



SURAJ MAL AND SHYAMA DEVI AGARWAL BOOK PRIZE 2021

PRIZE CITATION

Gamze Çavdar and Yavuz Yaşar

Women in Turkey: Silent Consensus in the Age of Neoliberalism and Islamic Conservatism,
Routledge, 2019

“The judges were unanimous that this innovative and timely book merits the Agarwal award, which has been established for a work of original scholarship in the field of feminist economics.

Drs Çavdar and Yaşar provide an illuminating analysis of the reconstruction of gender relations in Turkey since the 2000s. Turkey’s ruling party, they argue, has responded to the negative effects of neoliberalism on economic insecurity and volatility, with the promotion of policies that have undermined women’s empowerment and well-being.

One of the outstanding contributions of this book is its feminist political economy framework. In contrast to the many scholars who frame gender issues in Turkey as identity politics related to the role of Islam, Çavdar and Yaşar underscore the material motivation of policy changes that buttress patriarchal power relations to the detriment of women.

The book adopts an historical perspective and draws on extensive and detailed policy analysis in the areas of employment, education, and health. The authors argue that the Justice and Development Party (the AKP), Turkey’s conservative political party in power since 2003, has wrapped neoliberal policies in a veil of religious discourse related to culture, history, and authoritarian Islamic values. The resulting policies, rhetorically intended to improve women’s well-being, emphasize women’s role as mothers and wives and thus economic dependence on male members of the family.

The book excels in its presentation and detailed analysis of policies in a variety of areas, exploring how they contribute to or fail to address gender inequality in the context of a country that has experienced declining employment opportunities, especially for women. Declines in social protection spending have worsened women’s economic vulnerability. Women’s access to health care continues to be related to their employment status, and because of the failures of neoliberalism to generate deficient employment, women in particular lack access to work. For health coverage, they must rely then on male family members. In employment, there is an emphasis on women’s role as wives and mothers, with policies leading to women’s concentration in part-time work and homework.

This book is timely and offers a way to understand the rise of conservative political regimes across the globe. While many authors have explored the negative effects of neoliberalism, Çavdar and Yaşar go much further to understand how reactions to the ills of globalization can lead to a restriction of gender roles in a way that serves both neoliberalism and religious conservatism. The result of this alliance is a compatible, if not happy, marriage between capitalism and patriarchy. This book holds lessons for both policymakers and feminist political economists who aim to promote gender-equalizing policies. ”

The Judges

Professor Stephanie Seguino, Department of Economics, University of Vermont (chair)

Dr Uma Rani, Senior Economist, International Labour Office, Geneva

Professor Jane Humphries, All Souls College, Oxford University