujahideen?
Hasn't Syria had enough martyrs of babies and women?
Brothers of the prophet, Umars of the Great Tribulation
Hasn't Syria had enough martyrs of babies and women?
It's evening time already, wake up o Dead Muslims

'Suriye' – Ender Tekin (2015)

Its music video, which was created by collecting the scenes of war-torn Syria, has recorded more than 320,000 views on YouTube and the music video of another work of his, '*Gül Kırmızı Olur Anne*' (*Mom, the rose turns red*), which was released in the following year (2016) reached 1.84 million views, arousing sympathy from the people in Turkey. At that time, many netizens expressed their solidarity with the comment "*ALLAH tüm Müslüman kardeşlerimizi korusun*" (Allah may save our Muslim brothers). Ender Tekin had previously received fervent response with his music 'Gazze' (Gaza) to support Palestine, reaching 630,000 views on YouTube. This music was announced in 2010, when relief ships sent by the partnership between The Free Gaza Movement and the Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH) was attacked and interned by the Israel Navy. Tekin, through this music, described that Palestinians' victory as "ours", the victory of all Muslims, and warned that Muslims who did not unite in the struggle of the Palestinians must pay for it. These expressions imply that he prioritizes his Muslim identity over his Turkish identity.

*Hiçbir şey yapmayanlar nasıl öleceksiniz
Sanmayın mahşer günü sizler güleceksiniz*

*Sadece kınayanlar hiç kolay ölmeyecek
O adı Müslümanlar bir gün hesap verecek*

*Gazze'ye güneş doğacak kış bitecek yaz olacak
Gazze o zalimlere o kafirlere mezar olacak*

*Direnış bitmez mutlak zafer bizim olacak
İntifada Filistin intifada kalacak*

O bystanders, pacifists, how will you die?
Don't you dare believe you'll laugh at the Judgement Day.

Verily I say, those who only criticize will not easily die,
Those vile Muslims will one day pay.

Sun will rise upon Gaza, winter will end summer will come,
Gaza will become a grave for the heartless infidels

The Resistance will not end, victory will be ours,
Intifada Palestine will remain, in Intifada

'Gazze' – Ender Tekin (2010)

For İlahi artists, singing bitter trials and oppression of Muslims beyond Turkey is less sensitive and less risky, but inspires a great sympathy and resonance with the audience. If İlahi artists' resistant music aimed at political forces that suppressed Islam from the February 28 coup to the AKP, today their music targets the West and Israel trying to conquer and divide the Ummah.

The position of İlahi artists, who once had to self-censor Islam and politics in their music, has changed dramatically in the past 20 years. Now, they are proud to talk about both Islam and politics. It is especially the AKP regime's idea of Muslim nationalism that has made İlahi artists' political music activities to be adopted naturally by the audience because, according to the AKP regime's idea of nationalism, patriotism and religious faith contribute to each other. From an external point of view, their music activities seem to disprove their claim that İlahi music is dedicate solely to Allah and the Prophet. It is rather vague to say 'İlahi music is purely religious'. But we need to evaluate this issue in local context. In Turkey's political landscape today, their political and nationalist themed music is religious as well because, as the state and Islam are intertwined, whichever İlahi artists support, both sides are strengthened. This

symbiotic relationship between İlahi artists and the AKP regime is expected to be further strengthened unless the regime's policies and ideologies change greatly.



CHAPTER 5.

İLAHİ ARTISTS AND POPULAR CULTURAL INDUSTRIES

5.1. İLAHİ PERFORMANCE AS A COMMODITY

İlahi artists' performance today seems completely commodified. 'İlahi packages' have been selling on the websites of İlahi organizations. Furthermore, as İlahi artists' levels have been created according to their skills and experiences, fees for İlahi performances and who performs where are being determined by more specific criteria.

The artists of mid-level ("*orta düzey sanatçılar*") are able to perform only in private occasions like wedding ceremonies because private clients are not willing to pay much. Actually, private clients do not care about the quality of the performance. They prefer İlahi artists who can perform with very low costs. On the other hand, the artists of high-level ("*yüksek düzey sanatçılar*") perform in TV programs of which the major consideration is the artists' careers. (Doğan, November 2017, Ankara Yenimahalle)

Even though the money should never be the priority of İlahi artists, Doğan's explanation implies that İlahi artists' performance are driven by the logic of the market. This contradictory scene says a lot about today's Islam in Turkey.

