



Rethinking Islam and Liberal Democracy: Islamist Women in Turkish Politics

Yesim Arat

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In Turkey, no secular party has approximated the high levels of membership and intense activism of women within the Islamist Refah (Welfare) Party. *Rethinking Islam and Liberal Democracy* examines the experiences of these women, who represented an unprecedented phenomenon within Turkish politics. Using in-depth interviews, Yesim Arat reveals how the women of the party broadened the parameters of democratic participation and challenged preconceived notions of what Islam can entail in a secular democratic polity. The women of the party successfully mobilized large groups of allegedly apolitical women by crossing the boundaries between the social and the political, reaching them through personal networks cultivated in private spaces. The experiences of these women show the contentious relationship between liberal democracy and Islam, where liberalism that prioritizes the individual can transform, coexist, or remain in tension with Islam that prioritizes a communal identity legitimized by a sacred God."

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