Generally, most İlahi artists are asked to perform by telephone or through websites. As the client explains what he/she wants the performance to look like and the available budget to it, İlahi artists plan the performance of approximately 40 minutes with adding and subtracting elements for the performance, such as musical instruments, *semazen*, and *mehter* band. In the case of the client emphasizing looking 'religious', *ney* and *def* are included, which represent Sufi rites in Turkey, instead of electronic keyboard or Western instruments. If the client is barely able to pay the performance fee, the artist even performs to recorded accompaniment without any instruments, whereas if the client is able to pay well, the artist can be accompanied by a group of İlahi artists or a Sufi music ensemble and additional programs such as reading

religious poems, *sema* performance, and a quiz show for children among the audience.⁶⁰

On the other hand, 'İlahi packages' have recently appeared, suggesting prepared İlahi performance programs according to occasions and the range of budget. Some clients who might be embarrassed to talk about the budget are able to choose the package they prefer without stating how much of a performance fee they can afford.



Figure 5. Examples of İlahi Packages

Note. Grup Neva



Figure 6. An İlahi Organization's Religious Wedding Packages

Note. Asır Organizasyon

⁶⁰ The quiz show in İlahi performance usually asks the children questions related to Islamic history and the faith of Islam, such as "Who created the world?". The Qur'an, Hadith collections, and tasbeih are often awarded to those who give the correct answers.

The İlahi artist organizes not only his own performance but also, as a master of ceremonies, details for the wedding such as greeting guests, giving congratulatory messages, the cake cutting ceremony, and photographs. Therefore, the client can use a one-stop service by hiring an İlahi artist.

<An Example of Islamic Wedding Program Suggested by an İlahi Group>

• <i>Misafir karşılama</i>	Greeting visitors
• <i>Gelin damat karşılama</i>	Greeting the bride and the groom
• <i>Selamlama konuşması</i>	Welcoming speech
• <i>Kur'an-ı Kerim tilaveti</i>	The Qur'an recitation
• <i>İlahiler 1. bölüm</i>	İlahi performance-1
• <i>Sema gösterisi (İlahiler eşliğinde)</i>	Sema (along with İlahi music)
• <i>Pasta merasimi</i>	Wedding Cake ceremony
• <i>Evlilik ile ilgili kıssalar ve fıkralar</i>	Parables and Jokes on Marriage Life
• <i>Takı merasimi</i>	Offering Jewelry Presents
• <i>İlahiler 2. bölüm</i>	İlahi performance-2
• <i>Kapanış duası</i>	Ending Prayer
• <i>Gül dağıtımı</i>	Offering Roses to Guests
• <i>Fotoğraf ve video çekimi</i>	Photo and Video shoots.

Meanwhile, it is observed that İlahi artists invest for self-improvement in order to strengthen the competitiveness due to their explosive growth. They became careful about their appearance. They want to look more attractive with their costume, hairstyle, and perfume. According to Barış, although an İlahi performance takes less than an hour, İlahi artists spend 3 hours to be ready for the performance. He added:

The most important element in an İlahi performance is the tone of voice. But, an aesthetically attractive stage and the artist's costumes are important as well. I spend a lot for my appearance. (Barış, February 2018, Yenimahalle)

As we saw, commodified İlahi performances seem directly contrary to İlahi artists' argument that their music activities are not aimed at money, rather being a religious service. However, I look on this as modern Turkish Muslims' great ability to make their religion coexist with capitalism. It might be the best way to understand and practice Islam for them, since they have been accustomed to secular landscapes, and have gained confidence especially since the 2000s by experiencing the accumulation of wealth. Mustafa Caymaz's confession is

indicative of Turkish Muslims' recognition of economic success as a plus factor for their religious life:

For me, Allah is like the sun. If I only walked following the sun, I would be lost. But I could gain not only honor but also wealth as an İlahi artist because I followed both the sun and the shadow. (Mustafa, January 2018, Keciören)

In fact, capitalism itself does not conflict with Islam from an Islamic perspective. Since Islam has spread in part through caravans who traded throughout the desert, it has acknowledged private property and has considered the accumulation of wealth as God's blessing. The real matter for Islam to open arms to capitalism is how to accumulate capital. P. Haenni has referred to the recent form of Islam with an innovative and economic interest as "*Islam de marche*" (market Islam). According to her, market Islam, a new form of Islam, has been expanding since the late 1990s due to the following four factors: first, Muslims' faith which is individualistic and non-militant and focuses on this world (in contrast to afterlife); second, the interaction of religion and economy as important as the interaction of religion and politics; third, entrepreneurship spreading to religious values, which regards success and achievement highly; and lastly, a liberal and political tendency of Islam. Today, market Islam is a driving force of privatization (Haenni, 2005: 7-8 as cited in Eom, 2008: 101-102).

The most influential recent leader of the Naqshbandi, Mehmet Zahit Kotku and his heir, Esat Coşan tried to harmonize capitalism with Islam in Turkish society. In particular, Coşan taught Muslims to accept the ability rationally to control the market as a secret hand or wisdom of Allah, and through his book *Dünyada Değişen Dengeler ve Yeni Dönemde Yeni Görevler* (*Changing Balance in the World and New Missions in the New Period*), he claims "if somebody is able to be a businessman and a Muslim at the same time, he is in the best religious position" (Coşan & Erkaya, 1994: 119). In the 1980s, Turgut Özal's liberal economy policies enabled young Anatolian capitalists to appear. They united based on strong religious beliefs and a resistance to secularism and demonstrated the exemplary Islamic economy by accumulating wealth using domestic capital, and labor and creating jobs.

Taken together, İlahi artists have a strong belief that their music activities are a part of religious practices while the ability to control the market and the accumulation of capital count as Muslim obligations from modern Turkish Muslims' perspective on capitalism. Thus, İlahi artists' commercial activities located at the intersection of capitalism and Islam gain legitimacy as a sort of missionary entrepreneurship.

5.2. SPIN-OFF MARKETS FROM İLAHİ ARTISTS

In the late 2000s, the boom of İlahi artists led to musicians of other genres becoming İlahi artists. For example, in 2009, Cemal Ayyıldızlı, who was a famous arabesque musician, released an İlahi music album titled *Lailaheillallah* for the first time in his life, as well as one of the famous popular singers, Mustafa Ceceli who began to perform as an İlahi artist since 2015 with his first İlahi album *Aşk için gelmişiz* (You came for the love).⁶¹ He also collaborated with a global Islamic pop star, Maher Zain on Maher's third album.⁶²



Figure 7. Mustafa Ceceli's Ramadan Concert in Sincan Municipality

Furthermore, as İlahi artists provide chances to perform for amateur players, they wield a considerable power over the players. According to informants, it is

⁶¹ You can refer to these articles for more details:

<http://www.haber7.com/roportaj/haber/730936-unlu-arabeskci-ilahi-albumu-cikardi>

<https://www.sabah.com.tr/magazin/2017/12/03/albumumun-adi-simsiyah-ama-ruh-halim-bembeyaz>

⁶² This collaboration album was released titled *One*, in 2016.

common for an İlahi artist to work with the same orchestra more than 10 years. Thus, İlahi artists, can offer the amateur players a stable source of income. When a host pays 1,500 TL for the orchestra, the İlahi artist usually takes 500TL on it as a commission. It implies İlahi artists' influence on the current music market in Turkey.

İlahi artists also led to the creation of a new religious music industry market including İlahi music productions and İlahi organizations. Regarding to establishing the İlahi organization business, I need to mention that as the number of İlahi artists and the demand for their performances explosively increased, the competition between them has intensified and the taste of the clients has become more complicated. İlahi organizations not only manage requests for İlahi performances but also discover new İlahi artists, plan performance programs, and manage the SNS accounts of their artists. They even provide their artists private managers. Since a few major İlahi organizations have close to 50 artists, these organizations look a lot like entertainment management agencies. As a result of data collection, the number of İlahi organizations currently operating is 58 as of the end of 2017.

In general, İlahi organizations do business using telephone, their own websites and SNS such as Instagram and Facebook without offices, so they seem like a virtual existence. A representative of an İlahi organization that I contacted mentioned in this regard:

İlahi organizations do not need a physical space for business. Moreover, there is no regional restriction on the performances of İlahi artists, so we can practically do our business throughout Turkey, even though we are based in Ankara. (Kervan Organization, a telephone interview, November 2017)

Furthermore, since İlahi organizations do not have to pay a down payment for a contract with an İlahi artist other than very famous artists, it is easy to establish a company and its profit structure is quite advantageous. Of course, these organizations should move diligently to get more calls to request performances.

The main feature of İlahi organizations differing from entertainment management agencies is that its artists are not affiliated with a single organization but can be affiliated with multiple organizations. It is rare that a client asks a particular İlahi artist to perform. Thus, it is more important for the organizations to have as many artists as possible, rather than having a few famous artists, to increase the number of performances through them.

According to personal interviews with İlahi artists, the fee charged by İlahi organizations is on average 30%. So, from a position of İlahi artists, it is better to take the opportunity to perform themselves without going through an organization. However, most İlahi artists prefer to work with such organizations because it is more reasonable if the artist has another occupation or if the artists does not have enough name recognition. Another reason is that the size of the organization the artist belongs to or the artist's own reference is the most important qualification in casting for the events hosted by government authorities, which are well paid.

İlahi artists are independent from the organizations where they have belonged, when they gain a certain level of recognition, and directly manage their schedules. In recent years, it is increasing that İlahi artists and groups, which have enough reference and musical career, operate their own organizations. The body of İlahi artists, which simply started with releasing İlahi music albums, is getting bigger and bigger.

İlahi music productions are another religious music industry market created by İlahi artists. Currently, there are about 16 professional İlahi music production companies, including most prominently İsra Distribution, Nefes Production, Baysem Music Production and Kaan Production. They produce not only İlahi artists' solo albums but also compilation albums of several İlahi artists' music, sometimes with themes of Ramadan, Hajj, or children's religious education. Meanwhile, it is worth noting that the first generation İlahi artists, such as Mustafa Demirci, Halil Necipoğlu, İbrahim Sadri, and Dursun Ali Erzincanlı, participate in this industry as producers and lyricists.

İlahi artists create their albums at their own expense, unless they are very famous, because to have their own albums becomes an important reference for them. Besides, artists can raise their recognition by distributing their albums through the internet channels. In particular, YouTube channels operated by individuals or production companies play an important role in promoting İlahi artists in the public. An İlahi artist pays for the album production, ranging from 5,000TL to 20,000TL. If the artist wants instrumental accompaniment or a music video, the expenses mount up. Moreover, since the public's expectation of music video has become high these years, to produce a music video costs more for casting *semazen*, musical instrument players, and even professional actors, and a set to create a mysterious mood like fog effects and natural locations such as forests and lakes. İbrahim Cuşan added about producing İlahi music albums:

Although to make one's own albums is considered a necessary investment, even to release one is not easy if you cannot afford it because it costs a lot. Besides, today the public prefers watching music videos to just listening to music. Most İlahi artists thus make a single album consisting of 3-4 tracks and ask to produce a music video for a representative track. It costs about 15,000-20,000TL. Artists have to shoulder the entire cost. If you can do this, you can say that you are in a better position than the other İlahi artists. (Doğan, November 2017, Ankara Yenimahalle)

He and another informant said they have spent approximately 150,000TL and 100,000TL on their albums and music videos, respectively.



Figure 8. The MV Scenes of Mustafa Caymaz 'Ey Nur U Hüda'

On the other hand, the biggest feature of İlahi artists' albums today is artists' portraits on the album covers, whereas the first generation İlahi artists preferred to use Islamic symbols such as a mosque, a rose (the symbol of the Prophet), a tulip (the symbol of Allah), Mecca, a crescent, a *semazen*, or Sufi elements. Therefore, the artist's costumes, hairstyles and mood became important. This change suggests that artists' visuals are becoming important in the İlahi music industry as they are in the pop music industry. In fact, it was the global Islamic pop musicians of the United States and Europe who attempted to reveal the charm of musicians to religious music. They have a large fandom from young Muslims all around the world, just like pop stars have.



Figure 9. İlahi Album Covers
(From left) Ender Doğan / Pervane / Bahadır Özüsen

There have been attempts to develop the İlahi artists into entertainers not only by artists themselves but also by the television broadcasts. Conservative-minded TV broadcasts seem to have considered them as a hidden card that could be a match for pop stars. By the late 2000s, as the audition programs to discover pop stars became popular around the world, Meltem TV also produced an audition program in 2008, entitled “*İlahilerin Yıldızı*” (Stars of İlahi) with a concept of discovering the stars of Turkish Muslims. To fit the program's concept of İlahi stars against pop stars, Amir Ateş, İsmail Coşar, Yahya Soyyiğit, Galip Sokullu, and Ali Gedik, who are familiar from Turkish Art Music and Sufi Music, were invited as the judging panels.

This program's format involved 26 candidates, who were selected for the finals by judges' evaluations, competing on air with İlahi performances for 8 weeks to

win more votes from the viewers. The interest and popularity surrounding the program were so great that thousands of Turkish people living in Turkey and abroad participated in the audition. Furthermore, Meltem TV's station and studios have been paralyzed in the preliminary and days of final rounds.⁶³ İrfan Orhan was one of the five İlahi stars who were selected through the program. He has actively performed as an İlahi artist until now without releasing any albums or music videos by gaining recognition due to his appearance on broadcasting.



Figure 10. Meltem TV's “İlahilerin Yıldızı” Program

In 2011, Kanal 7 produced another İlahi star audition program entitled “Gönülden Sesler” (Sounds from the Heart). Unlike “İlahilerin Yıldızı”, a broadcaster İkbâl Gürpınar, one of the most famous İlahi artists Mustafa Demirci, and Turkish Art Music artist Yıldırım Bekçi participated as judges, reflecting the public's preference for popular religious music over classical. Among the judges, Gürpınar in particular had kept a secular image during her career but started to release İlahi albums in the late 2000s and to cover her hair after her Umrah travel in 2010. Thus, by inviting her as a judge, the program was able to indirectly show its critical attitude toward popular music and secularism, and as a result, it received a good response from its viewers.

⁶³ Yeni Mesaj (2008, June 04). *Meltem TV ekranlarında İlahilerin Yıldızı heyecanı*. Retrieved from: <http://www.yenimesaj.com.tr/kultur/meltem-tv-ekranlarinda-ilahilerin-yildizi-heyecani-h8004299.html>



Figure 11. Kanal 7's “Gönülden Sesler” Program

Meltem TV announced that “*İlahilerin Yıldızı*” season 2 will air in 2018. Related to the plan, Meltem Media Group General Manager Mustafa Uğurlu said:

İlahilerin Yıldızı’nda temel hedefimiz, ilahileri ‘arabeskleşmekten’ kurtarmaktır. Tasavvuf musikisi toplumumuzun ortak değeridir. Bizim hedefimiz tasavvuf müziğini halka sevdirmek ve toplumumuzun ortak kültürü olan bu müziğin en doğru şekilde icra edilmesini sağlamaktır. Türk aile yapısına uygun bir yarışma programı hazırladık ve izleyici ile buluşturacağız. (Mustafa Uğurlu, March 16, 2018, Posta) ⁶⁴

Our primary goal in *İlahilerin Yıldızı* is to prevent the ilahi music from becoming more and more “arabesque”. Sufi music is a common value of our society and we intend to make sure this music is loved by the people and performed in the correct way that is most suitable with our culture. We have prepared a game show that conforms to the Turkish family values and we will introduce it to our viewers nationwide.

As we have seen, today İlahi artists are expanding their influence in various aspects of Turkish society from individual life to the political arena and culture industry, even though not all Turkish people are aware of their existence yet. Presently, the AKP regime provides İlahi artists with a stable environment in which to continue their music activities by strengthening religiously conservative taste while maintaining a fairly moderate attitude to existing secularism. On the other hand, it is obvious that the AKP regime’s policies to cultivate homo Islamicus make Turkish people tend to recognize religion as more important in their lives. Their religious life is more concrete, strengthened, and enjoyed with the Muslim markets. This means that the public’s demand for popular religious

⁶⁴ Posta (2018, March 16). *Meltem TV’den Pop Star’a karşı İlahilerin Yıldızı ile İKRA*. Retrieved from: <http://www.posta.com.tr/meltem-tv-den-pop-star-a-karsi-ilahilerin-yildizi-ile-ikra-1393492>

cultures such as İlahi artists' performances is likely to continue to be intensified. This will be accompanied by the development of the related culture industries.



CONCLUSION

In fact, the idea of a dynamic and diverse Islam was not acknowledged either internally or externally. However, Horsman and Marshall argue in their book *After the Nation* state that “Islamism is very different from one region to another, and it is a variable phenomenon which rapidly changes over time” (1994: 255). Therefore, it is advantageous for revealing Islam’s local features and variability to illustrate religious lives created by Muslims themselves, in local contexts.

Since the 1980s, the emergence of pro-Islamic political forces and liberal economic policies, and AKP’s conservative democracy triggered the revival of Islamism in Turkey and this Islamism featured a bourgeois and liberal tendency. As a sign of this, the new emerging Islamist elite class and Anatolian capitalists contributed greatly to the development of civil societies and the forming of an active Muslim identity in Turkey. Meanwhile, conservative Muslims have created a unique consumption culture based on Islamic popular culture and religious media since the 1990s. İlahi artists who appeared in the process demonstrate that Islam is able to combine with capitalism and popular culture, which it had seemed unable to coexist with. İlahi artists and their music activities are the most dramatic indicators of Turkey’s socio-cultural changes since the 1980s, along with the issue of headscarves. İlahi artists who emerged with the rise of Islamism, soon developed as a means of expressing a new Muslim identity. Not only being influenced by the status of Islam according to political changes, İlahi artists also tried to preserve religion through their music even when they came upon a critical period. In consequence, their music could be rather diversified and strengthened.

Under the framework of the conservative democracy of the AKP regime, which succeeded to rule in 2002, the status of Islam became stable and higher than ever in the republican period. The new group of İlahi artists who joined the world of İlahi music during the AKP years represent religiously well-trained Muslims, Homo Islamicus.

İlahi artists' music activities and their attitudes dealing with their profession imply what religious life is from Turkish Muslims' perspective. First, for them religious life means a life that they believe to be religious. In other words, the most important factors in evaluating religious life for Turkish Muslims are individual faith and intentions. İlahi artists do not feel reluctant to use non-Islamic elements in their performances. This is because İlahi artists themselves armed with professional religious knowledge and a sense of mission as a Muslim, and Islamic lives, qualify their performances to be religious more than any other elements on stage. They also consciously emphasize their religious commitment and self-esteem on their profession and reveal themselves as exemplary Muslims in order not to lose religiosity, which is the highest priority in their profession.

Second, for Turkish Muslims, political actions may be considered a part of religious life because, as the idea of Muslim nationalism means that Muslim identity and Turkish identity are strengthened by supporting each other, devotion to the state is regarded as devotion to religion. In other words, the boundaries between nationalist and religious are quite blurred in the Turkey of today since the state and Islam are intertwined and sharing their fates. It is obvious that İlahi artists' political-themed music has a strong nationalist character. However, the music can be viewed as religious because İlahi artists believed that their works for the state and nation ultimately aim to protect Islam and the Ummah.

Third, for Turkish Muslims, active economic activities and the accumulation of wealth may be recognized something contribute to religious life. Turkish society has been accustomed to secular landscapes for a long time. Besides, since the 1990s, there have been a claim by Turkish religious leaders that a Muslim with the ability rationally to control the market is an ideal Muslim. İlahi artists might be no longer considered as religious because their music activities are becoming highly commercialized and forming a huge market. However today, as İlahi artists not only provide new opportunities for other local artists but also

create spin-off markets, they are more likely to be acknowledged successful as a Muslim according to the local context.

This study was limited to Ankara due to the matter of research permit, and 9 informants to this study cannot represent all İlahi artists. Besides, Turkish society looks a little strained since the July 15 coup attempt. As İlahi artists were suspicious about my identity and the purpose of this study, I had difficulty establishing rapport with them. There must be more complicated context related to İlahi artists such as regions, gender, and ages. Especially the absence of female İlahi artists' voices is a major limitation of this study. Even though modern and contemporary history of Turkey showed that gender is most responsive to socio-cultural changes, this study lacked gender sensitivity. I expect that female İlahi artists' voices can show different perspectives on their profession and their religious life in connection with their restricted activities in comparison with male İlahi artists. I tried to focus on İlahi artists' views to give prominence to their agency. However, this study might be qualitatively richer by involving the views of their clients as well.

Nevertheless, I want to find significance of this study, insofar as it showed Islam's locality and the variability of 'Islamic', and Muslims' agency that try to maintain a balance between their daily lives and their faith by forming appropriate religious lives through socio-cultural changes.

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T.C.
HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ
Rektörlük

29 Haziran 2017

Sayı : 35853172/431- 2308

EDEBİYAT FAKÜLTESİ DEKANLIĞINA

Fakülteniz Antropoloji Bölümü öğretim üyesi Doç. Dr. Mark Lewis SOILEAU danışmanlığında yüksek lisans öğrencisi Arş. Gör. Mina EOM tarafından yürütülen "Türkiye'de Popüler Kültür ve İslamın Birleşmesi Olgusu: İlahi Sanatçıları Örneği" başlıklı tez çalışması, Üniversitemiz Senatosu Etik Komisyonunun 20 Haziran 2017 tarihinde yapmış olduğu toplantıda incelenmiş olup, etik açıdan uygun bulunmuştur.

Bilgilerinizi ve gereğini rica ederim.

Prof. Dr. Rahime M. NOHUTCU
Rektör a.
Rektör Yardımcısı

APPENDIX2. Research Approval by the Governorship of Ankara

T.C.
ANKARA VALİLİĞİ
Emniyet Müdürlüğü

20 Eylül 2017,

Sayı : 58604142.6741.12473-36578
Konu : Saha Çalışması

.../09/2017

20.09.2017*12310

İlgi : Hacettepe Üniversitesi Rektörlüğünün 05.09.2017 tarihli ve 2896 sayılı yazısı. → Yoz 12/1.4

İlgi sayılı yazı ile Ankara Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Antropoloji Anabilimi Dalı öğrencisi N EOM tarafından 01 Eylül 2017-30 Nisan 2018 tarihleri arasında Ankara ili genelinde ve ilçelerinde "Türkiy Popüler Kültür ve İslam'ın Birleşme Olgusu; İlahi Sanatçıları Örneği" konulu çalışma yapılacağı bildirilmiştir.

Mina EOM tarafından yapılacak çalışma gereği doğrultusunda, İlçeniz sorumluluk bölgesi dâhil aldırılan genel asayiş tedbirleri çerçevesinde ekiplerinizce gerekli emniyet tedbirlerinin alınarak herhangi aksaklığa meydan verilmemesini,

Ayrıca; uygulama ile ilgili herhangi bir olumsuzluk olması durumunda Güvenlik Şube Müdürlüğü Nöt Amirliğine (303 53 25) bilgi verilmesini arz ve rica ederim.

Cemal DALKILIÇ
Emniyet Müdürü a.
Emniyet Müdür Yardımcısı
2. Sınıf Emniyet Müdürü

Ek: Dilekçe (23 Sayfa)

Dağıtım :
Gereği :
Merkez ve Dış İlçe Emniyet Müdürlüklerine.

Bilgi :
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Müdüriyet Makamına,
TEM Şube Müdürlüğüne,
İstihbarat Şube Müdürlüğüne,
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Yazışması
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APPENDIX3. Originality Report (English)



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Department: Anthropology

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APPROVED.

Associate Prof. Mark Lewis SOILEAU

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Tarih 04/07/2018

Tez Başlığı: Türkiye'de Popüler Kültür ve İslamın Birleşmesi Olgusu: İlahi Sanatçıları Örneği

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